

TRUST MISPLACED?

A report on the future of trust in media

October 2020



IPSOS
VIEWS



The
Trust
Project

GAME CHANGERS



THANKS

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OVERVIEW

This report is a collaboration between Ipsos and The Trust Project, a U.S.-based non-profit, international consortium of news organizations building standards of transparency. Its mission is to “amplify journalism’s commitment to transparency, accuracy, inclusion and fairness so that the public can make informed news choices.” The “Trust Indicators”¹ it has pioneered are used by Google, Facebook and Bing to help surface trustworthy content in search and social.

Ipsos led a two-stage variation of a future scenario-led workshop with members of The Trust Project. Together we identified and explored factors that will impact the future of trust and truth in journalism. These included: nationalist and populist sentiment; business model challenges for

news media; technological changes; and, disinformation campaigns from nations and other bad actors.

Ipsos then developed a two-part questionnaire that ran on two monthly waves of its Global Advisor survey² to learn more about public opinion that underpins these topics. That data is presented throughout this report and can be found in detail on the Ipsos website.³

After extensive analysis of the data, the findings were discussed with Ipsos leaders and publishers from Trust Project member organizations. Those interviews are included here to give some color and context to the data and also the conditions on the ground in markets from around the globe.



INTRODUCTION

TRUST AND TRUTH: HOW DO WE BUILD PUBLIC CONSENSUS?

Darrell Bricker PhD
Global CEO, Ipsos Public Affairs

Every worthwhile relationship is based on trust. You either have it or you want it. Those who have it hold an incredible advantage over those who are struggling to earn it. In business, having your customers' trust means you will spend less money marketing to them, they will be more willing to listen to and believe your pitches, they will be more likely to try out your new offers, and you may even be able to charge them a premium for what you are selling. Without trust, you will struggle to be heard in an incredibly crowded and noisy marketing environment that gets louder and more confused every day.

Trust is not an easy concept to measure or control, since it can be emotional, illogical and even irrational. Trust is based more on a sensory reaction than on a rational calculus. Something feels, sounds, smells or looks to us like it can be

trusted – or not. While business leaders and policy makers can struggle with this idea, successful politicians know it in their bones. Citizens don't go into a voting booth carrying a copy of each party's platform and a calculator to make a rational voting decision. Instead, we bring our emotions with us.

In a world driven by the emotional, illogical and irrational, where does truth fit? And who do I trust to tell me the truth? For most of the modern age this has been a relatively easy question to answer. We simply tuned into the nightly news or picked up a newspaper. We would also hear the same thing if we decided to tune into the radio. These were the places where we would find the elite-arbitrated public consensus or the truth about most things. We would also hear this truth repeated when we went to church or attended school or any other community activity. Sure, there were always some differences of opinion but we trusted them to speak the truth.

In most countries today this version of arbitrating and creating public truth has been shattered. The middle of the political spectrum – where consensus was traditionally created – has shrunk. Now, more extreme views dominate



the political debate. This is because contemporary political strategy is less now about building big tents and public consensus and more about mobilizing the extreme base.

The media has transformed along with our politics. With the fracturing of the media market due to digitization, the need to attract eyeballs and clicks has producers and editors moving to the more extreme edges of news reporting and storytelling. They have learned what works for politics can also work for news. Where is the cause and effect in this? They are a mutually reinforcing system rather than leaders and followers.

Where does this lead us on truth? Truth is rapidly becoming a subjective, personal concept ruled mostly by emotions. We now speak OUR truth as opposed to THE truth. At least that's what we see reported and lamented by many commentators these days. But this isn't what we are seeing in our surveys. There continue to be points of public consensus on many issues based on a broad acceptance of what we see the truth to be. The COVID-19 crisis is a good example. Since the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020⁴, the world has experienced a nearly universal instant shutdown. This has never happened before. No matter where you live, restrictions still apply around going to work, traveling and visiting family – all because a group

of public health officials and scientists say the best way to fight this deadly virus is for us to stay home, wash our hands and keep our distance. And almost everyone has decided to believe them and followed along.

This truly is the triumph of science. We may disagree about the quality of the science (in particular, the modelling) or the competence and loyalties of some of the scientists, but we can't deny their overwhelming power over us. Proof of this is that we have agreed to shut down the world and won't reopen it again until they tell us it is safe to do so. No religion could have achieved this universal level of obedience, and certainly no political organization. In the time of COVID-19, scientists and their statistics rule our world. Yes, there are people who disagree about this and you will see them well represented in media reporting. But these are extremes and not representative of the public consensus who are mostly wearing masks, washing their hands and practicing social distancing.

So, let's start there. With the truth defined by facts and science. Yes, there could be many conditions and exceptions but COVID-19 shows us it works for creating the trust essential for building public consensus. This applies to public policy, politics and the private sector. The truth can still win.

A woman with long dark hair is seen from the side, working in a television control room. She is looking at several computer monitors. One monitor shows a news anchor, and another shows a color calibration chart. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the screens. The text 'The need to attract eyeballs and clicks has producers and editors moving to the more extreme edges of news reporting and storytelling.' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

The need to attract eyeballs and clicks has producers and editors moving to the more extreme edges of news reporting and storytelling.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING A TRUSTWORTHY ECOSYSTEM

Sally Lehrman
Founder and Chief Executive,
The Trust Project

Sickness, hunger, social unrest, wildfires and hurricanes. In such tumultuous times, reliable information is essential and people know it. We see it in the rising attention to news and a corresponding climb in subscriptions. And yet everyday people don't often recognize their own role in maintaining a healthy information environment that prioritizes honesty and substance.

The Ipsos data in this report (see pages 22-28 for a detailed breakdown) demonstrates the danger in this dichotomy and also suggests how we can address it. It highlights the distress felt by big proportions of people who say society is broken, with many leaning toward populism and nationalism as their preferred solution. Most feel confident in their own ability to recognize false or misleading sources of news but are more skeptical of everyone else's. Their overconfidence could very easily leave them vulnerable to manipulation and at the same time, dismissive, even hostile, to information that challenges their point of view. According to this data, we are alarmingly close to a society splintered by the differing "truths" we know and live by.

Journalists hold the answer. We specialize in piecing together multiple sources of information and multiple perspectives, knitting them into an accurate reflection of the whole – a truth we all can trust. And the public recognizes the value of this work. A stunning majority of the survey's respondents – more than eight in ten people around the world – reported that they make sure the news they rely on comes from trustworthy sources.

Globally, two in three people felt confident that they had access to trustworthy news. The challenge for news organizations is to show that journalism, and only journalism, with standards and practices that protect impartiality and the public interest behind it, merits that trust.

In the digital world, news has become a commodity. According to the research, about two-thirds of news followers only read news that they can access for free. That's understandable. Everything looks equally valid – carefully reported journalism gets equal billing with reports that are poorly sourced, sloppily derivative or deeply biased, using cherry-picked facts. Some people may not see the value of responsible journalism, and some may not feel they can afford it.

And yet, in the Ipsos research, 27% of respondents expressed a willingness to pay for trustworthy news. That aligns with The Trust Project's own research, and that's an encouraging figure. If news organizations make a stronger effort to clearly set journalism apart and show its value, we may earn the financial support needed to sustain rigorous reporting by fully staffed newsrooms. We can learn from Intel, which used its "Intel Inside"⁵ campaign to convince people that their semiconductor chip, hidden deep inside computers, was essential to reliability. We can learn from public health specialists, who have finally made us realize that fast food may be convenient and enjoyable, but it cannot sustain us.

What's the lesson? Show what's inside journalism. Build value and trust.

We can demonstrate our intentions and ethics by fully describing ownership structures, funding sources and protections against allowing an owner's political or social interests to seep into reporting. We can pull back the curtain on our processes. How do journalists build expertise on an issue, topic or community over time? How do we assess whether a source is reliable? These disclosures, Trust Project user research⁶ has found, make a difference in how people perceive journalism and its agenda.

But that's not enough. We also need to back up our claims with action. People who are confident they can assess news may well be relying on information – not journalism – that reinforces their own world view. It's easy to shake our heads about confirmation bias. But what if they simply don't see themselves in legitimate news? The solution is not in presenting "both sides" or pitting one perspective against another to be inclusive and show impartiality.

