



# A New Understanding: What Makes People Trust and Rely on News

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# OVERVIEW

For more than a generation, research has tried to identify the qualities that lead people to trust news. The work has concluded that in general people want journalism to be fair, balanced, accurate, and complete. It can be unclear, however, what these broad factors mean or how news organizations can achieve them.

Even more challenging, these traditional conceptions of trust were formulated before the advent of the Internet and did not account for all the ways that consumers today encounter news and publishers can deliver it.

A new comprehensive study, conducted by The Media Insight Project, shows that trust and reliability in news can be broken down into specific factors that publishers can put into action and consumers can recognize. The study also finds that in the digital age, several new factors largely unexamined before – such as the intrusiveness of ads, navigability, load times, and having the latest details – also are critical in determining whether consumers consider a publisher competent and worthy of trust.

The specific factors that lead people to trust and rely on a news source also vary by topic, the study finds. How much consumers value a specific component related to trust depends, for instance, on whether they are seeking news about politics or traffic and weather, let alone lifestyle. On some topics, consumers rate in-depth reporting and expert sources more highly. In others, ease of use is of higher value. For still others, being entertained is more important.

And in social media, consumers are fairly skeptical of content and want cues of trustworthiness such as clear identification of the original reporting source.

Finally, the study sheds new light on why trust should matter to today’s publishers: It’s not only a journalistic aspiration, but a business imperative. People who put a higher premium on trust-related factors are more engaged with news, are more likely to pay for it, install news apps, or share and promote news with their friends.

**What factors drive people to trust news reporting sources?**

Percent of...	
Adults who say accuracy is a critical reason they trust a news source	85%
Adults who say having the latest details is a critical reason they trust a news source	76%
Adults who value news reporting that’s concise and gets to the point	72%
Digital news consumers who believe it is vital ads not interfere	63%
Political news consumers who highly value experts and data in reporting	79%
Lifestyle news consumers who say it’s important their source is entertaining	53%
Facebook news consumers with a lot of trust in the news they see there	12%

Over the last two decades, research shows the public has grown increasingly skeptical of the news industry. Designed for today's saturated media environment, this new study from The Media Insight Project, a collaboration of the American Press Institute and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, helps establish that trust is an important differentiator for building an audience.

The new study employs multiple research methods to drill down into the notion of trust and identifies specific factors that publishers can put into action. With this approach, the study reaffirms that consumers do value broad concepts of trust like fairness, balance, accuracy, and completeness. At least two-thirds of Americans cite each of these four general principles as very important to them. But the study goes further, breaking down what consumers actually mean when they talk about accuracy or fairness, and adding new specific factors about how people prefer the news to be presented.

**“If there is no trust, there is no relationship,” said Brandon, a lifestyle news consumer, during a focus group in the Philadelphia area. “Why put energy into something I can’t trust when there are other resources that I can trust?”**

Among the study's findings:

- Accuracy is the paramount principle of trust. Eighty-five percent of Americans rate it as extremely or very important that news organizations get the facts right, higher than any other general principle. And when we dig down into more specifics, a particular factor related to accuracy – getting the facts right – is most valued regardless of the topic.
- The second-most valued factor related to trust, however, has more to do with timeliness. Three-quarters of adults (76 percent) say it is critical to them that a news report be up to date with the latest news and information. This is something all media can compete on in the digital age on fairly equal footing.
- And the third-most cited factor in why Americans rely on a news source is related to clarity. Fully 72 percent say it is extremely or very important to them that a news report be concise and gets to the point.
- Online, still other factors come into play. Here people cite three specific factors as most important: That ads not interfere with the news (63 percent); that the site or app loads fast (63 percent); and that the content works well on mobile phones (60 percent). In contrast, only 1 in 3 say it is very important that digital sources allow people to comment on news.
- One of the new discoveries in this study is that the reasons people trust and rely on a news source vary by topic. For example, people are significantly more likely to say that expert sources and data are an important reason they turn to a source for news about domestic issues than about lifestyle news (76 percent vs. 48 percent). People are far more likely to want their source to be concise and get to the point for national politics (80 percent) than sports (61 percent). Similarly, people care more that their sources for sports and lifestyle present the news in a way that is entertaining (54 percent and 53 percent) than say the same about political news (30 percent).
- Even how people rank specific elements of digital presentation varies by topic. Close followers of traffic and weather, for instance, care more that such content presents well on their mobile phones (72 percent say that is very important) than do consumers of national political news (55 percent).

- People who rely on social media heavily for news are highly skeptical of the news they encounter in those networks. Just 12 percent of those who get news on Facebook, for instance, say they trust it a lot or a great deal. At the high end, just 23 percent say they have a lot or a great deal of trust in news they encounter on LinkedIn.
- To overcome that general skepticism, social media news consumers say they look for cues to help them know what to trust there. The most important of those, cited by 66 percent of Facebook news consumers, is trust in the original news organization that produced the content. The reputation of the person who shared the material is a less frequently cited factor for Facebook news consumers (48 percent).
- About 4 in 10 Americans (38 percent) can recall a specific recent incident that caused them to lose trust in a news source. The two most common problems were either instances of perceived bias or inaccuracies.

The study also finds a strong correlation between trust and how much people interact with news. People who place a higher importance on a variety of specific factors related to trust are more likely to pay for their favorite news sources (28 percent vs. 20 percent), to share content (55 percent vs. 32 percent), and follow favorite news sources on social media (40 percent vs. 26 percent).

There are some generational differences here, too. Younger and older adults share similar beliefs generally about what trust in news means to them. But younger Americans are more likely to place greater weight on factors related to a source's digital presentation and performance.

**“For a source I trust, I will talk about an article or something I heard and forward the link to a friend or family member, or I will tell them to tune in to listen. For YouTube, I will subscribe to their page and encourage others to view their content,” said Timothy, an older, hard news respondent, during the virtual activities.**

Race and ethnicity also matter when it comes to why people trust or rely on different news sources. African American and Hispanic news consumers are more likely than white news consumers to say it is very important that they see their communities and people like them in the reporting.

And there are also some broad differences in levels of trust by political affiliation. Democrats are more likely to have confidence in the press in general than Republicans or independents. However, there are not systematic partisan differences in beliefs about what specifically constitutes a trustworthy source or why people rely on certain sources.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The nationally representative survey was conducted from February 18 through March 6, 2016, and funded by API. Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and AP collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 2,014 completed the survey. Respondents without internet access and those who prefer to complete surveys by phone were interviewed by trained NORC interviewers.



The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

The qualitative research was conducted from February 24 through March 2, 2016. Insight Strategy Group LLC conducted the research in collaboration with staff at API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and AP. The qualitative research featured a combination of ethnographic activities and focus groups. First, 36 news consumers participated in a series of online activities designed to examine their news behaviors and attitudes. Then, 18 of these news consumers participated in news forum discussions on March 2, 2016, in the Philadelphia area. Each news forum lasted about two hours and included six participants with similar news behaviors.

## SECTION 1: THE MEANING OF TRUST IN NEWS

This study was designed to move beyond traditional conceptions of trust in the news. These general measures of trust have been identified in long-standing academic research, but leave publishers with little practical guidance on how to make their products more trustworthy or reliable.

In order to refine the industry's understanding of trust and develop actionable characteristics of a source, this study explores trust through its link to source reliance. Prior research shows that the way people define trustworthy news generally yields vague definitions that cannot be put into practice. However, people can readily identify the specific factors that lead them to rely or not rely on a particular news source. Some of these factors relate to trust (e.g. getting the facts right) and others likely do not (e.g. its content is entertaining). In this study, we measure the reasons people rely on sources in order to provide insights into the importance they place on specific factors that might be related to trust. We then link these specific factors to more general principles of trust such as accuracy or completeness.

The charts below show the traditional principles of trust on the left and their corresponding actionable factors on the right.

