



Summary report – Ipsos survey on science and the media

To mark its 20th year the Science Media Centre wanted to explore whether the public's main sources of information about science had changed over its lifetime. On opening in 2002 the SMC conducted a poll about science and the media – we conducted a similar survey with updated questions to suit a contemporary audience to understand British adults' current relationship with science and the media. Given social media didn't exist when we ran our 2002 poll but is now so pervasive, we also wanted to explore what it might mean when people say their only source of information is social media. Also, hot on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic when scientists had been visible in almost every home in the country we also wanted to explore possible reasons for the public's high levels of trust in scientists.

On behalf of the SMC, 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 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.

(The survey in 2002 was conducted by MORI on behalf of the SMC between 7th and 11th March 2002. A sample of 1,987 people aged 15+ in Great Britain were interviewed using a face-to-face methodology. The sample obtained was nationally representative of the population with quotas on age, gender, region, working status and household tenure. Data was weighted to the known offline population proportions for age and working status within gender, standard region, social grade, unemployment within region and cars in household, to reflect the population of Great Britain.)

Our thanks go to Ipsos for their work.

Sources of information about science

Participants were given a list of sources of information and asked through which, if any, they typically get information about science issues or scientific research, including its social and ethical implications. They were also asked which, if any, sources most influence their views about science issues or scientific research including its social and ethical implications.

TV news (e.g. BBC One News at Ten, Sky News channel, Channel 4 evening News, etc.) was the most commonly reported source of information about science – more than half (52%) of adults in Great Britain reported typically getting information about science issues or scientific research from TV news. When we asked a similar question in 2002, 68% gave TV news as their most common source.

One third (34%) of adults said they get information about science from an online news media outlets excluding newspapers, accessed online or via an app (e.g. BBC News, Sky News, msn, etc.). The three most commonly cited sources of information, out of all options given, were TV news (52%), TV documentaries or current affairs programmes (45%), and online news media outlets (34%). Taken together, the news media

was a bigger source of information about science than social media (73%). Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) was a source of information about science for three in ten (30%) of adults.

There were some differences across the age groups when we compare how often news media versus social media was a source. A significantly higher proportion of 16-34s selected social media as a source (51%) than amongst older age groups (29% for 35-54s and 15% for 55+), but for every age group news media outlets together were more likely to be selected than social media was.

Around the same proportion of adults typically get information about science from national newspapers (either in print, online or via an app) as from social media (29% versus 30%). Those who came across information about science on social media tended to also cite lots of other sources too (versus those who didn't come across information about science from social media), so it may be that there are few people whose only source is social media and that the majority of social media users have multiple sources of information. 81% of those who come across information about science on social media also cite news media (in all forms taken together) as a source, versus 62% of those who don't come across science information on social media. 56% of those who get science information on social media also get it on TV News (versus 49% who don't get science information on social media); 41% of those who get science information from social media also get it from online news sites or apps (excluding newspapers) such as BBC News (versus 25% who don't get it from social media); and 33% of those getting science information from social media also get it from national newspapers (versus 26% who don't get it from social media). Those citing social media as a source were also more likely to have other non-news media sources than those who don't get science information from social media, such as friends and family (40% versus 15%); information published by the government or public bodies (27% versus 13%); and information published by charities or campaign groups (17% versus 5%).

Even some of those surveyed (11%) who had said they didn't typically get information about science from the traditional news media went on to cite traditional news media outlets as a source of the science information they were seeing on social media.

Looking again at the 29% citing national newspapers as a source of science information, when we asked a similar question in 2002 49% cited national newspapers – though at the time this was broken down into the front end (i.e., pages in the front half of the newspaper) (24% for tabloid and 22% for broadsheet) and the back end (i.e., the back pages), so the two surveys can't be directly compared.

Radio news and/or current affairs programmes was a source for 24% of adults – in our 2002 survey it was 43%.