Rather, we should develop intercultural, community-based reporting practices that get at people's own lived truth and puts this in the context of observable fact and known consensus. We can look at the reasons why people feel society is going wrong, and through good reporting, empower them to intervene according to their own beliefs and priorities.

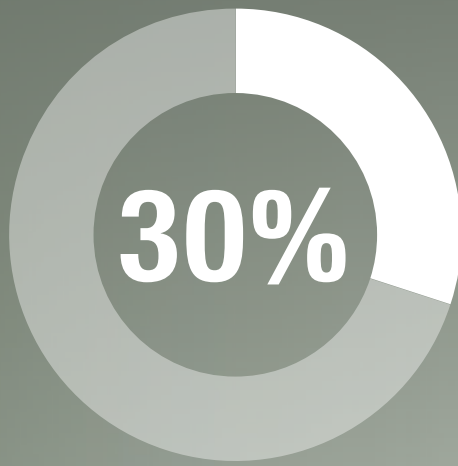
We know our job isn't to dictate answers and yet all too often, that's how our work is perceived. That's why news organizations need to stick to impartiality in news stories and clearly differentiate fact from opinion. Bold, easily seen labels are a good start. Despite the hesitation by both advertisers and news companies, sponsored content – including links – should be clearly identified.

We must help everyday people see their own role in creating a trustworthy ecosystem that prioritizes honesty and substance. It's all too easy to fall victim to the reward structure of social media, which encourages pushing out

a strong point of view, no matter how flimsy the evidence. Instead of evacuating in the face of raging wildfires, residents of one U.S. community set up checkpoints, roadblocks and patrols because a Facebook post said that anti-fascist activists were on the prowl.⁷ Accurate information is lifesaving. We can help people recognize that it's better to pause and check the source before spreading news that could be untrue.

Obviously, as we work to build a healthier news environment, social media and advertisers have major responsibilities as well. First and foremost, however, journalism can reclaim its leadership as guardians of the public's right to speak, be heard and know the facts in society. We can draw people toward reliable news – and build a willingness to pay for it – by strengthening their ability to recognize that journalism is the only source with the public interest at its heart.

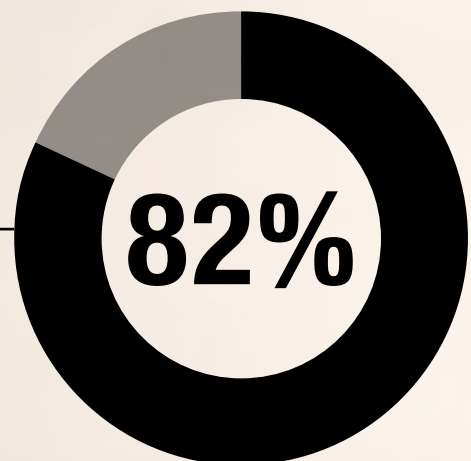
We know our job isn't to dictate answers and yet all too often, that's how our work is perceived. That's why news organizations need to stick to impartiality in news stories and clearly differentiate fact from opinion.



Almost a third of people globally say the average person in their country can tell real news from “fake news”



More than eight in ten people around the world say they make sure the news they rely on comes from trustworthy sources



IPSOS INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWS WITH IPSOS LEADERS



Cliff Young
President of Public Affairs,
Ipsos in the U.S.

In the U.S. how do we ask questions without triggering bias and tribal nationalist views?

We stay away from hot button words and phrases that will evoke emotional responses, whether they be negative or positive. To be frank, it's very difficult nowadays because even something like science, which seems an innocuous concept, has been politicized.

In the U.S. how big of a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns and how do we recommend clients and media respond?

It's a massive threat. It's really about amplifying pre-existing partisan and tribal views. It is very hard to inoculate or counter this. First, it is important not to leave an information vacuum – try to flood the zone with your own message. Nature abhors a vacuum – don't leave one. Second, you need to turn the tribal cues on their head and use them to your advantage. Think of what is sticky or novel about your message. Emphasize that and make sure you flood the zone.

How is trust impacted by nationalism and populism in the U.S.?

It's about tribal cues, which are about unifying your base by dividing it from others. You're unifying along a certain set of dimensions, for example native-born, but you're being divisive along other ones. The tribal cues and clues, employed by nationalists today, ultimately undermine the unifying notions of trust and trustworthiness. The goal is to create external enemies – to create others – to unify within your own subset by creating contrast with external groups. It's internally homogenizing, but externally divisive.

How does this impact credibility?

Well, that's the problem. No one trusts anything. This facilitates false information and conspiracy theories because people don't believe the historically trustworthy institutions and actors.

What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the state of news and media and our crazy media market?

We have a lot of media out there, but it's super fractured and very targeted to specific audiences. The content itself is a centrifugal force driving things towards disunion. So increasingly heterogeneous media provides a lot more information on niche topics to niche audiences, but at the same time undermines our ability to reach a consensus because of the very fact that it's an increasingly fractured media environment that lends itself to a fractured societal view by its audiences.



Marcos Calliari
Country Director, Ipsos in Brazil

How do you ask questions in your research and work without triggering bias, especially tribalist and nationalistic cues?

The problems we have toward any bias right now are more in the sense of being pro- or anti-government. It is two sides that are defending their own trenches. No matter the issue, it's just the whole concept of being for, or against, government that drives specific opinions. Our biggest concern right now is not to phrase anything in a way that it can refer to what the government or the opposition is saying.

How is trust impacted by nationalism/populism in your market and what responses do you see as effective?

In Brazil, it's not the nationalism that impacts trust, it's really something before that. It's really who do you favor politically? Your political position right now affects your nationalism and then this affects trust. You are seeing a very, very shaky moment for institutions in the sense that there is wide polarization. Many news outlets in Brazil are in threat of bankruptcy because of boycotts by anyone who disagrees with them. This of course harms our options of information.

In your market, how big of a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns and how do you recommend clients and the media respond?

Many here have preconceived opinions, and they are just looking to prove them. We are not known to change opinions based on arguments. The second point, which is important in Brazil, is that we have one of the lowest standards in education in international rankings. So, our population is not very critical in the sense of being able to discern what is truth or lie. And we are among the most active countries in social media. I would say that this is a very explosive combination that favors this sort of threat. It is life threatening because it can actually make people believe in things that are not true from a health perspective. So, we advise clients that it's absolutely imperative to present arguments, to discuss, and to be open. It's about time for us to raise the level of debate in Brazil. We cannot just take sides and start throwing rocks at each other.

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Ben Page
Chief Executive Officer, Ipsos MORI

How do you ask questions without triggering bias and tribal/nationalist cues?

One issue is simply what you choose to ask about. There is a question that we've been asking since 1974, "what are the biggest problems facing the country," with no prompting at all. It is interesting that the elite want to talk about trust – and we'll count ourselves amongst the elite. The fact that our clients are holding their hands in horror is itself interesting because it shows populism is a real thing because of course populism is a revolt against the elite.

I look at the fact that real incomes for most working people, certainly in North America and in Europe, haven't risen much this century. A large proportion of the population now expects their children to be poorer than they are. That's a massive structural change in the economy. If there were a massive boom and all incomes were rising across the population, we wouldn't be so worried about this question of trust.

71% of Brits say they have easy access to news from sources they trust, compared to **64%** of people globally.

How big of an issue is disinformation and how do you recommend clients and media respond?

If the disinformation technology that exists now were available to the Stasi in East Germany or the KGB during the Cold War, those regimes might not have crumbled. They may have been able to completely suppress all dissent.

So, when you see complete rubbish, you have to call it out. There's a very interesting balance because the risk is, the way the algorithms work, you actually draw attention to it if you're not careful. Just ignoring it is not an option, you need to be willing to go on the front foot.

What do you see as the state of media in the U.K these days?

It's very crowded and noisy. It can be engaging. They can get lots of audiences, but are we losing this sort of reflection on where we really are? Are we losing the ability to identify the signal in the noise?

Interestingly because of the breadth of information, the velocity of information, the rise of social media, there are more people that are overwhelmed. One of the by-products of that seems to be a rise in demand for trusted news sources. Traditional broadcasters in the U.K., like the BBC, remain highly trusted despite all of the he said/she said, and the attempts to have a culture war like North America here. One of the reasons for that is that they're highly regulated. You aren't able to go on a broadcast station and just say things that are not true. In Britain, unlike the rest of Europe, we have high trust in our broadcast news media because it's highly regulated and we have relatively low trust in our print and social media, because it's much less regulated.