General Principle of Trust	Specific and Actionable Factors Related to Trust
Completeness	The reporting is in-depth
	It always has the latest news and information
	It covers <i>all</i> the day's events

General Principle of Trust	Specific and Actionable Factors Related to Trust
Accuracy	It presents expert sources and data
	It gets the facts right

General Principle of Trust	Specific and Actionable Factors Related to Trust
Balance	It provides diverse points of view
	It shares my point of view
	I see my community and people like me in the reporting

General Principle of Trust	Specific and Actionable Factors Related to Trust
Transparency	I know and trust its journalists
	It explains the way it gathers and reports news and information

General Principle of Trust	Specific and Actionable Factors Related to Trust
Presentation and Design	It's concise and gets to the point
	It is easy to find news and information I'm looking for
	It uses visuals such as photos, videos, lists, or charts*
	It allows people to comment on news and information*
	The news and information include hyperlinks to get more information*
	The site or app loads fast*
	It works well on my mobile phone*
	The ads do not interfere with getting news and information*

\*The component applies only to digital sources

Non-Trust Principles	Specific and Actionable Factors Not Related to Trust
Convenience and Entertainment	I can multitask or use it when I'm doing something else like household chores
	It presents news and information in a way I can talk about it
	It makes it entertaining
	It's a source I've always used

The research then dug deeper on these specific factors related to trust. To do so, we asked people what topics they follow most closely in the news. We then asked them to think about the sources they rely on for following those topics and then to name their favorite one. Finally, we asked them how important different qualities are when relying on that source for that topic.

This source-specific approach allows us to get beyond general ideas, such as accuracy, and to isolate what a concept like accuracy means for people.

Inside the broader concept of completeness, for instance, we are able to test how important it is for people that the reporting is in-depth, that it contains all the day's news, or that it is always up to date with the latest results.

Inside the general and sometimes elusive principle of balance we are able to test how important it is for people to see differing points of view, views they agree with, or to see their community reflected in the coverage.

This approach also allows us to test the importance of certain modern presentation factors, such as navigability and use of visuals.



**OVERALL, ACCURACY AND COMPLETENESS ARE THE TWO MOST-CITED CATEGORIES OF TRUST.**

Past research had found that four or five main principles made up credibility or trust in the news: accuracy, balance, and fairness central among them. Some scholars broke fairness into additional parts, such as completeness and transparency. Others suggested concepts related to clarity or presentation.

In part so this new research can be compared to that older work, we test whether people recognize these traditional concepts today. At the most general level, we find Americans do still value these traditional and general concepts of news trustworthiness.

Americans rate accuracy as the most important general principle related to trust. Eighty-five percent describe getting the facts right as an extremely or very important factor of a trustworthy source.

That is followed by completeness (providing all the important news and information), which 77 percent describe as very important.

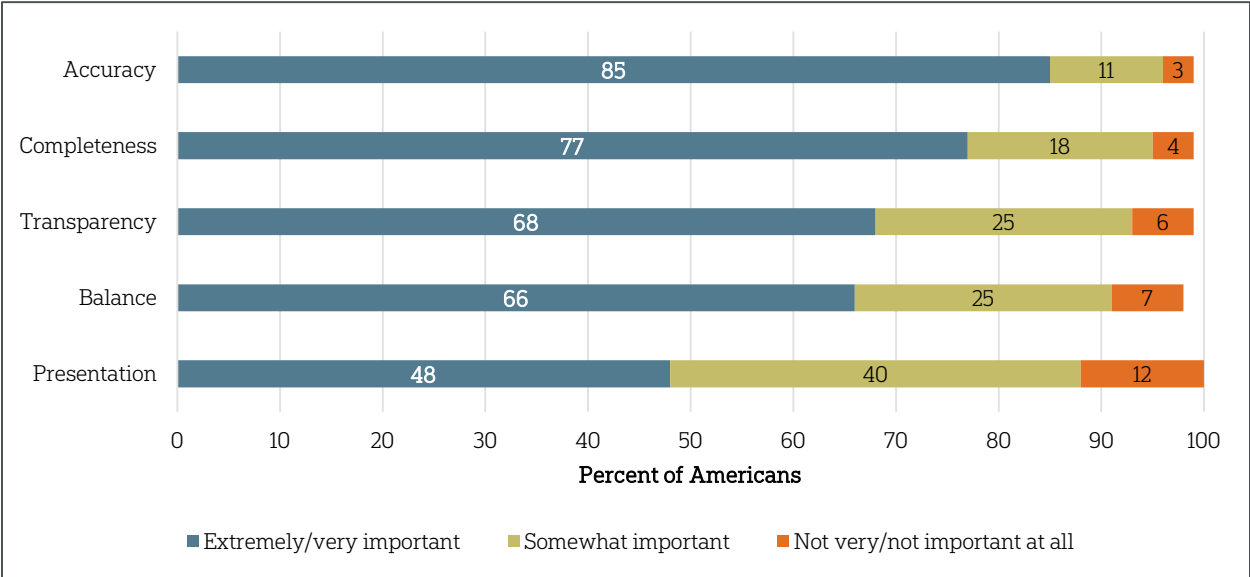
A sizable majority (68 percent) also say transparency (the idea that news organizations explain the way they gather and report the news) is very important.

And 66 percent rate balance (reporting that provides different views) as a key factor of trustworthy sources.

Fewer Americans, but still nearly half, cite presentation (having a high quality and professional appearance) as a very important factor for trustworthiness.

But as we will see in a moment, those numbers change when people are asked to drill down into specific factors related to trust and other factors that lead them to rely on certain sources for different news topics.

**Accuracy and completeness are the most important principles of trust in a news source to Americans.**



Question: Thinking about the sources you consider trustworthy, how important is each of the following factors?

## GETTING INSIDE THE BROAD CATEGORIES OF TRUST.

The next step involves drilling deeper into the reasons why people rely on specific news sources.

We broke the five general trust principles – accuracy, balance, completeness, transparency, and presentation – into 12 actionable and specific factors related to trust. In doing so, we found that many of these 12 are important for why people rely on certain sources of news. Some are significantly more important than others.

We also look at four additional factors that relate to entertainment and convenience, which may be more important in an age of greater consumer choice.

The idea that a news organization should get the facts right is cited more than any other specific factor as vital. Fully 80 percent rate it extremely or very important.

Being up to date with the latest news and information – something related to completeness – emerges as the second biggest reason people rely on a specific source, at 76 percent.

Despite presentation falling lower on the list of more general principles people think make a news source trustworthy, a specific factor related to presentation – that a news account be concise and get to the point – ranks third overall (with 72 percent of respondents citing it as very important) when we asked people why they rely on a particular news source.

Another element of accuracy – that a news account cites expert sources and data – ties for fourth among the 12 specific factors related to trust we explore. Fully 70 percent describe this as very important. Seventy percent also cite navigability – that is, easy to find the news and information you are looking for – as critical.