Other (non-news) websites or forums, such as the Conversation, Mumsnet, or Wikipedia were a source of information about science for 13% of adults, behind Information published by official Government or public bodies (e.g. the NHS, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, etc.) (21%) and Museums (14%).

Taking all the news media sources together (TV, newspapers, online national news media outlets, and radio), more than seven in 10 adults (73%) answered that they typically get science information from these traditional news media sources. (In our 2002 survey, it was nine in 10.)

Overall therefore, when it comes to sources of information about science, although the two surveys aren't directly comparable, the proportion of adults reporting news media as a source of information about science is lower now than in the 2002 survey, but it nonetheless remains the biggest single source.

There were no significant differences regionally in the proportion of adults surveyed that typically get information about science from the traditional news media and from social media. There was a difference in the likelihood for traditional news media to be cited as a source of information about science depending

on social grade – 77% of those in social grade ABC1 get information about science from the traditional news media, whereas 68% of those in social grade C2DE do. But there was no difference in the likelihood for social media to be a source of information about science – 30% of those in social grade ABC1 get information about science from social media and 31% of those in social grade C2DE do. There was no difference in traditional news media being a source of information about science depending on employment status, with 73% of both those working, and those not working, selecting traditional news media formats as sources of information. But there was a difference with social media – 33% of those currently working cited social media as a source of information about science, versus 26% of those not currently working. A similar proportion of adults who had children in their household (compared to those who didn't) selected traditional news media as a source of information about science; 72% of those who did have children compared to 73% of those who didn't).

When asked which sources of information, most influence their views about science issues or scientific research, including its social and ethical implications, a higher proportion of those surveyed picked news media as the source that most influenced their views than any other source (37% NET all formats of news versus 9% for social media), but this varied with age, with 24% of 16-24s selecting a form of news media versus 46% of 35-44s. 31% of those aged 16-24 picked social media as the source which most influenced their views about science. TV News was more likely to be the source that most influenced views about science in older age-groups: 13% of those aged 16-34, 21% of those aged 35-54, 21% of those aged 55+. Similarly with national newspapers: 2% of those aged 16-24 picked national newspapers as the source that most influences their views about science, versus 4% of those aged 25-34, 4% of those aged 35-44, 4% of those aged 45-54, 8% of those aged 55-74, and 11% of those aged 75 and over. The age group with the highest proportion picking news media outlets excluding newspapers accessed online or via an app (e.g. BBC News, Sky News etc. websites) as the source that most influenced their views about science was the 35-44 year-old age group: 15% of them versus 5% of those aged 16-24, 9% of those aged 25-34, 9% of those aged 45-54, 6% of those aged 55-74, and 4% of those aged 75 and over. 25-34 was the age group with the highest proportion selecting friends and family as the source that most influenced their views about science: 10% of them versus 6% of those aged 16-24, 3% of those aged 35-44, 2% of those aged 45-54, 5% of those aged 55-74, and 1% of those aged 75 and over.

Taking all news media together (TV, newspapers, online national news media outlets, and radio), there was no significant difference across the social grade on the proportion who picked these sources as most influencing their views about science – 38% in ABC1 versus 37% in C2DE. There was also no significant difference across the social grade in how many picked social media – 8% in ABC1 versus 11% in C2DE. A slightly higher proportion in social grade ABC1 picked either news media outlets excluding newspapers, or national newspapers, as the source that most influenced their views about science, than those in C2DE (9% versus 7%, and 7% versus 4%, respectively).

Social media as a source or a platform for existing sources?

Social media was cited by 30% of those surveyed as a typical source of information about science. However, because social media can be a platform for information that originates from elsewhere, we also asked about the primary source of the information participants were seeing on social media (i.e. did it tend to be posts from family and friends, from celebrities and influencers, or from traditional news media outlets or journalists etc.). 50% of those who encountered information about science through social media cited traditional news media outlets as a source of that information. We then asked all adults who have come across science information through at least once source on social media which is their main source of information about science. 34% cited traditional news media outlets as the *main* source of information on social media – there were some differences across the age groups (22% of 16-34 year-olds versus 48% of

the over 54s) but nevertheless traditional news media outlets were the most often-cited main source for all ages surveyed.