Shunichi Uchida
Country Leader, Ipsos in Japan

In your market, how big of a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns and how do you recommend clients and the media respond?

It is very unlikely that clients are impacted by disinformation campaigns in Japan because many of them are separately assessed by politicians and specialists etc. on TV shows and magazines.

How is trust impacted by nationalism/populism in your market and what responses do you see as effective?

Japanese companies seem to have a lot less pressure to demonstrate where they stand compared to non-Japanese national companies. The society is not divided strongly, therefore they also do not have to care so much about nationalism and populism.

What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the state of news media in your market?

In terms of politics, the Japanese people know which media is for the government, against the government, or neutral. There is a very often used Japanese word 'Sontaku' meaning someone executes something assuming their boss/superior wants it that way. So, imagine a bureaucrat's or politician's secretary gets caught doing something illegal. Media accuses boss of having commanded it, but the punishment does not go up to the boss because their secretary just assumed and did it with their own decision.

In general, people know there are some lies/Sontaku in every story. We have a lot of programs (TV show, online news, blogs by journalists etc.) that disclose and explain each lie from a major story by the so-called specialist in that subject. People must see this whole thing as a story or news. Some people get upset, but never the extreme way we see in other countries. People learn political power balance, history, and the financials behind the scenes (true or not) from a story or news; and maybe that is good enough as an entertainment story.

In terms of politics, the Japanese people know which media is for the government, against the government, or neutral.



Vicente Castellanos
Head of Public Affairs,
Ipsos in Spain

When you're doing your research in Spain, how do you avoid triggering nationalist cues?

Nationalism is a very hot topic. We have different kinds of nationalism here. We have "National Nationalism," which is people defending their Spanish origin and the "unified" country. And we have regional nationalism, which defends the preeminence of regional origin over "national" origin. Therefore we have five official languages in Spain. So, the way we handle questions is mostly by managing the regional languages. For example, in the exit poll questions in Catalan, if you say good morning in Spanish they know you are

46% of people in Spain are confident they can tell real news from "fake news", but just **19%** believe the average Spaniard can do the same.

mainly a Spanish speaker, and this has an impact on how you're perceived. If you say good morning in Catalan, you are perceived as a competent native speaker or a Catalan speaker.

How big of a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns and how do you recommend that clients and media respond?

I'm not sure if we have a lot of external disinformation campaigns. But Spanish society is particularly polarized. The media environment is also polarized. Telling them to be open on presenting a wide range of options, data or opinions is not always feasible because public opinion is polarized, but the media are also polarized. We tell clients to consider which medium could be the right platform to share or to show specific research.

People are either on one side or the other. If you are on one side, you see the others as doing a permanent, disinformation campaign.

What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the state of the news media in Spain?

We don't have a very trusted media institution, like, for example, the BBC. We have public television, but even that is under the control of the government. There isn't a lot of trust in the media. The media are trying to get audiences by using populist messages. In the best case, they suffer from a lack of audiences, which means that they look for audiences at any price. And second, because there are political or economic biases. Everyone could say if this newspaper, television or radio station is on the right side, or is on the left side.

TRUST PROJECT INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWS WITH PUBLISHERS FROM TRUST PROJECT MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



Dan Petty
Director of Audience Development,
MediaNews Group

The survey data suggests that people want quality news, but they don't always want to pay for it. How can news organisations bridge that gap?

Through the pandemic, we've seen a subscriptions surge, which shows that people are willing to pay for quality that they need when they need it. Even during an economic recession, our subscriptions are growing. The biggest challenge is just to go faster.

People in surveys trust our brands, and part of that is because we are journalists living in the communities that we cover. People subscribe to stuff they can't find anywhere else - often local public policy or business issues. Are these restaurants closing because of the pandemic? What is the local or state government doing? Our focus is on the competitive advantage we can gain by covering things that no one else is going to cover with depth and breadth.

How big a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns, and what do you do to battle them?

One of our editors was asking what to do about Facebook commenters claiming that COVID was fake, when he doesn't have the resources to deal with all those comments. According to Pew, some 43% of Americans are getting their news from Facebook. Facebook acknowledges the problem and has added resources, but it's just impossible. We seem to be occupying different realities with the facts. All we can do is just keep pushing the truth out there, as much as we possibly can.

How do you respond in your coverage to these challenges to the idea of truth?

If we tell the truth, we should be able to build trust with our audience. That's not something you do in just a week - it's something you have to do, as many of our publications have, over years and decades, even in an environment that feels as hostile as today. The United States has gone through periods like this before, like in the '50s with Joseph McCarthy. This is different obviously: there's more technology at work. But we have to adhere to the truth, and we can't get discouraged.

We need to not mess up, but when we do, we need to be transparent about it. It's why we have, through The Trust Project, a corrections policy about how we handle those things. We need to recognise that the truth can be difficult to get to, and as an industry we need to get better at explaining how difficult the truth is. We have not done well in explaining how we go about doing things. So people who are disinclined to trust institutions like ours, look at us and ask what are they doing behind closed doors? More transparency would help. Also, a really good first step would be to acknowledge that the truth is sometimes not as black and white as people want it to be.



Linda Solomon-Wood
CEO, Observer Media Group
and Editor-in-Chief, National
Observer, Canada

The research suggests that people want quality news but are reluctant to pay for it. How do news organisations bridge that gap?

Quality, standing out from the crowd, providing people with real value, leads directly to subscriptions. Our audience places a premium on investigations that address a societal issue that's already been on their minds. Then, to leverage excellent content, we have a strong engagement team that is constantly bringing the work to readers' attention. We have to learn from the likes of the New York Times and Washington Post, who are succeeding through digital subscription sales. For relative newcomers to succeed, you need a kind of brutal persistence and a commitment to the long haul. For me, it has been one of the greatest challenges of my life; it's been both harrowing and rewarding.

As journalists, we must resist the urge to become hyperbolic in situations where it's not merited.

How big a threat do you see from internal and external disinformation campaigns, and how do you combat them?

The threat is large and growing. We worked hard on that in the 2019 Canadian federal election. We worried about foreign intervention because of what had happened in the U.S. election. But it turned out to be more internal. Regardless of the source, disinformation's impact is the same: it confuses the public; it can also confuse journalists and public officials.

How is trust impacted by nationalism and populism in your market, and how do you avoid accidentally triggering it?

Nationalism and populism are divisive and this divisiveness, of course, erodes trust. We are lucky in Canada that we still have a strong middle, and polling shows that Canadians have much more trust in democratic institutions and the media than Americans do. As journalists, we must resist the urge to become hyperbolic in situations where it's not merited. We must stay within the bounds of good journalism, which is part of being part of The Trust Project - that helps us organize ourselves around the highest journalistic principles. The Trust Project is a moral compass.

How do you respond in your coverage to all of these challenges to the idea of "truth?"

To me truth is not an idea, it's a set of facts that are real and measurable. We're often looking at problems in the energy industry, and conversely solutions that people are coming up with to move Canada to a clean economy. One of the big challenges in covering climate change is being sure your writers genuinely understand the science of carbon and global emissions. You need an expert team to advise you, to act as a sounding board and fact checkers.



Jaime Bedoya
Head of Content, El Comercio,
Peru; member of The Trust
Project's News Leadership Council

The survey data found that people want quality news, but don't always want to pay for it. What can news organisations do to bridge that gap?

The pandemic has transformed what was previously a desire for information into a need. Helped by a certain neglect on the part of legacy print who took everything for granted until the internet appeared, we have been living under a distortion of the communication process. People have become used to social media content as if it were real information, and for free.

Will people pay? There are subscription peaks during the pandemic – people are regaining trust in real journalism and its value, now that your life depends on how well informed you are.

How big a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns, and what do you do to fight them?

In The Art Of War, Sun Tzu says to use the enemy to defeat the enemy – which we can do by putting a mirror to fake news to highlight the false 'reality'. Fact checking is indispensable and goes hand in hand with the good practices in our work. The Trust Project methodology is valuable here. There are restaurants in which the kitchen is separated by a glass wall, so you can see that the products are fresh. The glass wall that The Trust Project forces on journalists is of great value to fight against disinformation.

