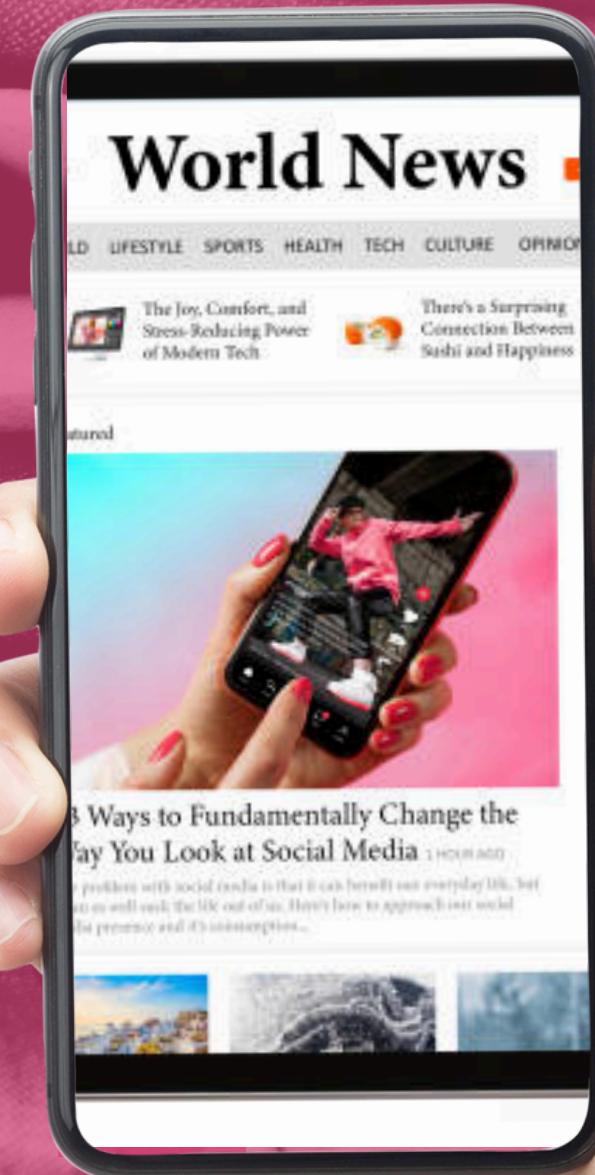


December 2024

Next Generation PR

The Newsroom Report



A **DEMOCRACY** Insights Report

# Introduction

It's a real conundrum - the appetite for news remains as strong as ever, yet there are fewer journalists than ever before working to new rulebooks designed to generate revenue. People don't trust legacy news outlets or individuals and, with the internet at their fingertips, are reluctant to pay for it.

So how is the news industry responding in order to survive? And what can agencies, organisations and brands do to gain an advantage when engaging journalists?

This Democracy Insights report seeks to capture what life is like for those telling the stories - big and small - that matter in national, regional and specialist media.

To attract the best students for market purposes

# Contents

We look at:

- The state of play **Page (05)**
- Where we are getting our news from **Page (06)**
- Life as a gen Z news avoider **Page (07)**
- New storytelling for a new generation **Page (09)**
- Connecting gen Z with news **Page (10)**
- The new newsmakers **Page (12)**
- Podcasts **Page (14)**
- Who's winning in print **Page (16)**
- The ongoing impact of paywalls **Page (18)**
- How Facebook unfriended the news **Page (19)**
- Summary **Page (20)**
- Contact us **Page (21)**

To attract the best students for market purposes

## ONE PUBLISHER SUMS UP THE STATE OF THE LANDSCAPE:

“Our main newspaper’s circulation is half of what it was 10 years ago, while digital subscriptions have grown by 30 per cent. However, the average age of a print subscriber is 68, and for this reason, the firm is investing strongly in digital, including TikTok. We will only be able to print and sell newspapers in the next five years if we are able to stabilise the digital part of the business.”