In addition, some participants (11%) who had said they *didn't* typically get information about science from the traditional news media actually went on to cite traditional news media as a source of the science information they were seeing on social media, suggesting that in some cases people who only come across information about science on social media are still being reached by the traditional news media.

Looking at other sources of information on social media: 26% of those who come across information about science through social media cited journalists as a source, compared to 35% citing family and friends, 29% citing government bodies, 21% citing charities/NGOs, 20% citing non-traditional news media outlets (e.g. sciencealert, LADBible, etc.), 19% citing activists, 19% citing influencers and 18% citing celebrities.

Looking again at all adults surveyed – interestingly more younger adults than those in older age groups said the source of the information they were seeing on social media was the traditional news media or journalists (45% of 16-24s versus 22% of the over 75s). Traditional news media outlets was the most selected source of science information on social media by those aged over 35, as well as in the youngest age group (age 16-24). Although still a smaller proportion than those citing traditional news media as a source, influencers and politicians were more often a source through social media for younger age groups than for older ones (28% of 16-24s versus 1% of over 75s for influencers; and 20% of 16-24s versus 1% of over 75s for politicians). Celebrities were a source for 24% of those aged 16-24, 22% of those aged 25-34, 12% of those aged 35-44, 8% of those aged 45-54, 3% of those aged 55-74, and less than 1% over 75.

Trust in media versus social media

Participants were asked how much they trusted information about science from different sources. 55% said they trusted information from the traditional news media (e.g. newspapers, TV news, radio news, etc.) , compared to only 19% who trusted information from social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.).

There were some differences depending on age, and younger age groups were more likely to trust information from social media than 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. Those who typically get information about science through news media were more likely to trust it than those who do not (62% versus 37%). Those who trust science information from traditional news media were also more likely to trust information about science from social media (27% of those who trust information from traditional news media versus 7% of those who don't trust information from traditional news media).

A higher proportion of adults in London trust information about science from the traditional news media than in the north: 61% in London, 61% in Wales compared to 52% in the north of England, 55% in the midlands, 57% in the south, and 54% in Scotland. In terms of trust in science information on social media: 25% of those in London and in Wales trust information about science from social media compared with 20% in Scotland, 19% in the midlands, 18% in the north of England, and 17% in the south.

There were no significant differences in whether those surveyed trusted information about science from social media in different social grades: 18% of those in ABC1 trust it versus 21% of those in C2DE.

Trust in scientists

Participants were asked about their levels of trust in scientists and the reasons for that trust. A majority of those surveyed (71%) do trust scientists (and this is fairly consistent across all age groups, 67% - 75%) – and 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, and this reason was the top held reason the across all age groups. A higher proportion of women than men trust scientists because they are experts in their field (73% of women versus 63% of men).

57% said they trusted scientists because they use the scientific method to test ideas, 48% because in producing evidence or giving advice they focus only on the scientific data and do not consider other factors such as the economy, and 42% because they are separate and independent from government. 36% selected because scientists are not political, and 35% because they remain neutral and objective.

Only a small proportion of those surveyed said they didn't trust scientists (4%), with the main reasons given being because they are funded by or work with industry (e.g. pharmaceutical industry, cosmetics industry, etc.) (52% of those who said they didn't trust scientists gave this reason) or because they are influenced by politics when publishing or communicating about data (47%).

A higher proportion of participants who trusted scientists came across information about science from the news media in all its forms than those who didn't trust scientists (80% of those who trusted versus 58% of those who didn't trust). This was mainly driven by differences in TV as a source of information about science – 58% who trusted scientists gave TV News as a source versus only 31% of those who didn't trust scientists. There was no significant difference in the use of social media as a source of information about science depending on levels of trust in scientists. Those who didn't trust scientists were more likely (24%) to cite other (non-news) websites or forums (e.g. Mumsnet, Wikipedia, the Conversation) as a source of information about science than those who did trust scientists (14%).