How big a factor is nationalism and populism in your market, and what do you do in your own reporting to avoid triggering it?

It's a constant fight. We need to viralize the truth, to regain the trust we have lost. Also, we must deal with 'angry, disengaged' audiences, who do not care about transparency, but they need the media as a piece of machinery for the conspiracy to work. Another tool to help here is solutions journalism and dialogue journalism, which aim to achieve empathy with this audience – instead of colliding with them, you are listening and offering rationality. This doesn't confirm that they're going to listen, but at least it's an honest approach.

How do you respond in your coverage to all of these challenges to the idea of "truth?"

Our first obligation is to rebuild the trust that the audiences once had in the so-called legacy media. We must recognise our mistakes and correct them, not sweep them under the rug, and show possible conflicts of interest without any make-up or camouflage. The Trust Project Indicators are useful in meeting the challenges of giving journalistic truth a good reputation again. It is like a chemical reaction – honesty and transparency generate engagement, which is the greatest asset for media.

**The glass wall that
The Trust Project forces
on journalists is of
great value to fight
against disinformation.**



Joseph Davis Weddi
Digital Producer, SciDev.Net

The research indicates that people want quality news, but they don't necessarily want to pay for it. What can news organisations do to bridge that gap?

People in the Global South are not used to buying news online – it will take time to catch fire. Take my former employer in Uganda – their revenues have dipped because people think that print newspapers may carry COVID-19. So to experiment with selling an electronic version, they've struck a deal with a local telecom, who control the payment methods.

At SciDev.net, we've always distributed news for free; we get funded to produce it. We know that there are opportunities for initiating premium news products not only to test if the audience will pay, but to respond to new ways of publishing high-quality news and analysis. In order to compete, one will need to have compelling, quality, truthful, well-priced news products. For news that is free, we need to introduce our audiences to the fact that the product costs money to produce. Hopefully, the audience will understand that quality news is as 'tangible' as anything they can buy on Amazon or Ebay.

How big a threat is internal and external disinformation campaigns, and what do you do about it?

Where I previously worked in Uganda, there's a lot of disinformation targeting less-informed people. Some of it originates internally and some comes from outside the country – mostly via social media platforms. The information lacks substance, but it's so convincing.

At SciDev.net, we will continue providing reliable, accurate reporting. In the pharmaceutical markets there are fake drugs or drugs that have not been fully tested before release. There are players in the developed markets who are not doing the right things when it comes to the developing world – for example, exporting substandard drugs.

How is trust impacted by nationalism and populism in your market?

In some Global South countries with a colonial legacy, the government ideology will influence how local science news is treated. A single misplaced populist statement can completely discredit a news publication, and science news publishers are not exempt from this. Hype and overclaims can lead to misperceptions among audiences who may not have grounded knowledge about the true potential of emerging areas of science.

How do you respond in your coverage to all of these challenges to the idea of "truth?"

Quote as many impeccable, verifiable sources as possible. Even try to prove what they're saying - give examples, show that this is something that can be cross-checked. Explore as many sources as possible. Bring in many voices to amplify the message that is within an article. What we know is that one plus one is two... a fact is fact.

46% of people globally believe other countries target people in their country with disinformation/fake news.



Jack Lahart
Head of Social Media,
The Economist, U.K.

How big a threat do you think internal and external disinformation campaigns pose, and what can the news industry do to combat them?

In social media now it's incredibly difficult for publishers to try and break through some of that noise. The disinformation campaigns that we see around vaccines or COVID-19 are gaining new followers very quickly, and they are pushing into the mainstream which is extremely worrying.

But I think there are some positive trends in all of that. I think the pandemic showed that there's still a place for publishers to continue producing sensible and trustworthy news. The fact that publishers like The Economist and the New York Times continue to perform well tells me that there is an appetite for news that is viewed as trusted and not on the fringes.

What can publishers do? More of what they're doing - combat disinformation with fact checking exercises, and by ensuring that they are involved in projects like The Trust Project, so that we can send signals to readers that you can trust us because of these combinations of reasons. While those conspiracy theories and disinformation campaigns are bubbling into the mainstream, at the same time you're still seeing a surge back to traditional news organisations for trusted news, so I don't think it's all bad news.

How do you respond in your coverage to all of these challenges to the idea of "truth?"

On a practical level we employ a rigorous process of fact checking for our articles. We have an entire research department which pores over every single word and every single issue of The Economist, to ensure that what we're saying is accurate and fair.

There's also a broader element, which is about context and honesty. This is something that I as a social media editor think about a lot – how we present our articles to the reader, providing as much context as possible to the arguments we're making, is really important.

This is partly because it allows the reader to see if they agree with the point that we're making, or if they want to go away and make up their own mind. But as well, especially on social media, thinking about how we present our work helps us avoid our journalism being misinterpreted, or being used in a way that we would not want it to be used. We think about the framing of the entire article.

We seek to contextualise the articles we're putting out there, to give the reader all of the tools that they need to then make a judgement for themselves on whether they agree with us, or whether they want to disagree with us. So, I think it's about context. I also think it's about the practical steps that publishers have to take to make sure that they are honest with themselves.

59% of Brits say they regularly make sure the news they read, watch or listen to comes from trustworthy sources.



Jessica Johnson
Executive Editor & Creative
Director, The Walrus, Canada

The research suggests that people want quality news, but they're not so keen to pay for it. What can the news industry do to bridge the gap?

The news industry has done a terrible job of expressing its value to the public – in Canada, the Toronto Star has made that an overt part of their appeal. Otherwise, everyone thought that if they played with the algorithms of Facebook and Twitter it would lead to revenue, which did not arrive.

We are a non-profit. We will experiment over the next year with voluntary membership by committed readers. On our website now there are some small widgets that pop up and say, "Support The Walrus – the facts are not free." We have to market and explain the situation. For the public, I do not think this a top-of-mind priority.

How big a threat are internal and external disinformation campaigns, and what do you think you can do to combat it?

The fake news threat is somewhat exaggerated. It does exist, and we know where it is. We know that, for example, Russian and Ukrainian actors targeted the last Canadian election. But the bigger problem is bad, poorly sourced news.

How much do you think is impacted by nationalism and populism in your market, and how do you prevent yourselves from accidentally triggering it?