# State of Play



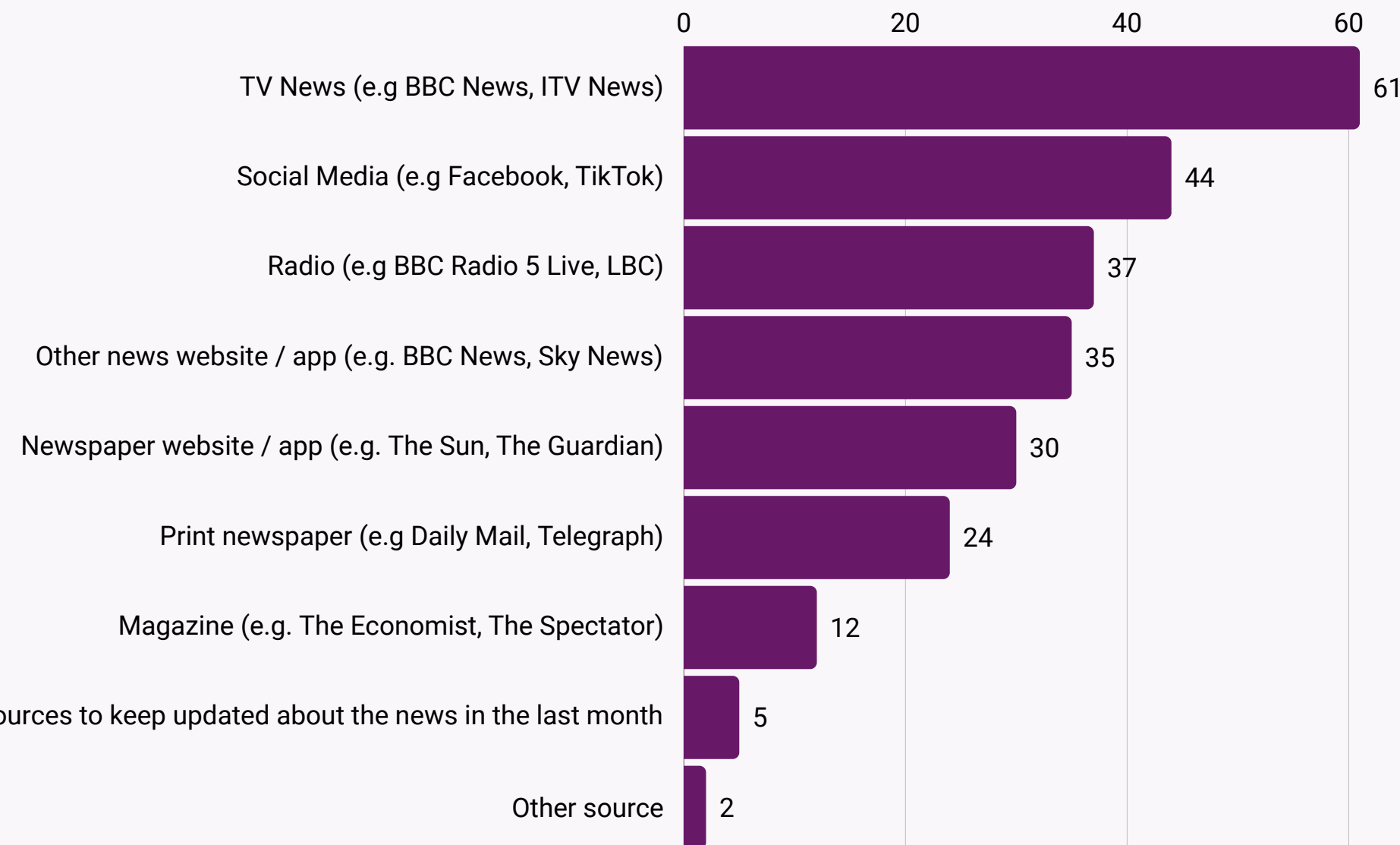
According to research by City University, readers spend 23 minutes flicking through a physical paper versus less than two minutes daily on the online version of these same titles.

Professor Neil Thurman of City University says: “Newspapers’ print editions provide an experience people invest time in, compared to how they snack on and scan news online.”

In all the country’s major publishers, the strongest revenue stream remains print and these old fashioned inky products are what’s propping up the flashy new worlds of podcasts, TikTok channels and other digital audience initiatives.

But with the average age of a reader of a print publication over the age of 60 and most Gen Z Brits claiming they’ve never picked up a single newspaper in their lives, it’s clear that businesses and brands who want to engage audiences need to understand the right platform and the right content to get cut through.

# Where are we getting our news from?



Source: Mintel, July 2024,  
News Consumption report

The fact that TV is the go-to medium for three in five people isn't the story here...

Instead, look at what is further down in this table..