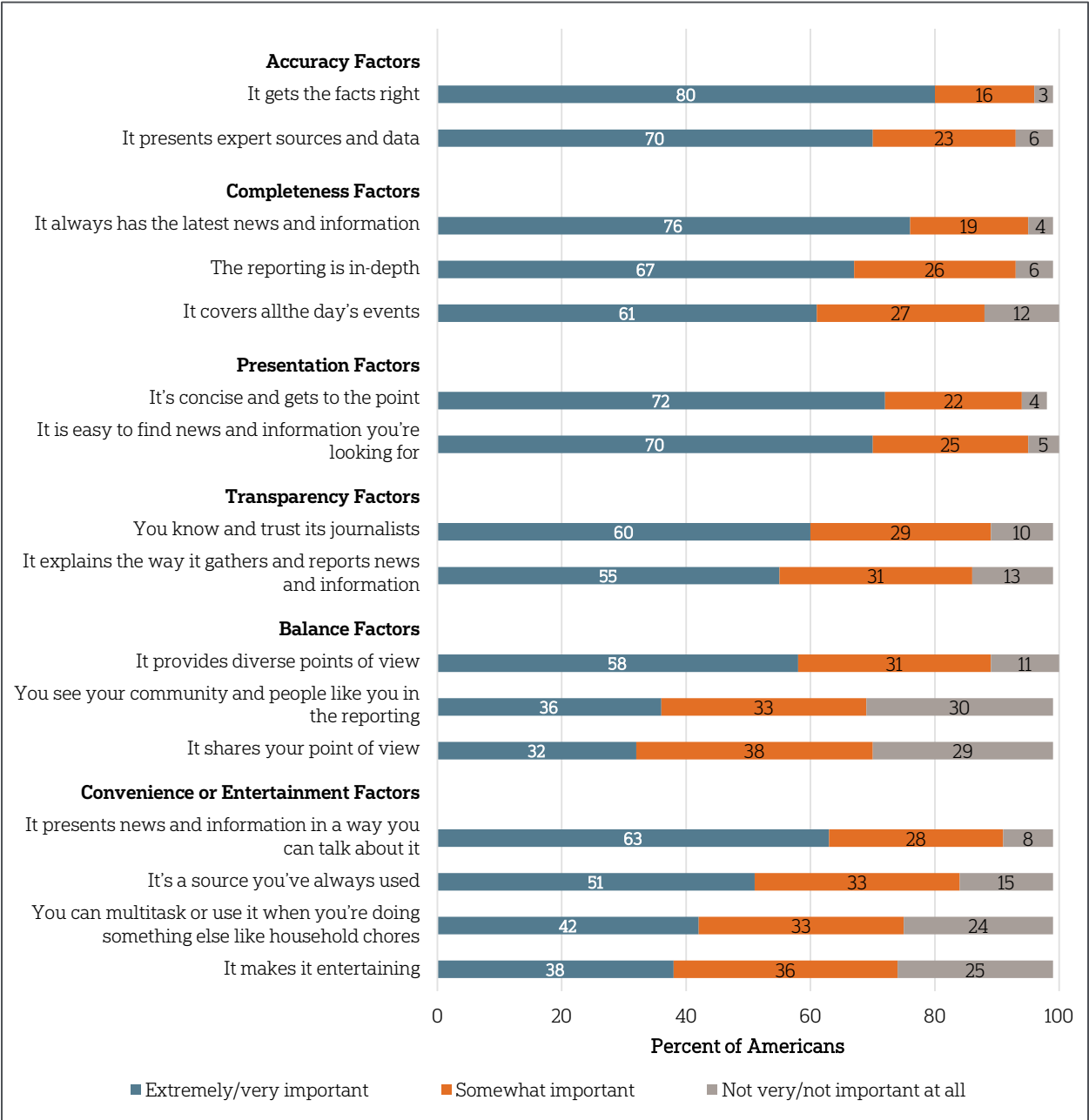
In other words, having something be navigable, clear, and easy to use is a key part of whether people rely on and value it.

Nearly as important to people as clarity and navigability is depth. Fully 67 percent cite that the reporting is in-depth as extremely or very important. On its face, people wanting news to be in-depth might reflect a contradictory preference to their desire for news that is concise. It may also reflect, however, a desire for news that is in-depth, but no longer than absolutely necessary.

The three specific factors Americans are least likely to report as being very important are that a source makes the news entertaining (38 percent), that they see their community or people like them in the reporting (36 percent), and that it shares their point of view (32 percent).

**“As soon as I start getting outdated news (even if by a few hours) or find out they aren’t giving me the whole story, that’s when I start to go somewhere else for news,” said Zach, a younger, hard news consumer.**

Americans place the most importance on specific factors linked to accuracy, completeness, and presentation.



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

**BREAKING NEWS IS DIFFERENT – TRANSPARENCY BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT WHEN THE FACTS ARE UNFOLDING.**

The qualitative research conducted as part of the study (a combination of ethnography and focus groups) also indicated something else: The importance of certain components of trust may vary depending on whether a story is breaking news or is coverage of an ongoing trend or issue.

In focus groups, people said they understand that not all the facts may be known during a breaking news event such as a natural disaster, mass shooting, or terrorist act. When there are conflicting accounts about what is happening, people even said they understand if some of the information presented may not be true.

In those instances, some people raised the idea that transparency from a source about what is “factual and verified” versus what is the reporter’s theory or speculation is more important than immediate accuracy.

People also said that during breaking news they are more likely to look at multiple sources to try to find the latest information.

“When a story breaks, I’m flipping back and forth between channels because I need to know if anything developed that I didn’t hear about,” said David, a younger, hard news consumer. “And I’m on my phone, I’m on social at the same time.”

People’s news behavior and expectations change as news stories progress and become less ambiguous. Getting the facts right returns as the most important component in their determinations of trust. “After the fact, I have higher standards because people have time to do due diligence,” said Drew, a younger, hard news consumer.

In other words, among the issues that determine what makes a news account trustworthy is timing — or where an unfolding story stands and how much time there has been for reporting.

## **SECTION 2: AUDIENCES VALUE TRUST COMPONENTS DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON THE NEWS TOPIC AND SOURCE**

This study employs a new approach for understanding trust. Rather than asking people about what makes news trustworthy in the abstract, we ground respondents by asking them 1) to focus on a topic they follow regularly, and, 2) to think about their favorite specific source for news on that topic.<sup>1</sup>

The findings reveal that when trust is taken out of the abstract, there is a lot of nuance in how people assess sources. What makes something trustworthy and valuable differs depending on the topic and source.

There is one general exception to this: On every topic and regardless of the source, getting the facts right is critical.

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<sup>1</sup> Eighty-nine percent of respondents identified two topics they followed and their favorite source for each topic, 8 percent identified one topic and their favorite source, and 3 percent did not identify a topic or source.

## HOW PEOPLE RANK SPECIFIC FACTORS RELATED TO TRUST VARIES BY TOPIC, ESPECIALLY BETWEEN SOME HARD NEWS AND LIFESTYLE NEWS TOPICS.

Americans follow a wide range of news and information topics. When asked to select the two topics they follow most closely, the most popular choices are domestic issues<sup>2</sup> (25 percent), national politics or government (22 percent), local news (13 percent), and traffic and weather (12 percent). Named by 10 percent or less are lifestyle topics<sup>3</sup> (10 percent), crime and public safety (8 percent), sports (7 percent), and foreign or international news (4 percent).

There are significant differences in the reasons people rely on different sources, depending on the topic.<sup>4</sup>

The differences are particularly striking between political coverage and lifestyle news.

People are significantly more likely to cite the presence of expert sources and data (79 percent vs. 48 percent) and in-depth reporting (77 percent versus 49 percent) as important reasons why they rely on a source for national politics than they are to say that about lifestyle news. Interestingly, they are also more likely to say it was very important that a news organization be concise and clear in its reporting for political news than for lifestyle coverage (80 percent vs. 55 percent).

They say they care more that lifestyle news, by contrast, is entertaining (53 percent) than they do about national politics (30 percent).

In focus groups, we even heard that accuracy mattered less when it came to lifestyle. “If it’s entertainment news, I won’t necessarily expect it to be factual but I’ll follow it if it’s entertaining and relevant,” said Kimberly, a lifestyle news consumer.

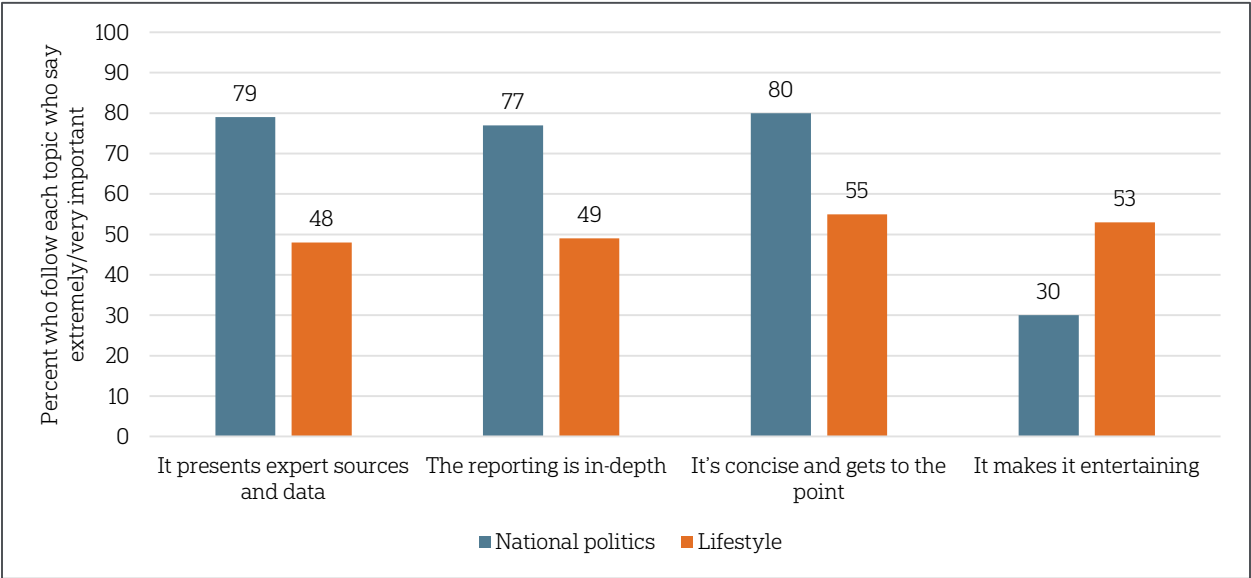
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<sup>2</sup> Domestic issues news includes the following topics: healthcare and medical information, science and technology, schools and education, the environment and natural disasters, business and the economy, and social issues like abortion, race, and gay rights.