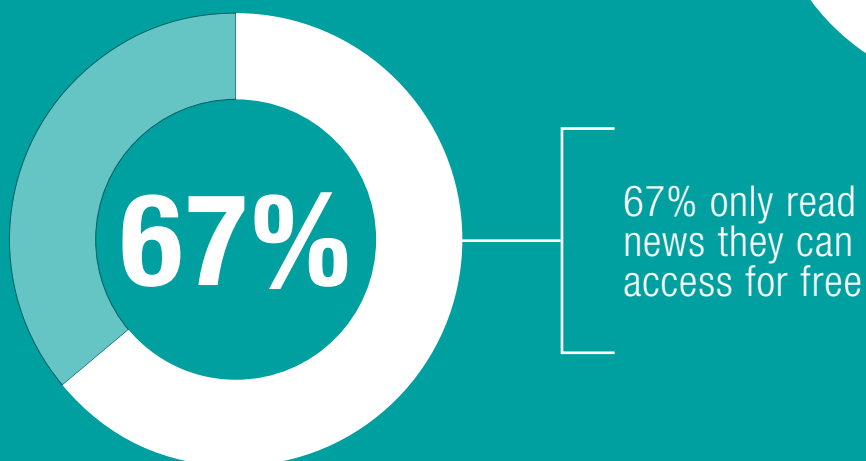
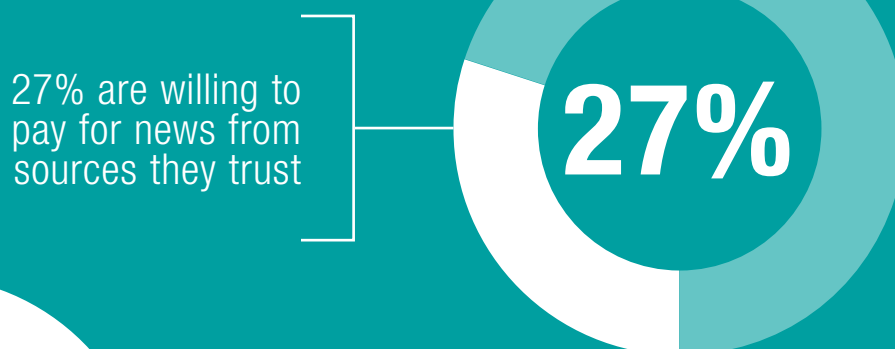
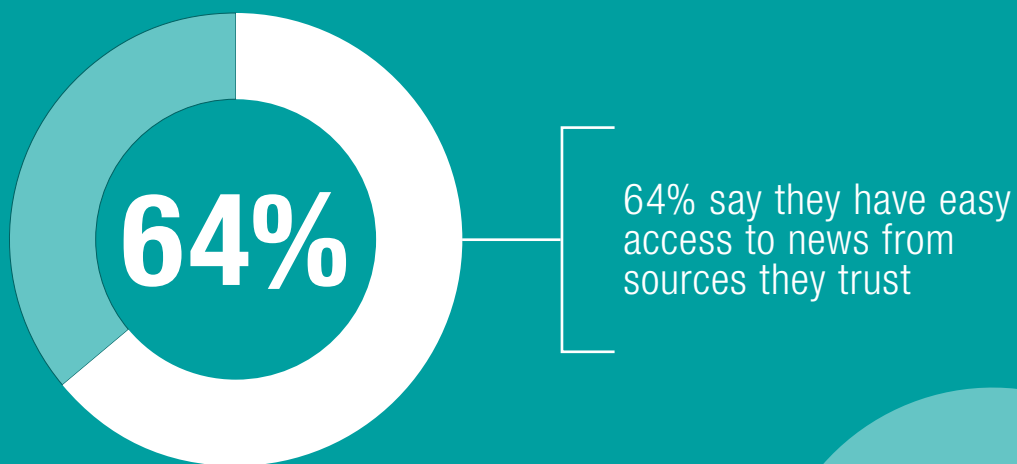
As a national publication, it's difficult because Canada is so regional. There's much more nationalist sentiment in Alberta and Saskatchewan than you would find in Ontario. For us, it's just about transparency and objectivity. I'm careful not to be left-wing because you don't get any right-wing people by being left-wing. You just have to be: "Here's the facts, here's how we've arrived at these conclusions... Here's how you can verify them for yourself."

How do you respond in your coverage to the erosion of these ideas of 'truth'?

That issue of trust has become our primary message to readers. Joining The Trust Project was important; it forced us to clean up our website and separate news and analysis, to tell people who we are, what we're doing, why we're doing it and how to get in touch. Our readers have very high trust, so our efforts are working with the audience we have.

I think the concept of objectivity is being deconstructed before our eyes, beginning with the election of Donald Trump and his message that the media is fake, so only trust me. The Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S. and in Canada has had a huge effect on the notion of who holds the truth, who holds the power, who should we listen to, and what unbiased opinion and news actually are.

I think there's something about this that is healthy. Why should people like you and me have had the platform? That was the weakness in the system. And now, newspapers and other media must find a way to re-establish a level footing with their audience. And that's our challenge and it's always been a brutally difficult business. We're not owed an audience – we have to earn it.



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020



DATA AND ANALYSIS

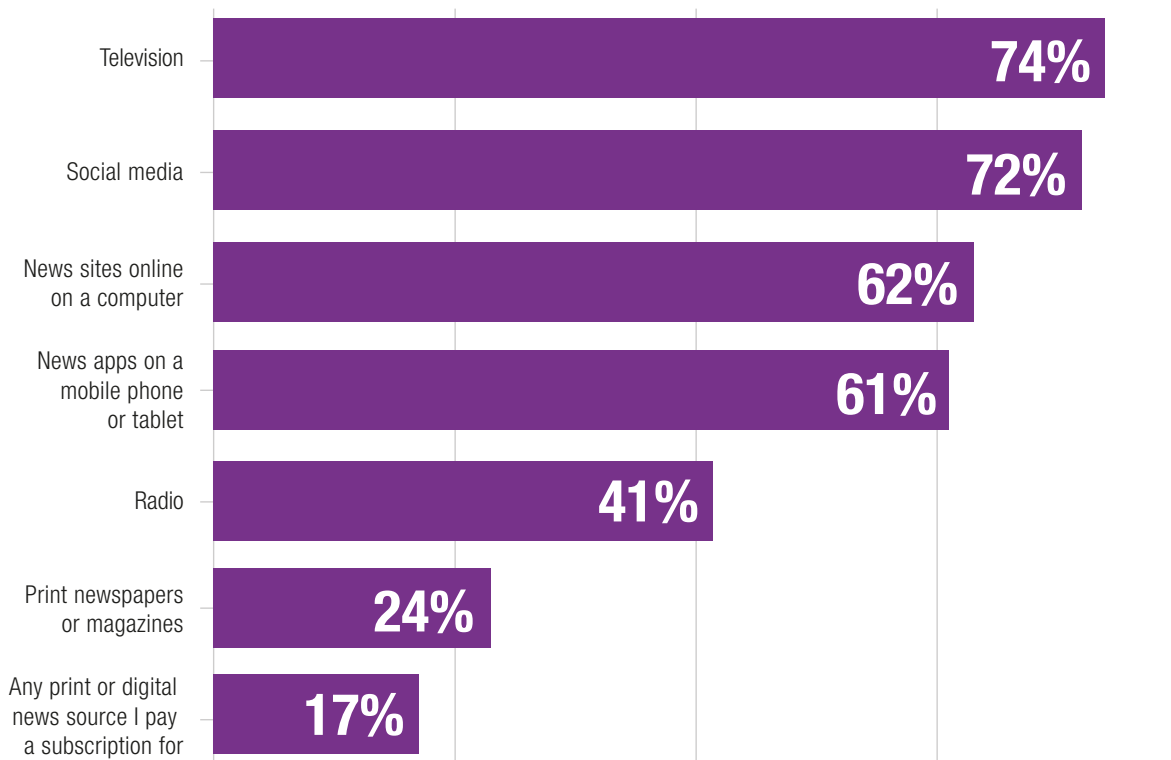
MEDIA USAGE

Where you get your news matters. It's not news that the media landscape has fragmented over the last 20 to 30 years with the rise of cable TV, satellite radio, internet and social media. For television and digital media, numbers are high across the board. Print media has declined to the point that only around one in five people read papers frequently in many nations. Social media has joined TV as a dominant source of news (see Figure 1).

The good news for media, and arguably for society as a whole, is that a clear if not vast majority of people are getting news frequently from at least one form of media. But a large number are also getting news from multiple forms of media.

On the one hand, having more voices in the media can lead to a much more diverse and representative picture of the world. On the other, media fragmentation is one factor that influences our (in)ability to come together as a society and have constructive dialog about the issues and challenges facing us. The parts that are growing the most, like social media, are the parts that are the most fragmented of all. It's harder for there to be cohesion when there are so many voices giving us news and more importantly, opinions. It's harder for there to be cohesion when media in many markets are aligned with one political party or another and people can choose to hear the news that confirms and reinforces their existing world views.

Figure 1 Frequency of media usage (% three days a week or more often)



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

THE “FAKE NEWS” PROBLEM

The Dunning–Kruger effect and its related cognitive bias, the Superiority Illusion, are about overestimating your abilities. People, on average, consider themselves to be above average at various tasks. In an Ipsos poll about the rules of the road⁸, eight in ten drivers said they considered themselves above average drivers. Which, well, can't possibly be an accurate depiction of reality because math doesn't work that way.