The second most used source of news is social media, a fast-rising medium that suits the way we're all living today. Expect to see that ascend to top spot very soon.

Meanwhile, much lower down and slipping towards the trap door are print newspapers. Existing readers are dying off, new entrants to the market simply don't exist and the cost of production is prohibitive for media businesses who are counting the pennies..



# Gen Z news avoider?

The relationship between young people and traditional news outlets does not reflect that of generations before.

According to a report conducted by the CIPR, when 16-24 year olds were asked how they consume news, 16% replied print media, 12% online news, 53% through live broadcast and on demand services.

16-24 year olds are the most likely to be news avoiders, with one in ten consuming no news at all. This figure is twice as high as older adults.

Olivia Hirst-Whyatt, aged 24, works at Manchester Metropolitan University, and is proud to call herself a news avoider.

“The news was a big part of my childhood. It would always be on the TV in the morning. My Grandad loved the news. He would always have a newspaper in his hand, the Daily Mail, The Mirror or The Times.

“As a child, seeing upsetting sides of the world before the sun had even risen just wasn't healthy for me. Those memories are really negative, which is why as an adult, I try to avoid the news at every cost.

“It's an attempt to prioritise my mental health. Why would I want to start my day feeling down about the world when I could focus on what's going well in my life?

“I've even cut news feeds from my social channels, tailoring my TikTok and Instagram to show me content from influencers based on my hobbies and interests.

“I rely on my partner and my parents to tell me when there is important news about the country. For example, my partner showed me a clip on X about the election - otherwise I don't think I would have known that it was happening.

**“I quite like living in my small bubble of not wanting to know what's happening.**

“When there is a big important story, like the death of the Queen or the start of a war, I had access to the news when it mattered by searching online.

“The ratio of negative to positive things in the news is wrong, in my opinion, and the good things don't get enough share of voice. If there were more readily available publications who focused on more positive news then I would probably seek it out.”





# New storytelling for a new generation

Newsrooms are facing immense pressure to meet the shifts in digital behaviours exerted by younger audiences.

The change of operation towards digital and social first is still ongoing, with many publishers in the process of integrating all journalists into one team, rather than print and digital in separate teams.

However, in these legacy businesses, knowing they should be running stories on TikTok and Snapchat and doing so effectively are still two different things.

The audience is living on their phones and demanding instant content. But the money is elsewhere.

***SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE NEWSROOMS...***

# Connecting Gen Z with news

The bad news for legacy media is that younger generations will not simply 'grow up' and start reading newspapers. The next generation want to see stories from creators who they know (or feel like they know), reporting on issues that they have a direct connection with.

In 2024, The FT looked at the possible news landscape of 2030 and how publishers can start preparing. They found that what matters is authenticity and it is most often their peer group who validate those sources of who to trust. An outcome, a call to action or at least solutions-focused reporting is what these consumers want.

This could mean someone on the front line of a protest or military attack. Or a credible case study becoming the reporter on an issue they know inside out and have lived experience of.

The report also highlighted a shift in what is considered 'news' too. Young consumers want information that is significant to them and to those they care about. There is clear evidence that the idea of what is considered 'newsworthy' is changing drastically.



# Connecting Gen Z with news

In the past, editors at recognised outlets decided what was relevant. However, with so many outlets, platforms, communities and sources, power has shifted to the consumer to judge for themselves what is 'news'.

A return to light touch news - the 'and finally' segment from decades ago - is on the cards with the next generation demanding it. So even for serious stories, with moderated and updated language, humour can be injected into most stories - think Last Week Tonight With John Oliver.

Some news outlets are already building the profiles of individual reporters about distinct areas of expertise or on certain platforms to elevate them and build an audience over the longer term. Brands can take a leaf from this approach.