<sup>3</sup> Lifestyle news includes the following topics: entertainment and celebrities, art and culture, hobbies, and lifestyle topics such as food, beauty, exercise, or parenting.

<sup>4</sup> A complete set of tables showing the importance of each factor by topic is included in Appendix A.

Americans value different factors from a source of political news than a source of lifestyle news.



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

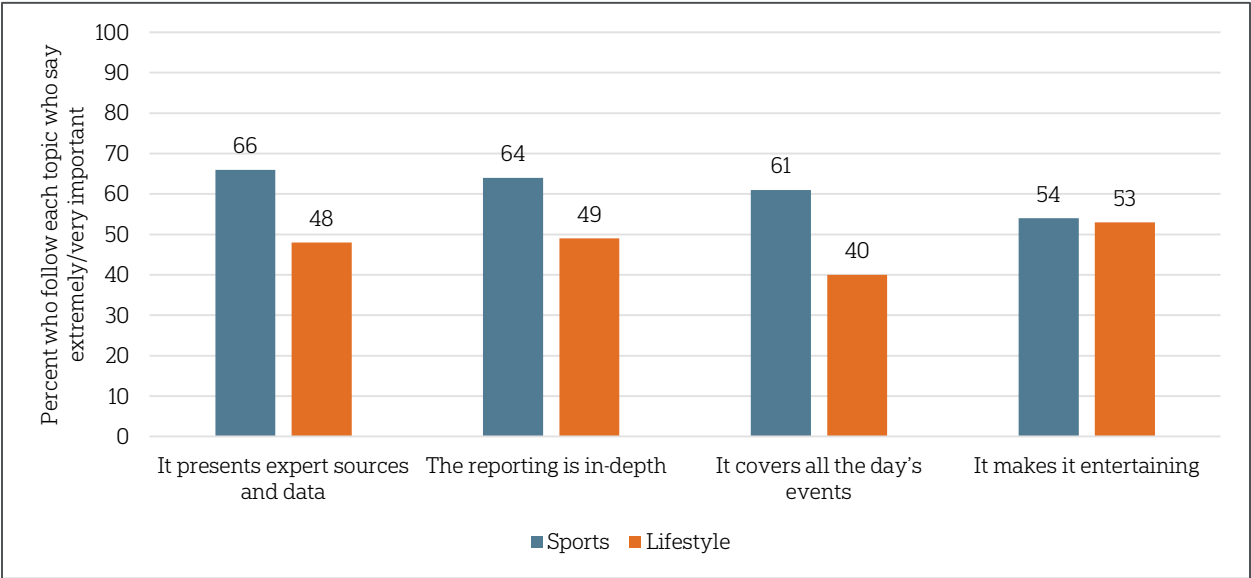
There are also significant differences between why people rely on a source for sports compared to lifestyle topics.

Expert sources rank higher for sports news (66 percent), for instance, than lifestyle (48 percent). So do in-depth reporting (64 percent vs. 49 percent). People are also more likely to cite a key component of completeness – that it’s important that a news organization covers all the day’s events – when talking about sports than lifestyle news (61 percent vs. 40 percent).

There is one specific factor, however, where sports looks a good deal like lifestyle news – people rank that the news be entertaining about equally important for sports and lifestyle news when they choose their favorite sources.



Americans value different factors from a source of sports news than a source of lifestyle news.

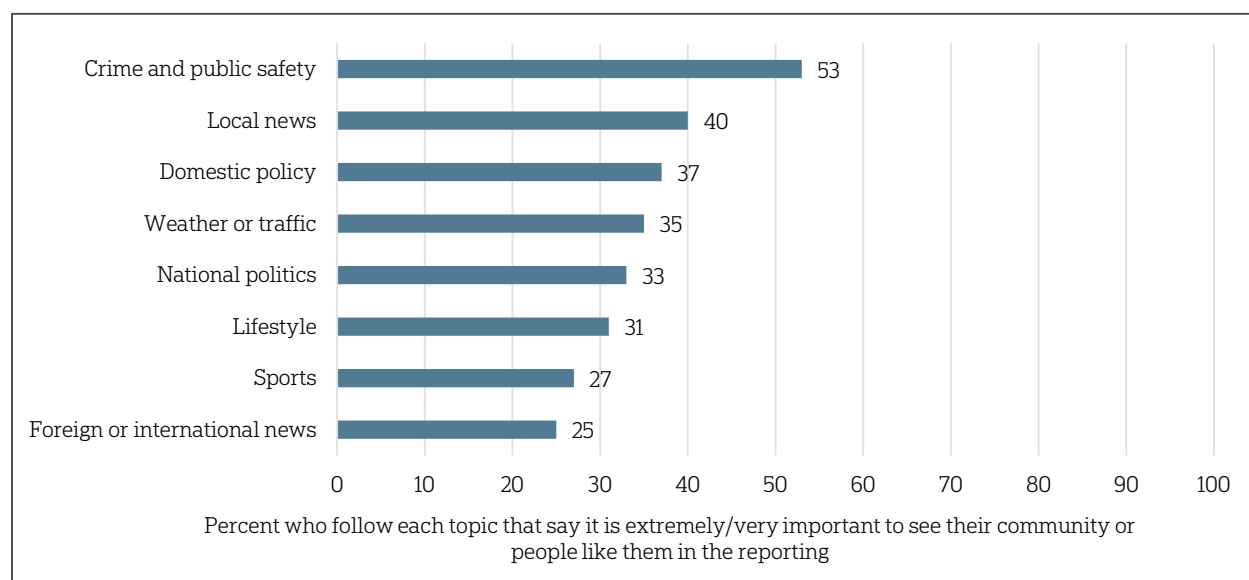


Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

With news about crime and public safety, people are far more likely to value coverage that contains their community and people like them than they are for coverage of any other topic. This may be partly explained by our earlier Personal News Cycle research<sup>5</sup>, which found that African American and Hispanic adults are somewhat more likely than white adults to follow news about crime and public safety, and large majorities of people in those minority groups believe their communities are not accurately portrayed in the media.

<sup>5</sup> <http://mediainsight.org/Pages/the-personal-news-cycle.aspx>

### The importance Americans place on seeing their communities in the reporting varies by topic.



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you? I see my community and people like me in the reporting

And there are some specific factors related to trust – such as getting the facts right, having the latest news, and ease in finding content – that are very important to majorities of Americans regardless of the topic. For every topic people say they follow closely, at least 65 percent of people believe it is important the facts are right, and majorities, across all topics, report having the latest news and being concise are important.

### THE SPECIFIC FACTORS RELATED TO TRUST FOR RADIO, PRINT, AND ONLINE SOURCES ARE SIMILAR, BUT THERE ARE SOME DIFFERENCES FOR TV NEWS.

Americans rely on many different types of media for news about the topics they follow most closely. No one medium dominates.

This finding reinforces what the Media Insight Project learned in 2014 through the Personal News Cycle research,<sup>6</sup> which found that topic rather than age or other demographics often dictates where people go for news; and that the notion of having a primary news source for all topics, if it ever held true, is now obsolete.

When asked in this study to name the source they rely on most for the news topics they follow most closely, about a third (31 percent) cite a national TV station/program. About a quarter (24 percent) say a local TV station/program (24 percent). About 1 in 10 name a radio program/station (10 percent); a niche or specialty publication (9 percent); a local, national or international newspaper (7 percent); or an online only news source or blog (7 percent).