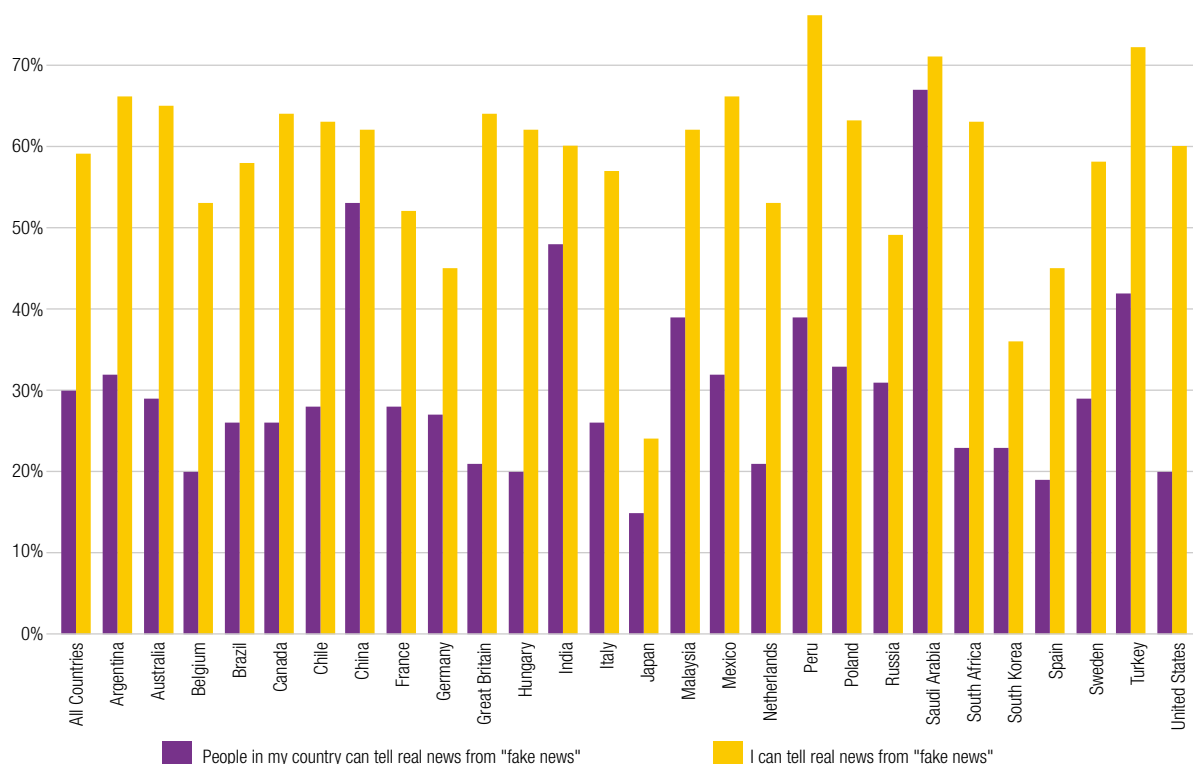
We know that in today's world “fake news” exists, although that is a terrible phrase. It lumps together several disparate things with varying levels of malice. People outright lie, and then get quoted in the news. Governments and other organizations are running sophisticated disinformation/propaganda campaigns in their own countries to try to influence public opinion around the world to shape events to their benefit. Synthetic media means that even “trustworthy” media like videos or audio can be faked and have their

authenticity called into question. Even simple mistakes by a reporter, or stories that evolved over time leading to a naturally shifting narrative of a situation get lumped in as “fake news.”

The situation has led to a number of efforts to combat the problem from a push for greater transparency, to labels of suspect content, to takedowns from social media platforms, to a rise in fact-checking sites – and, of course, The Trust Project's Trust Indicators. Brazil's National Congress is considering legislation against “fake news” which some view as a massive affront to freedom of expression.⁹

An important part of media literacy in these times, therefore, is to be able to tell real from fake. And here we see Dunning-Kruger in full effect. We are roughly twice as confident in our own ability to spot real from fake (59%) as we are confident that others in our country (30%) can (see Figure 2). An Ipsos study conducted in the U.S. saw similar numbers about telling news from opinion.¹⁰

Figure 2 Most are confident they can spot “fake news” but that their neighbors can't



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

This over-self-confidence coupled with a lack of confidence in others is a toxic combination. It could also lead them to trust news they see shared from people they trust less as “likely fake” and dismiss it, even if it is factual. At the same time, it could lead people to look less critically at news than they should, or even more to look less critically at news if it comes from trusted sources – either specific outlets they trust or shared on social media by people they trust. And as we’ll see, that trust is likely misplaced.

HOW MUCH ARE WE WILLING TO PAY?

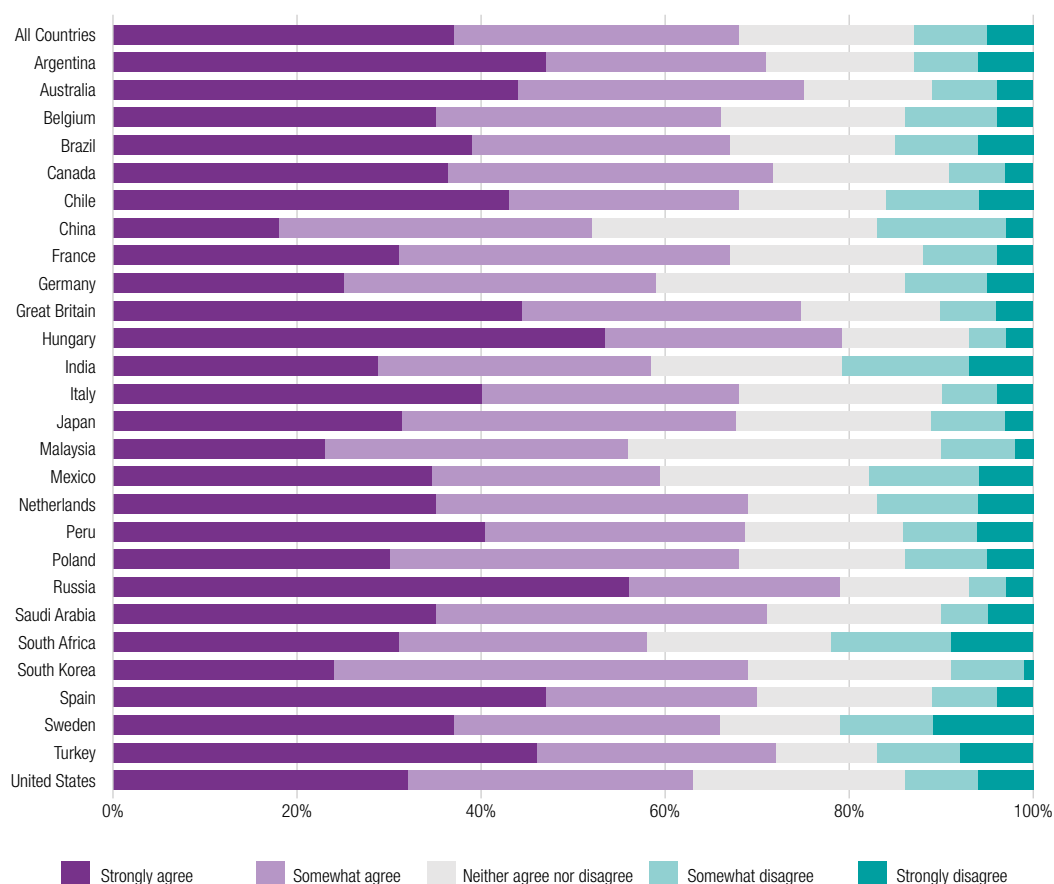
In the United States, daily newspaper circulation decreased by 12.5 million readers between 1941 and 2018, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center.¹¹ Over that span, the population increased by more than 195 million people. That’s not a great trend line for newspapers and in no way

is the U.S. unique in this. Roughly two in three people agree with the statement that “I only read news I can access for free” (see Figure 3).

Part of the issue might be cost. Two thirds say they have “easy access to news from sources [they] trust”. In a time when so many are struggling to pay the bills in so many parts of the world, buying something that you can ostensibly also get for free might seem like an extravagance. About three in ten say they are **willing** to pay for news, which is roughly the same number as say they **are able** to pay for news. So those that can, seem to be doing, but many don’t think they can.

One could argue that newspapers and other media need to do a better job of communicating their value and branding/selling their product and benefits – like many other industries disrupted by ecommerce and the internet.

Figure 3 I only read news I can access for free



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

While subscriptions to some outlets (print, or online) have risen in recent times, subscription revenue doesn't make up for the falling advertising revenue. Meanwhile, two thirds say they try to avoid ads when they can and 36% of your potential audience say they actively use software to block ads. That makes the ad-supported model seems unsustainable at best.