# TikTok

## The new newsmakers



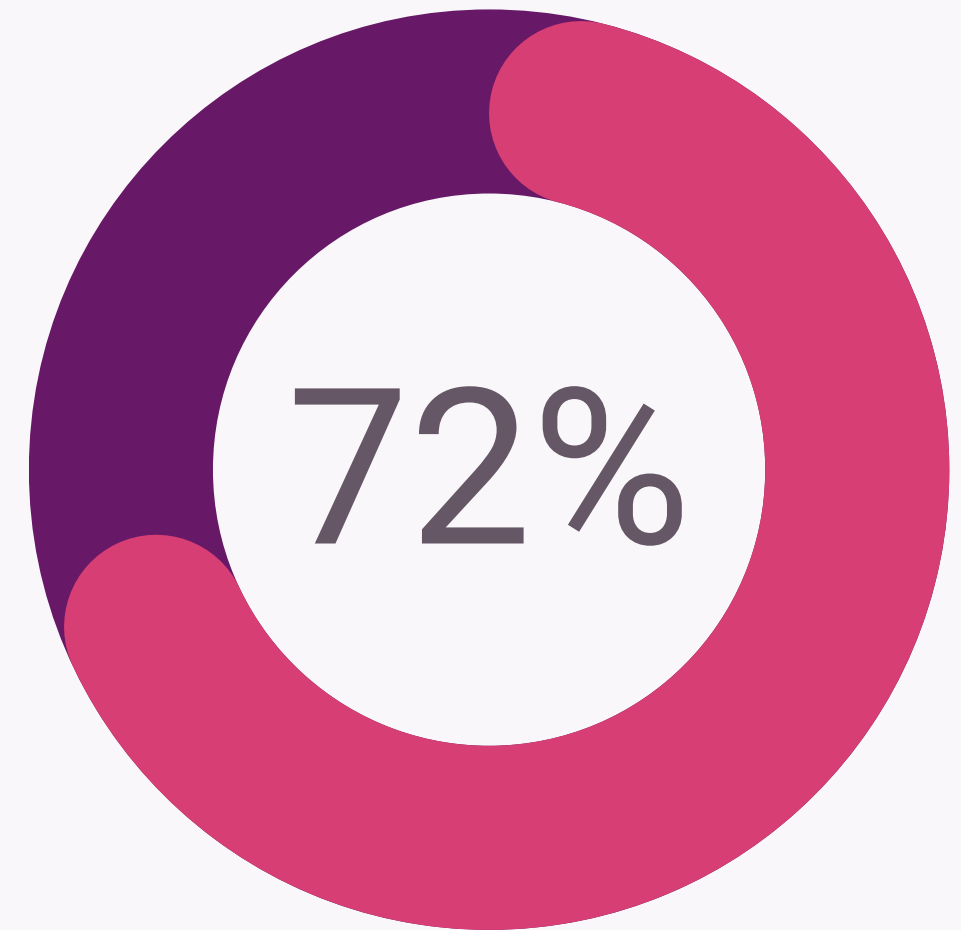
TikTok has become an unlikely hub for news, with one in three 16–24 year olds using it to keep informed.

A recent Press Gazette report found that more people are using TikTok to consume news stories than BBC Radio One and Channel 5.

This figure (10%) is also on par with The Guardian. TikTok has strict limits on the types of news that gain traction.

Another of the UK's major publishers on the app is The Daily Mail. With almost 9m followers, the publisher is an unlikely sensation on TikTok, after joining in 2020. The Mail employed an intriguing strategy when it came to its team, which is now made up of 50 per cent journalists and 50 per cent social media specialists, allowing the outlet to effectively package its headlines to reach the younger target audience that dominates the app.

**Celebrity news (55%) and light-hearted content (43%) dominate. Youth-focused publisher Ladbible has 13.7m followers and the majority of its content utilises user-generated content to show a different perspective on the story to make content shareable.**