<sup>6</sup> <http://mediainsight.org/Pages/the-personal-news-cycle.aspx>

Whatever media they choose, people's reasons for relying on their main source are relatively consistent.<sup>7</sup> Significant majorities, regardless of the platform or media, say it is very important to them that the news organization they name get the facts right, always have the latest news, and make it easy to find the information they are looking for.

However, there are a few differences between why Americans might rely on television news compared with other types of media. For example, 7 in 10 people who rely on either national or local television news say it is very important that the source covers all the day's events. That compares to about 5 in 10 people relying on a newspaper, online site, or specialized niche publication.

Americans who rely on local or national television news are also more likely to place a greater importance on in-depth reporting (72 percent) than those who rely on online-only sources (57 percent) or specialized niche publications (62 percent).

There are also some differences between television and newspapers, in particular. For example, 37 percent of Americans report it is very important that local television shares their views, compared with 23 percent of people who say the same about newspapers.

People who rely on local television are the most likely to say it is very important that they see people in their community and people like them in the reporting.

The focus group discussions provided additional context for why certain components of a source are more important.

With TV and radio, in particular, the face or voice of the journalist is an important part of why people rely on it.

One focus group participant, for instance, said she felt a strong loyalty to NBC's Tamron Hall and watches her on cable news because of the trust she places in her. "We have a relationship," said Sonya, an older, hard news consumer. "I go to her on a daily basis."

## SECTION 3: HOW PEOPLE DECIDE WHAT NEWS TO TRUST ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital formats provide distinctly different opportunities for people to engage with news and information than do traditional print and broadcast media formats. In doing so, they also provide new ways in which consumers can evaluate a news source. In much the way misspellings and grammatical errors do for text, or dead air might in broadcast, factors such as load times, mobile compatibility, and ad placement may now serve as indicators for consumers to evaluate a source's competence on digital platforms.

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<sup>7</sup> A complete set of tables showing the importance of each factor by type of source is included in Appendix A.

In the survey, 66 percent of Americans report that they get news of any type from a computer and 63 percent from a smartphone. In all, 46 percent of people report receiving news in a digital form (a website, app, or email alert) from at least one of the sources they use to closely follow one of their topics of interest.

Majorities of these digital news consumers cite three specific factors of digital presentation as critical to whether they rely on a news source. Those factors are the behavior and placement of digital ads, load times, and how well a site works on a mobile device.

Other features of online news are less important to digital news consumers, including interactive features and links to additional content.

But, as with the actionable and specific factors related to trust, the relative importance of these digital features changes, depending on the topic. How well the page works on mobile, for example, matters more often for news on traffic and weather than for news on national politics.

Social media platforms are another way that many people access news online. In the survey, a majority of Americans (51 percent) told us they now get news on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Of these, Facebook is by far the most frequently cited social media platform for getting news.

When it comes to trust, many people who receive news from these social media platforms consume it with skepticism. Social media news consumers do not generally trust the news they see there. As a result, they consider a variety of factors to adjudicate whether a particular story can be trusted. The most important are their perceptions of the original news source and also the person who posted the item.

### **FOR ONLINE NEWS CONSUMERS, PRESENTATION AND DELIVERY OF DIGITAL NEWS ARE IMPORTANT.**

Which digital features matter most to audiences? Do they want to drill down into links? Do they want to comment? Is it load times? Or visuals and interactives?

While these specific factors may not be typical elements of trust, they affect whether people rely on a news source. And in the same way that typos in a print article might make consumers question whether a source is getting the bigger facts right, in the 21st century consumers may think if a source can't get its app to work right, it may be incompetent more generally.

Three specific factors in online news matter most, people say: A majority of digital news consumers report it is very important to them that ads not interfere with the news (63 percent); that the site or app loads fast (63 percent); that the content works well on their mobile phones (60 percent).

**“My day is very busy, and I have very little patience for news that is flawed with inaccurate info,” said Robert, a younger, hard news consumer. “Also, I do not have patience for websites so cluttered with ads that it interrupts my reading.”**

Numerous comments from the focus groups reinforced the importance of load times, mobile compatibility, and ad presentation in why people use and trust an online source.

“I also feel that a well put-together page means it is running from a well put-together media company,” said Jason, an older, hard news consumer. “If I were to click a link and the page appears all wonky, I would feel that the stories behind it could be flaky, as well as the reporting behind it. I do kind of judge a book by its cover in this category.”

People talked in particular about the importance of these qualities on their mobile phones, where traffic for news has shifted rapidly. Several consumers told us they have turned away from a news source because the site was hard to use or read on their phones.

“If a news source or a website doesn’t have a mobile version, I don’t know why but I just feel like I don’t even want to read it,” said Tanushree, a younger, hard news respondent. “It makes me feel like if you don’t have a mobile version, you’re not keeping up with the times. It just makes me not want to go to the website. It makes me question it.”

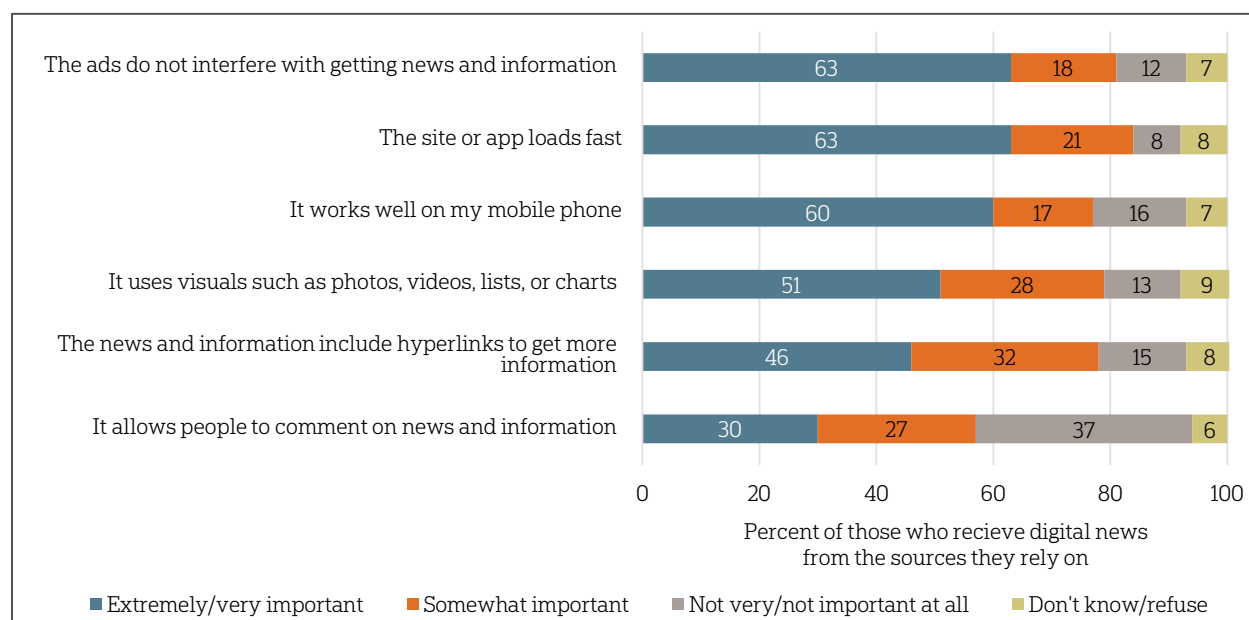
And both the survey and the qualitative research findings make it clear that it is important whether or not ads display in a way that interrupts what they are doing. The interviews showed that most news consumers know advertising is part of the business model and often enables the free access they expect. However, when people see advertising, they say they want it to be of a similar tone and topic to the news content and mesh visually with the page. In contrast, irrelevant, off-tone, or jarring ads can really bother people. Even worse were ads that monopolized the screen.

“If I see more ads than the article there is a problem,” said Robert, a younger, hard news consumer. “If I cannot read an article because an ad is blocking it and I cannot close the ad, there is a problem.”

Robert and several of the other interview participants said ads that interfere with the news have led them to stop using some sources altogether. “With the ads that start playing [automatically], I find that very annoying especially if I’m at work and I forgot to hit mute on my speakers” he said. “That makes me a lot less likely to go to a website.”

These responses were revealing and cautionary. Some advertisers increasingly want their ads on mobile devices to be hard to miss. The message here is that ads that annoy consumers will backfire on publishers – and probably on advertisers.