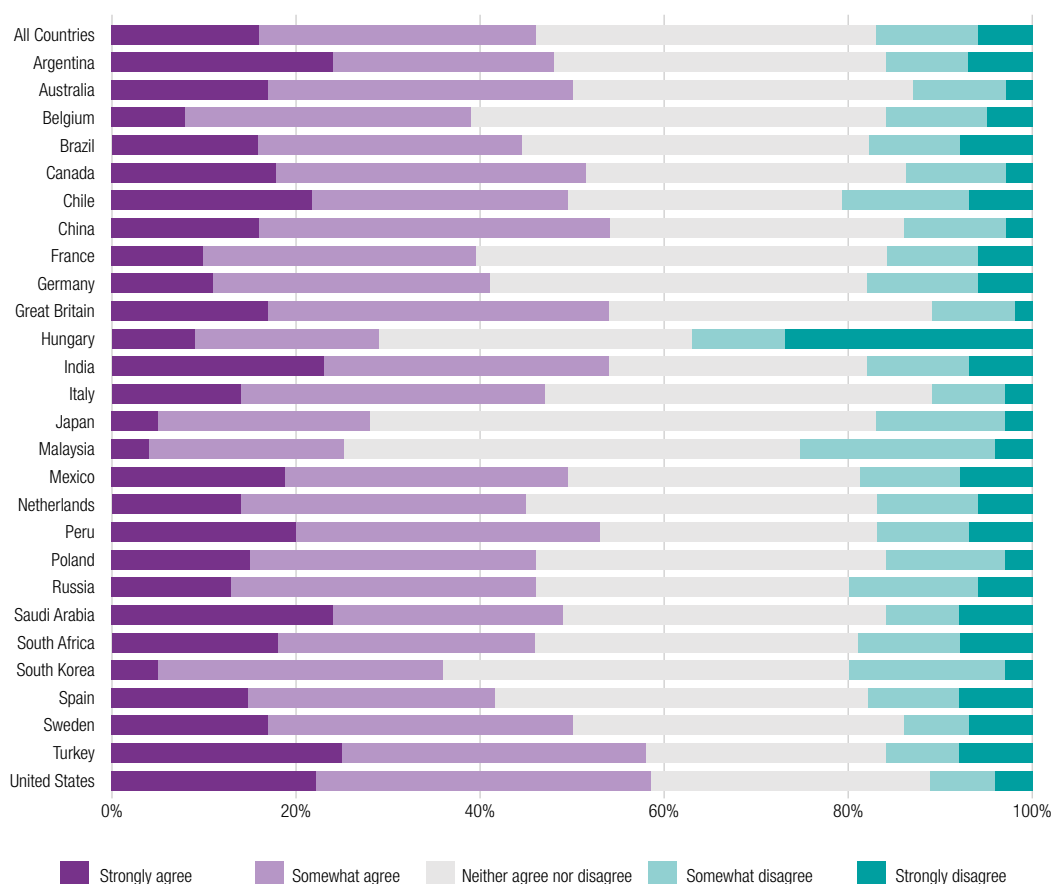
As more newspapers, etc. fail financially we're in a situation where we see a sizeable decrease in the number of "traditional" media outlets available, especially at local level.

Which brings us to one big problem for truth and trust: low quality news content is almost always free. That's always been true to some degree but now it's even more so. You always used to be able to get a "newspaper" that was chock full of ads and light on content, but it was free compared to the daily in your city or small town.

Today that's even more true. Lots of high-quality content is certainly available for free. Even sites with paywalls will often allow access to some stories each month without a subscription. But blogs peddling conspiracy theories, or opinions rather than news, are readily available and almost never behind a paywall. Trade watching a couple of seconds of pre-roll advertising and you can watch just about any video on major streaming platforms for free.

So if people are unwilling, or more to the point feel they are unable to pay to support quality news, much of that will go away. But the lower quality, free content will always be there to fill the void.

Figure 4 I believe other countries target people in my country with disinformation/fake news



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

A United States Senator, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, once said, “You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts.” Sometimes, when conducting surveys, we like to ask people’s opinions about facts. In the U.K., for instance, there is very little disagreement that outside governments are trying to influence public opinion with disinformation (see Figure 4). Yet when asked just over half agree with that’s the case. Slightly more agree in the U.S., another country that is certainly a target. Interestingly, a sizeable group (35% in the U.K. and 30% in the U.S.) neither agree nor disagree.

What drives the low acceptance of reality coupled with the high lack of an opinion? Is it a dearth of information or something else?

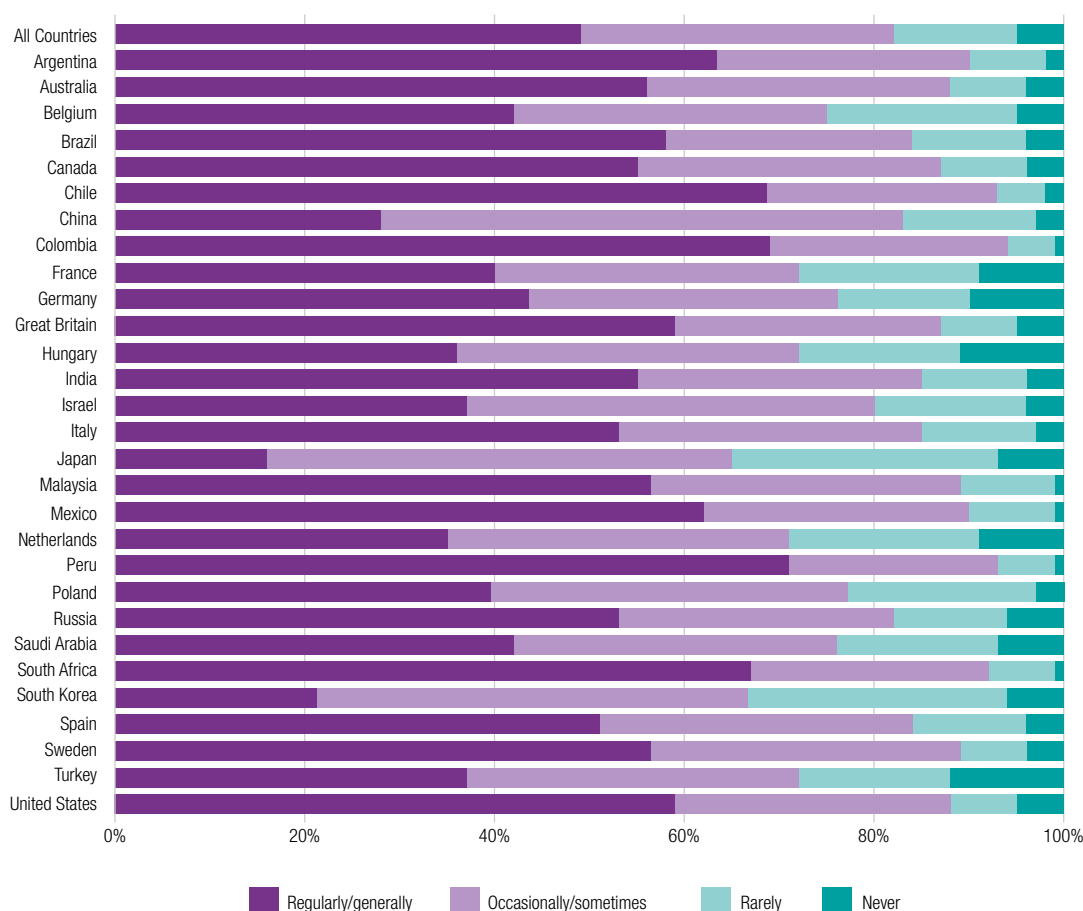
FINDING TRUSTWORTHY CONTENT

Regardless, when taken together with our data on the ability to tell real from fake you can start to see how we are quite susceptible to a problem we can’t even seem to acknowledge exists.

Do people actively seek out the truth? The answer seems to be an overwhelming yes, and that’s great news for the news industry. By wide margins in most countries, people “make sure the news [they] read, watch or listen to comes from trustworthy sources” (see Figure 5).

Ok, so if everyone seeks out trustworthy content, and 65% say they have easy access to trustworthy content, then what’s the big deal?

Figure 5 How often do you make sure the news you read, watch or listen to come from trustworthy sources?



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 20,047 adults in 29 markets, June-July 2020

In many nations, it's not that big of a deal. The governments regulate the news to the degree that it is generally trustworthy content. In many countries, broadcasters can't just go on air and lie, mislead or engage in hate-speech without risking shut down.