**18-24 year olds consider themselves 'TikTok users'**

# Snapchat

## The new newsmakers

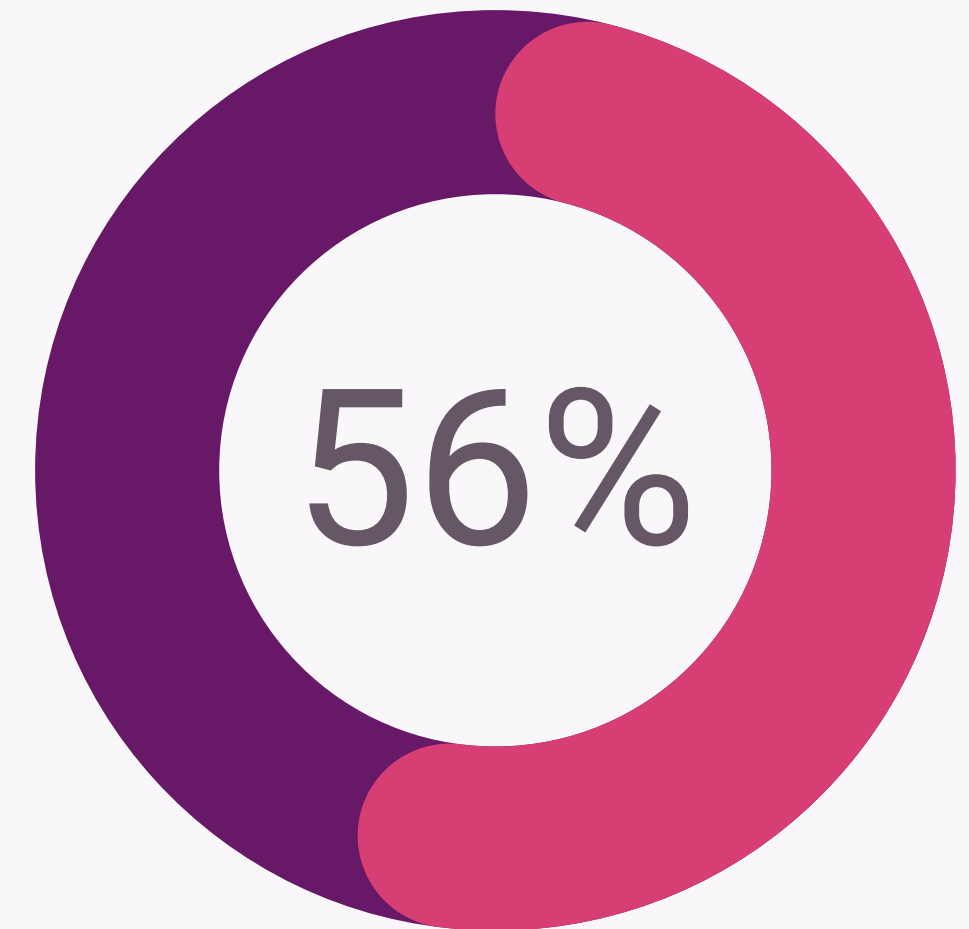


Snapchat has 900 media outlets operating on the platform. The app presents itself as the key to reaching the Gen Z audience. Lucy Luke, Snapchat's UK Head of Partnerships, claimed that over 70M users consume news content there each month.

Luke references the effectiveness of short-form content at drawing users in, a format which is much harder to recreate on other channels. Therefore, this makes Snapchat the perfect platform for reaching this audience with different types of news articles.

The addictive and engaging nature of Snapchat is almost unmatched, with users opening the app around 40 times a day, presenting ample opportunity for news content to be consumed.

Unlike other social platforms, Snapchat offers a 50/50 revenue split with news organisations placing content on the Discover tab. In terms of reaching the next generation, Snapchat claims 90% of 13-24 year olds use it.



18-24 year olds consume their media through Snapchat

# Podcasts

## The new newsmakers



**Podcasts are reshaping the landscape of media consumption and challenging the dominance of traditional platforms.**

Goliaths of journalism like The Guardian, The BBC, and even tech giant Apple have ventured into the podcast realm. For institutions like The BBC, there's undoubtedly internal deliberation regarding the future of radio amidst the rising popularity of podcasts.

There are more than 500m active podcast listeners, and several news outlets have started their own daily/weekly shows, presenting a new opportunity to 'get the nation talking'.

Consequently, certain demographics are turning away from traditional radio, finding it incompatible with their schedules, while podcasts seamlessly cater to their preferences.

Younger people, aged 18-34, are increasingly favouring podcasts as a news source, with the format both engaging and convenient.

# Podcasts

## The new newsmakers



The true allure of podcasts lies in their versatility - they offer something to suit every taste, particularly in the realm of news. Podcasts offer unparalleled adaptability.

Research shows that 43% of podcast listeners enjoy them while driving, making commutes more enjoyable and productive.

Additionally, 46% of listeners choose to immerse themselves in podcasts while out for a walk, combining entertainment or learning with physical activity. This adaptability combined with the on-demand nature of the content is clearly what fits with today's lifestyles.

UK weekly podcast listeners spend an average of **5 hours 27 minutes** listening to podcasts in a typical week

# Newspapers Winning in print

**Metro readership up 9% year on year, now at 1.48m copies daily**

The free morning commuter favourite Metro is now the highest circulation paper in the UK, with almost one and a half million printed every day and growing.

Advertisers, keen to grab the attention of the young, socially mobile and earning commuters, have flooded in.