Those who come across information about science from any source are more likely to trust scientists – whether they come across that information via social media (77% of those seeing information on social media trust scientists versus 67% who don't see information on social media); or on traditional news media (78% of those seeing information in the traditional news media trust scientists versus 53% of those who don't see information in news media). Those who trust scientists are more likely to trust information about science from the traditional news media (65% of those who trust scientists versus 24% of those who don't).

Men said they were more likely to trust scientists than women (75% of men trust scientists versus 68% of women). A higher proportion of those in social grade ABC1 trusted scientists than those in C2DE (77% versus 65%). There were no significant differences in levels of trust in scientists across different regions of the UK.

There was no difference in whether those surveyed trusted information about science from social media depending on whether they trusted scientists: 20% of those who trusted scientists trusted information about science from social media versus 21% of those who didn't trust scientists.

Science in society

Repeating some questions from our 2002 survey, participants were asked their views on whether science has had a positive impact on society; whether scientists need to improve how they communicate their research findings through the media to the public; whether they expect scientists to give them an agreed view about science issues; and whether they expect science to provide a 100% guarantee about the safety of medicines.

79% agreed that science has had a positive impact on society (compared to 87% who said so in 2002).

There were some small differences across the age groups but most adults of any age agreed that science has had a positive impact on society (64% of those aged 16-24, 77% of those aged 25-34, 81% of those aged 35-44, 80% of those aged 45-54, 83% of those aged 55-74, and 81% of those 75 and over). A higher

proportion of those in social grade ABC1 agreed that science has had a positive impact on society than those in social grade C2DE (83% versus 73%). A higher proportion of those who typically get information about science from the news media agree science has had a positive impact on society compared to those who don't typically get information about science through news media (84% versus 63%). Interestingly a higher proportion of those who trust scientists expect scientists to give an agreed view about science issues (63% of those who trust versus 48% of those who don't).

61% agreed that scientists need to improve how they communicate their research findings through the media to the public – but this is lower than the 85% who said so who were surveyed in 2002, which might suggest scientists have perhaps got better at communicating their research over the last 20 years!

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 sample obtained is nationally representative of the adult population 16+ with quotas on age, gender, region, and working status. Data has been weighted to the known offline adult population proportions for age, working status and social grade within gender, government office region and education, to reflect the population of Great Britain.

(The survey in 2002 was conducted by MORI on behalf of the SMC between 7th and 11th March 2002. A sample of 1,987 people aged 15+ in Great Britain were interviewed using a face-to-face methodology. The sample obtained was nationally representative of the population with quotas on age, gender, region, working status and household tenure. Data was weighted to the known offline population proportions for age and working status within gender, standard region, social grade, unemployment within region and cars in household, to reflect the population of Great Britain.)

Sub samples reported upon:

- 713 adults aged 16-34, 774 adults aged 35-54, 850 adults aged 55+
- 323 adults aged 16-24, 390 adults aged 25-34, 353 adults aged 35-44, 421 adults aged 45-54, 618 adults aged 55-74, 232 adults aged 75+
- 1,452 adults in social grade ABC1, 628 adults in social grade C2DE
- 1,244 working adults, 836 not working adults
- 501 adults in the North, 546 adults in the Midlands, 487 adults in the South, 257 adults in London, 204 adults in Wales, 185 adults in Scotland
- 1,433 adults aged 16+ who have encountered information about science through social media via at least one source of which 590 adults aged 16-34 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

** 2002 MORI survey: Q1. Through which sources of information, if any, do you get most of your information about science issues or scientific research and its social and ethical implications?*

2022 Ipsos survey: Q1. Here is a list of sources of information. Through which, if any, do you typically get information about science issues or scientific research, including its social and ethical implications?