But in less regulated nations, like the U.S. for instance where freedom of speech trumps most government regulation, the problem is confirmation bias. People trust news from sources they agree with. In some countries, the state controls the media flat-out. In countries such as Spain, the newspapers tend to align with political viewpoints. Very few countries have something like the U.K.'s BBC that is generally considered neutral and trustworthy across the spectrum.

It's human nature for people to trust content they believe to be true, but in many cases, they believe it to be true because it reinforces their world view.

If you've read this report all the way through you can see how that might be a bad thing for societal consensus and cooperative decision-making.

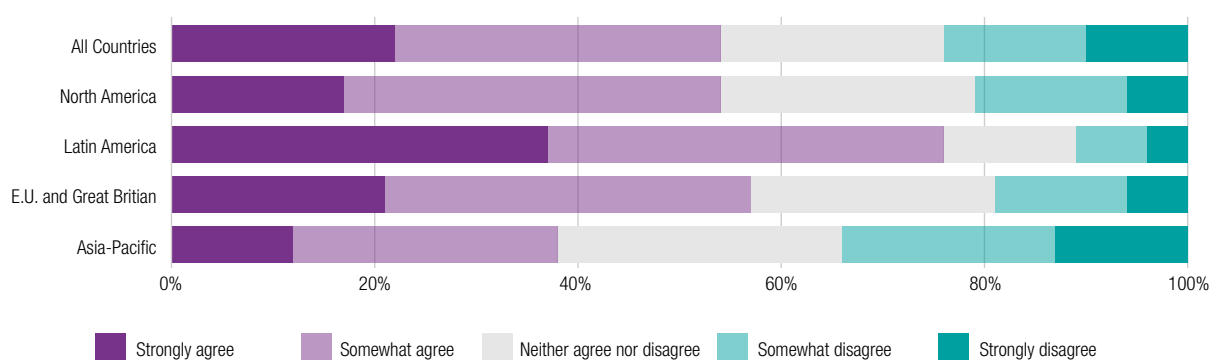
IS THE SYSTEM BROKEN?

The majority of people in our survey think that where they live, "society is broken" (see Figure 6a). In the Americas that's more like 75% - 80%. Just under half think that the way to make things better is to have a strong leader who breaks the rules (see Figure 6b). Again, those numbers tend to be higher in the Americas. More than a third (36%) feel that all immigration should be halted to make their country stronger (see Figure 6c). That contrasts with 16% who feel that open borders would benefit their nation.

These questions are meant to tease out nationalist and populist tendencies. Around the globe, we see large pockets where these ideas have taken hold. And these ideas trigger some interesting differences in how people trust and view the news.

For instance, those who think their country would be stronger without immigration are more likely to trust that people in their countries can spot "fake news". People who favor more lenient immigration are much less likely to have faith their fellow citizens can. As do people who think the system is broken.

Figure 6a Society is broken



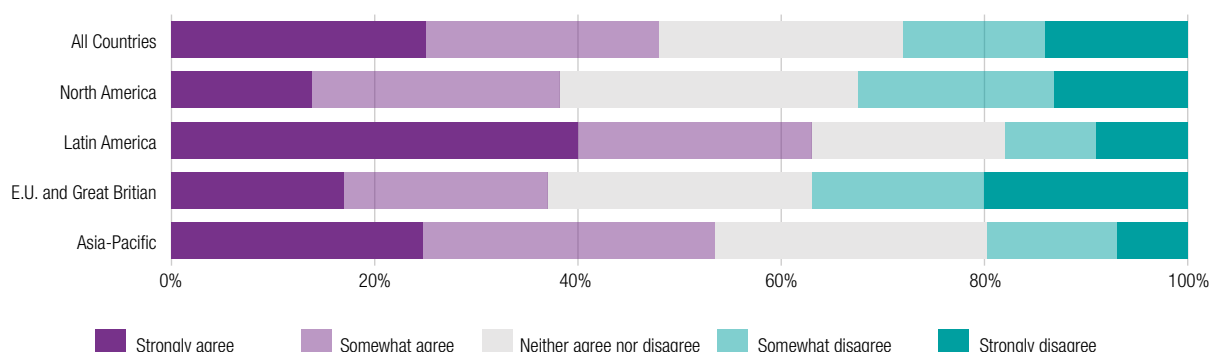
Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

People who think their country needs a strong, rule-breaking leader – a key nationalist belief – are more likely to trust news shared with them by people they don't know personally. So, bloggers, influencers, thought leaders and the like can have an outsized influence on this group. Will that mean a virtuous/vicious circle can develop, or perhaps already has? Will people who lean toward nationalism and populism also gravitate toward media which reinforces those

beliefs? It's a chicken and egg question. And it holds true for those who don't hold those beliefs, too.

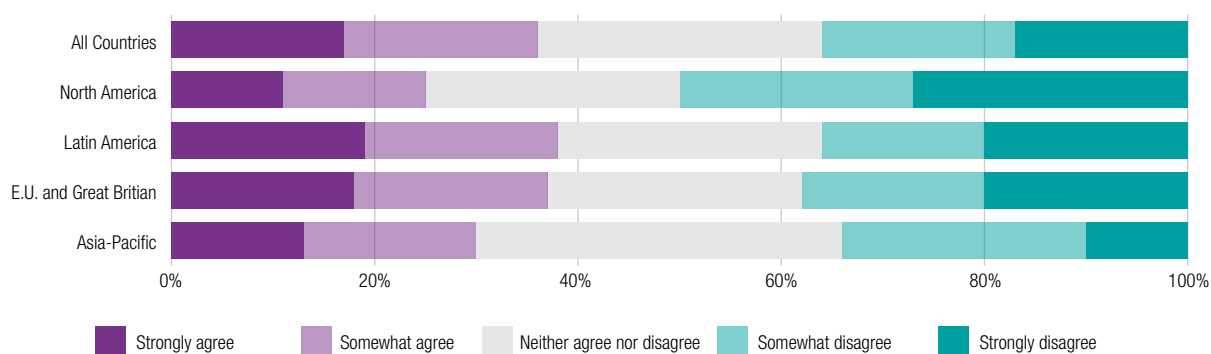
And finally, will nationalism lead to a rise in state-controlled media in countries where that doesn't effectively or currently exist?

Figure 6b We need a strong leader willing to break the rules



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020

Figure 6c [Country] would be stronger if we stopped immigration



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey, 18,998 adults across 27 markets, May-June 2020



It's human nature for people to trust content they believe to be true, but in many cases, they believe it to be true because it reinforces their world view.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this report several key factors that would impact the present and future of truth and trust in news were identified: Nationalist/populist opinions; disinformation campaigns; eroding business models and other forces that limit access to quality news; and technology shifts further fragmenting how and where we get our news. Ipsos and The Trust Project chose those based on some future scenario planning exercises and with input from publishers throughout the world based on what they see in their markets and beyond.

This report, then, paints a fairly grim picture with some of the worst possible combinations of beliefs and situations: a fragmented media audience, a proliferation of disinformation, a lack of ability to judge real from fake, and media outlets that are struggling and failing financially. That leaves them on a back foot in this fight with fewer resources and staff to challenge the onslaught of lesser-quality journalism.

But with any challenge comes an opportunity.

Ipsos research¹² shows that despite a lot of ironic media-driven handwringing, there has not been a long-term, global crisis of trust in all media (the U.S. is a bit of an exception to this.) People are seeking out news on a wide variety of platforms, and they're seeking trusted news.

As we've discussed, that trust is often misplaced. It is not much of a stretch to assume that if most people are trusting the content in front of them, then there are differences in what people consider "trustworthy," and that not all of that content is, in fact, true. And if we don't trust other people (and often ourselves) to tell the difference, we're in for a bumpy ride.

But if media outlets, likely working with the technology-based platforms where many people get their news, can earn the trust that people are seeking, maybe, just maybe, truth can still win the day.



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METHODOLOGY

The data in this report comes from the following two monthly waves of Ipsos' Global Advisor survey, unless stated otherwise.

Wave 1: 18,998 adults aged 18-74 in 27 markets, May 22-June 5, 2020. Wave 2: 20,047 adults aged 18-74 in 29 markets, June 19-July 3, 2020. The full data and methodology can be found on the Ipsos website at <https://www.ipsos.com/en/trust-misplaced>

TRUST MISPLACED?

A report on the future of trust in media

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