Metro is clearly positioned as a title for younger readers to spend 20 minutes on as they make their way to work.

Layouts are bold and colourful, stories about pop culture outnumber politics or crime and advertisers include flavoured cider, crisps and trainers as opposed to sofas or cars.



**Financial Times paying readership of 1.2m split between digital and print subscriptions**

Print circulation is holding steady year on year.

Aiming at a niche business audience, mostly unaffected by the cost of living crisis, stories here have a different look and feel.

Greater emphasis placed on specialist reporting and deep dives. Indeed, the FT even goes as far as to lay out its areas of interest - China, AI, climate change and sustainability.

Readers can expect explainers, data visualisation and original research to keep them on top of these themes.



# Magazines Winning in print

Niche is king in the world of magazines and there are more than 50 titles in growth with their print editions.

## POLITICS AND SATIRE

The Economist and The Spectator's in-depth analysis of politics and the finances of the world are in strong demand, while Private Eye's dogged resistance to any online presence at all translates into a circulation figure in the 200 thousands that many more prestigious titles would snap your hand off for.

## TV MAGAZINES AND SUPERMARKET MEDIA

So what are people picking up? TV magazines, TV show spin-off magazines and supermarket mags all lead the way. In a world where you can watch anything, a trusted curator is invaluable. However, dig deeper and there are plenty of opportunities for brands.

## PRACTICAL AND ASPIRATIONAL

Then there are the practical and aspirational titles such as Good Housekeeping (now 100 years old and still going strong with sales of more than 360,000 for every edition), Ideal Home, Tatler, Vanity Fair.



# The ongoing impact of paywalls



Paywalls have been divisive in the news industry since they were first introduced in the 1990s, but are they value for money?

Established publishers and new entrants are experimenting with different types of paywall, all in search of the magic bullet that generates sizeable levels of revenue in return for premium content.

However, with so much content available for free online and on social, making it normal to pay for the news just hasn't happened yet.

That's why the approach to putting news behind a paywall differs so wildly. From the 'hard' paywalls of the likes of The Times and Daily Telegraph in the national press, to partial paywalls on the likes of Mail Online and niche expert content on The Racing Post or Politico, it's still evolving to find a sweet spot with audiences.

For journalism to continue as a business, and to replace print revenue when it finally disappears, the drive to normalise paying for the news will continue apace in national and local and niche outlets.

# How Facebook unfriended the news

**Publishers have been hit by Facebook's owner Meta turning its back on the news industry and deprioritising news stories.**

Facebook was for many years a traffic juggernaut for news sites, driving millions of page views. It would shape headlines and the types of stories produced on a daily basis to drive engagement and shares.

A Reuters Institute study revealed traffic via Facebook dropped by almost 50% last year and shows no signs of improving.

While newsrooms are no strangers to adapting to algorithm changes which regularly impacted site traffic, many have been left stunned by the nose-dive in referral traffic.



In 2018, Meta said it would prioritise content from 'family and friends' in its news feed and this was followed by stopping grants to publishers and sharing ad revenue. Two years ago the platform revealed that it would be dropping Instant Articles which allow news links to open in a mobile-friendly format within the Facebook app.

Despite the difficulties, one regional editor believes newspaper sites must stick to their guns as the industry is facing a referrer issue not 'news fatigue'.

**“It'd be easy to panic and head for the easy trending wins. But my opinion is that a good local story is always a good story - even if the referrers we'd always relied on have decided they don't agree.”**

# Summary

The clear message that emerges from all of this change, turmoil and emotion is that people still want to tell stories and people still want to read, watch and listen to stories being told.

So for brands and individuals, the opportunity is to present original content in a format and on a platform that the public likes.

This landscape will keep evolving as public tastes shift again and again, so brands must keep on the front foot with their communications, ensuring they are where their audiences are.



**Sam Christie**  
Head of News

samc@democracypr.com



**Ben Vause**  
Account Executive

ben@democracypr.com



**Graeme McGilliard**  
Media Director

graeme@democracypr.com



**Milly Painter**  
Senior Account Executive

millyp@democracypr.com

**How can**

**DEMOCRACY<sup>TM</sup>**

**Supercharge your brand?**

**Jennifer O'Grady**  
Head of Agency

0161 881 5941  
[jennifer@democracypr.com](mailto:jennifer@democracypr.com)

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