**“If it takes me two minutes to get to the actual article after clicking on the link where [another] one can take me two seconds, you’ve already lost me,” said Robert, a younger, hard news respondent. “And that’s one click that is not going to come back, because of poor design.”**

**Ad placement, load times, and mobile compatibility top the list of important digital factors.**

Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you?

The survey research shows how well a news source makes use of visuals, photos, videos, lists, and charts also is important. In all, 51 percent of consumers cite that as very important. Similarly, just under half of consumers (46 percent) report that it is very important whether a publisher uses hyperlinks in their stories so that consumers can drill down on their own into a subject.

Only 1 in 3 Americans rank it as very important that digital sources allow people to comment on news.

In the focus groups as well, participants found value in these features, but spoke less passionately about them compared to issues of ads and mobile compatibility.

Visuals, data, and charts help them better understand news and information, people said, but they were also discerning about them. Charts or figures that are too narrowly focused or lack context, people told us, could make them more skeptical of the information.

"Videos, graphs, charts, those visual aids can help build trust because we all have learning styles," said Drew, a younger, hard news consumer. "It will definitely catch my attention and tells me they are taking the time to consider different perspectives."

Hyperlinks can generate trust, people told us, even if people do not click on them. This factor is especially important for younger digital news consumers.

"I may not read it, but it's useful to have the posts that link there," said Kimberly, a lifestyle news consumer. "I may not have time to actually go study the study, but I'll trust that a little bit more than just saying 'studies show.'"

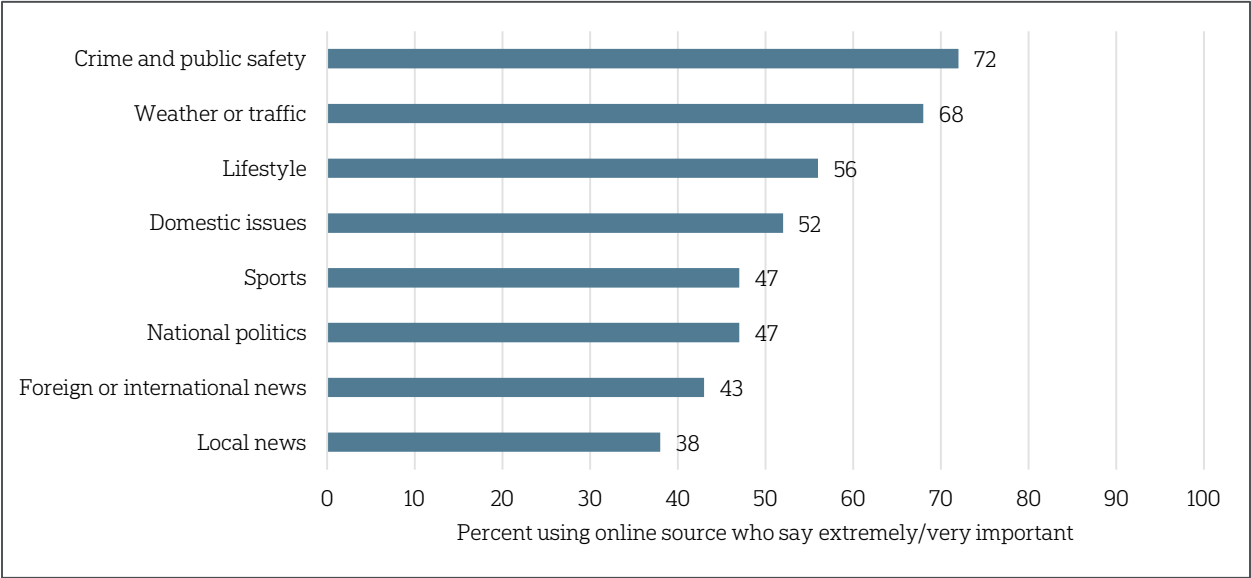
### **VISUALS AND MOBILE CAPABILITIES FOR DIGITAL NEWS ARE MORE IMPORTANT FOR SOME TOPICS THAN OTHERS.**

The digital elements that matter to Americans vary somewhat depending on the kind of news.



Visuals matter more, for instance, when it comes to crime and public safety news. Fully 72 percent of people who follow crime news closely using digital sources say using visuals such as photos, lists, or charts is very or extremely important, compared to 38 percent who say that about local news from online sources. Visuals also matter significantly more for traffic and weather.

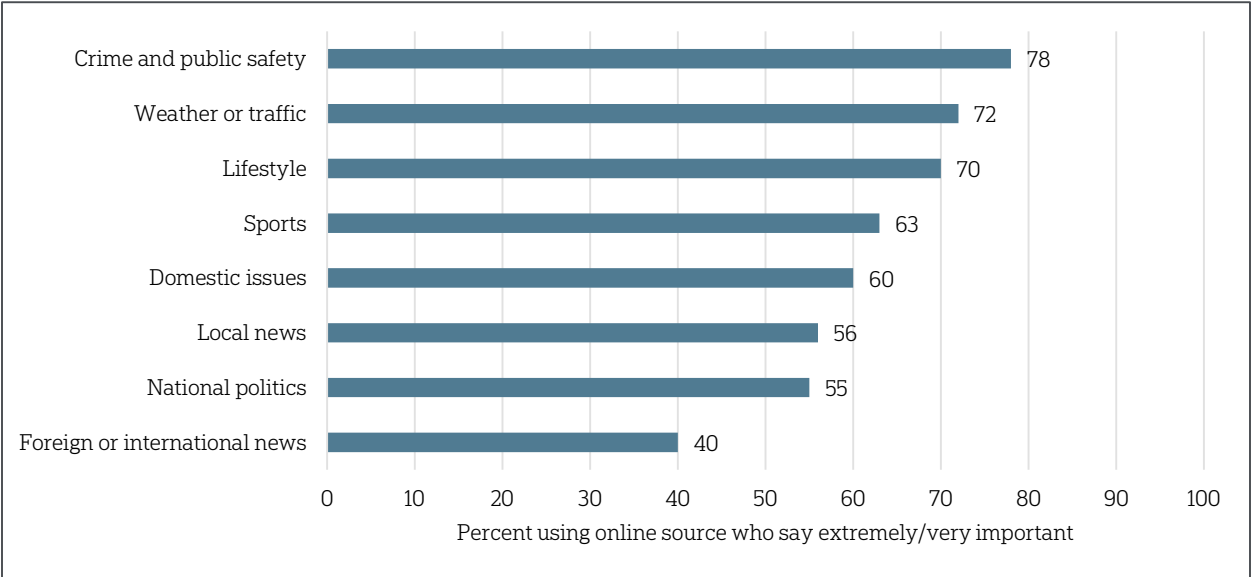
The importance of visuals for online news depends on the topic.



Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you? It uses visuals such as photos, videos, lists, or charts

Whether or not content presents well on mobile also matters more for traffic and weather than it does for national politics (55 percent) and foreign or international news (40 percent).

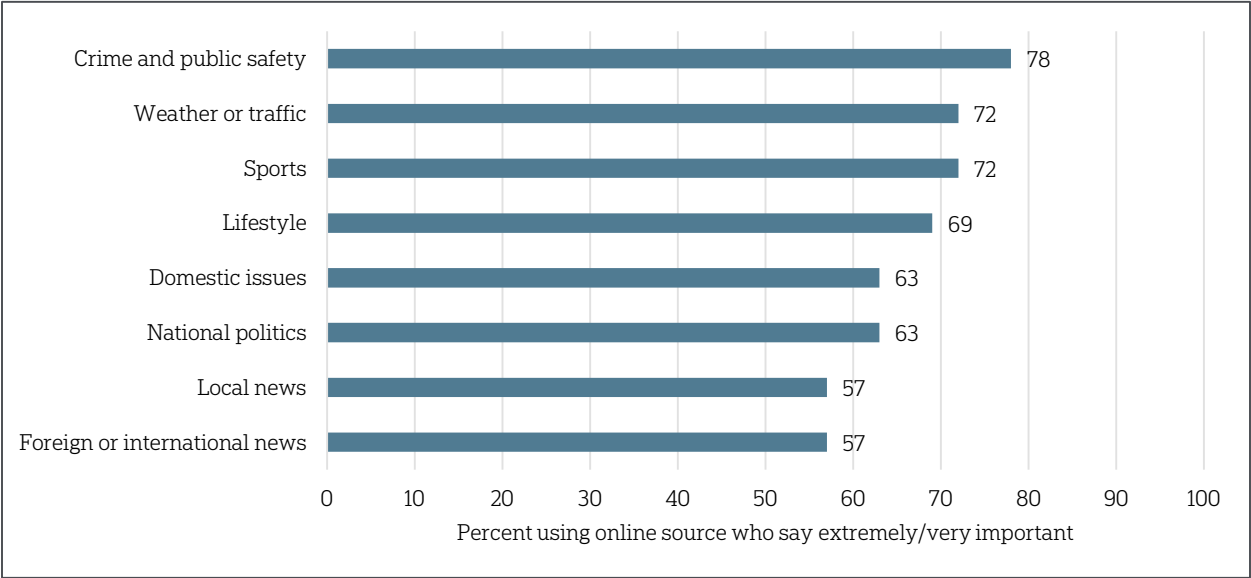
Across topics it is important digital news works well on a mobile phone.



Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you? It works well on my mobile phone

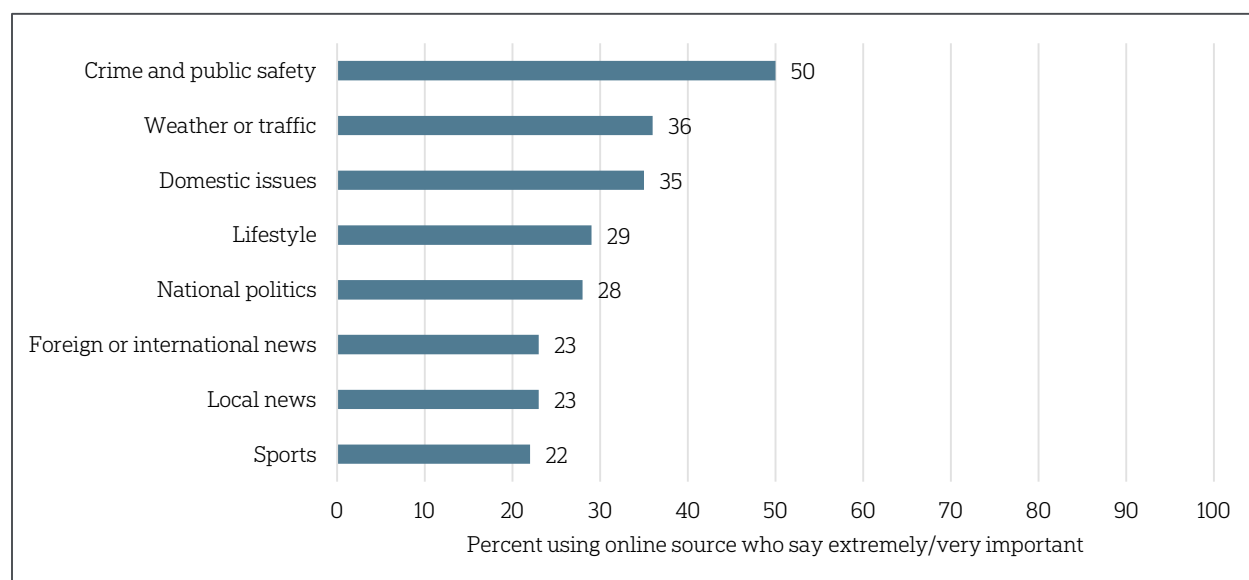
By the same token, load times register as particularly important for crime and public safety news (78 percent); significantly higher than it does for local news (57 percent) and foreign or international news (57 percent).

The importance of load time for online news differs across topics.



Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you? The site or app loads fast

Interestingly, the ability to comment on the news registers higher for crime news than other topics. Fully 50 percent of avid followers of crime and public safety news rate the presence of and ability to post comments as very important in their choice of news source compared with just 22 percent of people talking about sports and 29 percent of people talking about lifestyle news.

**Allowing people to comment is especially important for crime and public safety news.**

Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you? It allows people to comment on news and information

## **HALF OF AMERICANS GET NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, BUT MOST DO SO WITH HIGH DEGREES OF SKEPTICISM.**

What drives trust on social media? These networks present a variety of issues. People are no longer coming to a news brand when they are on Facebook or Twitter. Content from many sources is mixed, and news is only one kind of content a user may encounter in a given visit.

As we've noted in earlier Media Insight Project research, this means people in social media are no longer consuming news in "news sessions." News instead is just one form of content that is part of a larger social flow, and it is being encountered as part of connecting with people more generally.<sup>8</sup> The news has also been "atomized" in social media, meaning that people are encountering one story from a news source mixed in with content from many other sources, quite unlike watching a newscast or reading a magazine or newspaper, where all the content comes from the same source.

What causes people to decide to click on a given news story in that environment while skipping over another? This is a new dimension of trust.

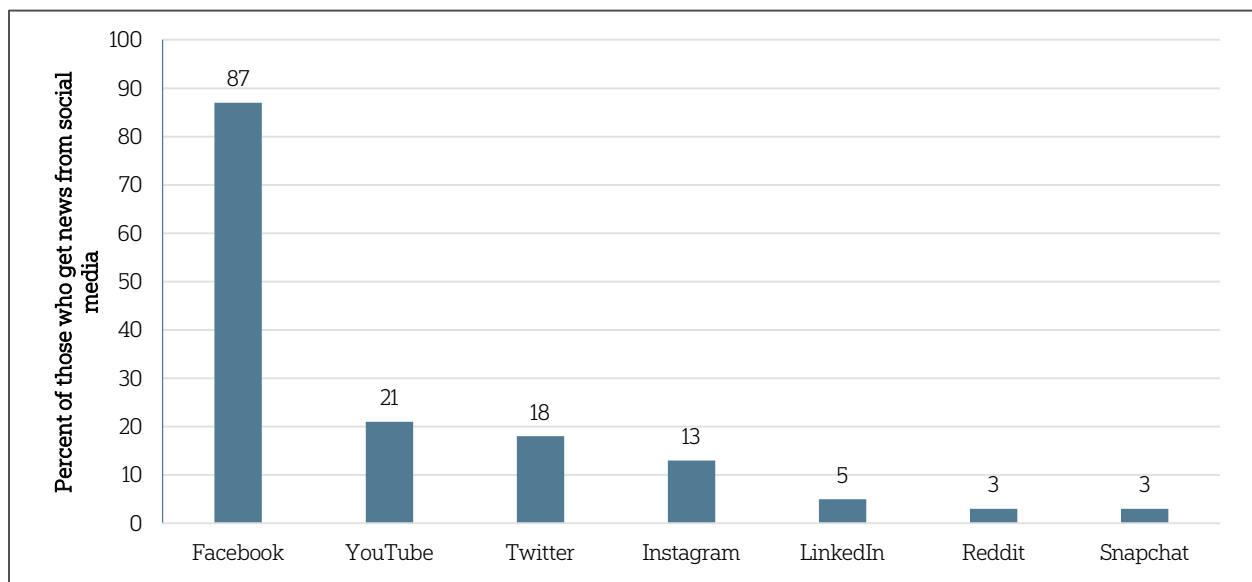
<sup>8</sup> How Millennials Get News: Inside the Habits of America's First Digital Generation.  
<http://www.mediainsight.org/PDFs/Millennials/Millennials%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

About half of Americans (51 percent) report they get news from social media. When those receiving news on social media are asked to name the two networks they use most frequently for such information, Facebook is by far the most popular network (87 percent of all adults who get news on social media say they get information there) followed by YouTube (21 percent), Twitter (18 percent), and Instagram (13 percent).

Fewer than 5 percent of those who get news on social media mention LinkedIn, Reddit, or Snapchat as one of their top two platforms, while less than 1 percent select Vine or Yik Yak.

