



News media a bigger source of science information than social media

British adults aged 16+ are more likely to get information about science from traditional news media than from social media, according to a new survey published today. The survey finds that around 3 in 4 (73%) typically get information about science from news media in all its forms, including TV news, news media outlets (excluding newspapers) accessed online or via an app, newspapers, and radio news and current affairs programmes. In comparison 30% answered that they typically get science information from social media.

Additionally, information about science seen on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) is more likely to have come from traditional news media outlets (e.g. BBC News, the Guardian, Daily Mail, etc.) than from other sources such as celebrities or activists. The survey results suggest that while many British adults – especially young people – do encounter information about science from social media, half (50%) of all those who have ever seen it there cited traditional news media outlets as the source of that information.

Fiona Lethbridge, a Senior Press Manager at the Science Media Centre, which commissioned the Ipsos poll, said “We had assumed that younger people might have migrated away from traditional news media to social media and that they would therefore be getting information about science mainly from friends and family, influencers or politicians. Instead, our survey shows that for half of those encountering information about science on social media, the posts are from traditional news media outlets like BBC News, the Daily Mail and the Guardian.”

When asked from which sources they have encountered information about science through social media, of those who reported having seen science information on social media 50% cited traditional news media outlets as the source of that information – 34% cited traditional news media outlets as the *main* source. There were some differences across the age groups – 22% of 16-34 year-olds versus 48% of the over 54s

cited traditional news media outlets as the main source of the information they were seeing on social media, but nevertheless traditional news media outlets were the most often-cited main source of information about science on social media for all ages surveyed.

Furthermore, some of those surveyed (11%) who had said they *didn't* typically get information about science from the news media actually went on to cite traditional news media outlets as the source of the science information they were seeing on social media, suggesting that in some cases people are still being reached by the traditional news media even if they don't seek it out.

Fiona Fox, CEO of the SMC said: "For all its problems news journalism is at least striving to meet agreed standards of accuracy. These findings should reassure those of us who worry that younger people have abandoned the news and are getting their information about science only from sources that don't feel the same need to check facts or report accurately. It suggests that many people are coming across information from news media even if via different platforms."

Looking at all sources of science information, TV news was the most commonly reported source of information about science issues or scientific research including its social and ethical implications – more than half (52%) of adults in Britain reported typically getting information about science from TV news. One third (34%) of adults said they got information about science from an online news media outlet such as BBC News, Sky News, msn, etc. The three most commonly cited sources of information, out of all options given, were TV news, TV documentaries or current affairs programmes (45%), and online news media outlets (excluding newspapers) accessed online or via an app (34%). 29% of those surveyed said they typically get information about science from national newspapers (either in print, online or via an app). There were some differences across the age groups when we compare how often news media versus social media was a source – for the 16-34s social media was more often mentioned as a typical source than for the older age groups, but across every age group, news media sources taken together were more commonly cited as a source of information about science than social media was.

The poll was carried out to mark the SMC's 20th year to explore whether the public's main sources of information about science had changed over its lifetime. Ipsos surveyed over 2,300 adults across Great Britain. Some of the other notable findings include:

- A greater proportion of those surveyed trust information about science from traditional news media sources than from social media;
- The reason most commonly given for trust in scientists is because they are experts in their field.

People trust news media more than social media

55% said they trusted information about science from the traditional news media, compared to only 19% who trusted it from social media. There were some differences depending on age, and those in younger age groups were more likely to trust science information from social media than those in older age groups (37% of 16-34s versus 6% of those over 54), but across all age groups trust in traditional news media was greater than trust in social media. Lethbridge said: “This might suggest the public uses discretion when judging what kinds of sources of information are likely to be trustworthy or not, and reminds us the public don’t always trust everything they read.”

People trust scientists because they are experts

The majority of those surveyed (71%) said they trusted scientists. The most commonly-given reason for this trust is that scientists are experts in their field – 68% of those who said they trusted scientists opted for this reason. “This might suggest scientists come across as more trustworthy when they are commenting within their area of expertise”, said Lethbridge.

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Link to summary report: <https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PDF-summary-report.pdf>

Notes to editors:

The research was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of the Science Media Centre. Ipsos interviewed a representative quota sample of 2,337 adults aged 16+ in Great Britain using its online i:omnibus between 14th and 18th December 2022. The survey included a main study of 2,137 respondents aged 16-75 and an extension of 200 respondents aged 76+. The sample obtained is nationally representative of the population with quotas on age, gender, region, and working status. Data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age, working status and social grade within gender, government office region and education, to reflect the population of Great Britain.

Sub samples referred to:

- *Of the total of 2,337: 713 adults aged 16-34, 774 aged 35-54 and 850 adults aged 55+*
- *1,433 adults aged 16+ who have encountered information about science through social media via at least one source; of them 590 adults aged 16-34, 480 aged 35-54 and 363 adults aged 55+*
- *1,750 adults aged 16+ who trust scientists*

- *566 adults who do not typically get information about science issues or scientific research through TV News; News media outlets, excluding newspapers accessed online or via an app; National or local newspapers (in print, online or via an app); Radio News or current affairs programmes*