**“I follow the local news stations on social media platforms and I enjoy it because I get the news as it is happening,” said Tabitha, a lifestyle news consumer. “With apps like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, the news is literally at my fingertips.”**

**Among people who get news on social media, Facebook is named four times more frequently than any other network.**

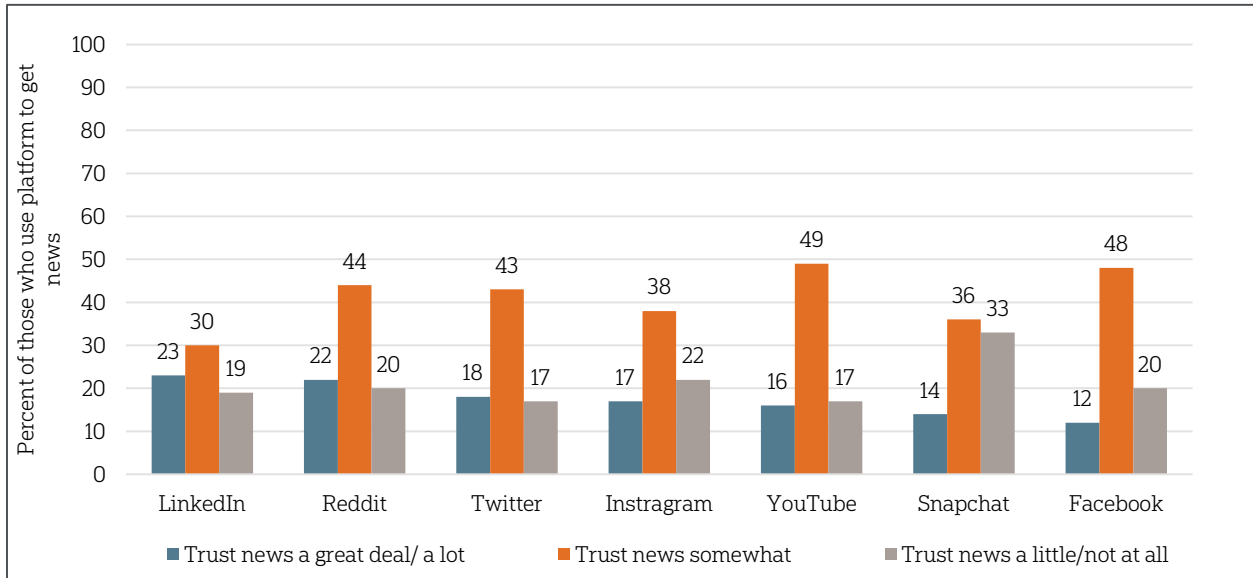


Question: Which of the following do you use most frequently to get news and information? Please select up to two.

However, while social media may be a common way for people to discover news today, those who use it are skeptical of the news and information they find there.

Fewer than 1 in 4 of these social media news consumers, for instance, say they trust news and information from that source a great deal or a lot. That number ranges from as low as 12 percent on Facebook to 23 percent on LinkedIn. The largest share of people, on all social networks, say they trust the information only somewhat.

**Most people who use social media to get news do not have a lot of trust in the content.**



Question: In general, how much do you trust the news and information you see on [SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM]?

**PEOPLE WHO GET NEWS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA USE CUES TO DECIDE WHAT NEWS TO TRUST.**

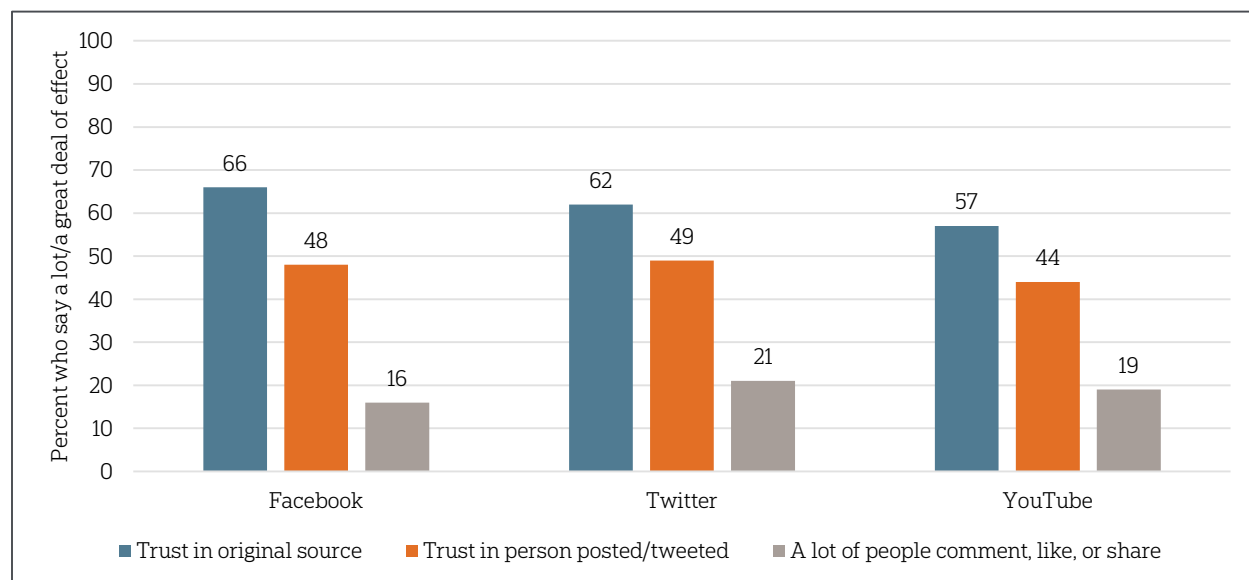
How much these social media news consumers trust a given item depends on several factors. The most important of these, people say, is the original news organization that produced the content.

Nearly 7 in 10 of those who get news on Facebook (66 percent) cite this as a critical factor in their decision to trust the content. Six in 10 (62 percent) say so about Twitter and somewhat fewer (57 percent) about YouTube.

The reputation of the person who shared the material is a less frequently cited factor, though still sizable. That factor is very important to just under half of users of most networks.

On the other hand, the popularity of the post itself, how many people shared, liked or commented on it, does little to affect trust. About 1 in 5 people say the number of others who have liked, shared, retweeted, or commented on a piece of news or information impacts their trust in the information.

**When people receive news on social media, trust in the original reporting source has the greatest effect on trust in the content.**



Questions: How much do the following factors affect your trust in piece of news and information you see on [SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM]?

We heard the same thing in our qualitative research. Participants in the focus groups said source is key on social media – and by source, they meant the original source creating the story and the person who shared it. Several people said if they respect the person who is posting news or perceive that person as knowledgeable on the subject, it can lend credibility to the story.

“I look who shared it. If I have a friend that’s a creep I might not believe what they post,” said Sonya, an older, hard news consumer. “If a friend is in a certain field, then I might believe what they post.”

And here too we heard people discount the idea that the number of shares or likes was a metric of credibility.

“When I see the number of likes or shares or the number of people reading an article, I just think it’s a popularity contest,” said Michael, an older, hard news consumer.

## SECTION 4: WHY TRUST MATTERS

A fundamental question any research about trust in news must address is whether trust actually matters to audiences and, if so, how.

The data here suggest that the specific factors of trust do correlate not only to whether people turn to a particular source but also how much they engage with news in general. People who rate specific factors related to trust as especially important are the most likely to engage with, and to pay for, news from the source they rely on. They are especially more likely to share content from their trusted sources.



And again, this relationship varies by topic. People who put a high value on trust-related factors in choosing their main source of news for political or domestic issues are even more likely to engage with the source in several ways.

### **AMERICANS WHO PLACE THE GREATEST EMPHASIS ON TRUST FACTORS ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO PAY, SHARE, OR FOLLOW THAT SOURCE.**

While most people report all of the trust-related factors are important, some people place a higher value on them than others. And those news consumers especially concerned with trustworthiness are also the most likely to report that they take valuable actions – such as paying for news, spreading news to friends, and following the source on social platforms.

In short, news organizations that earn trust have an advantage in earning money and growing their audience.

To assess the relationship between trust and engagement, we compare the people who are most likely to report that specific factors related to trust are very important reasons they rely on a source versus people who say they are less important. We examine respondents' importance ratings for all 12 trust-related factors and break people into three groups – from those who rate these factors most highly to those who rate them as least important in whether they use a news source.<sup>9</sup>

When we do this analysis the relationship between trust and engagement is clear. People who place the highest importance on trust-related factors are more likely to report that they engage in a variety of activities with news content than those who place the least importance on these factors. Those who rate trust-related factors highest are much more likely to share the sources' news content with others (55 percent vs. 32 percent). They are also more likely to follow their favorite news sources on social media (40 percent vs. 26 percent).

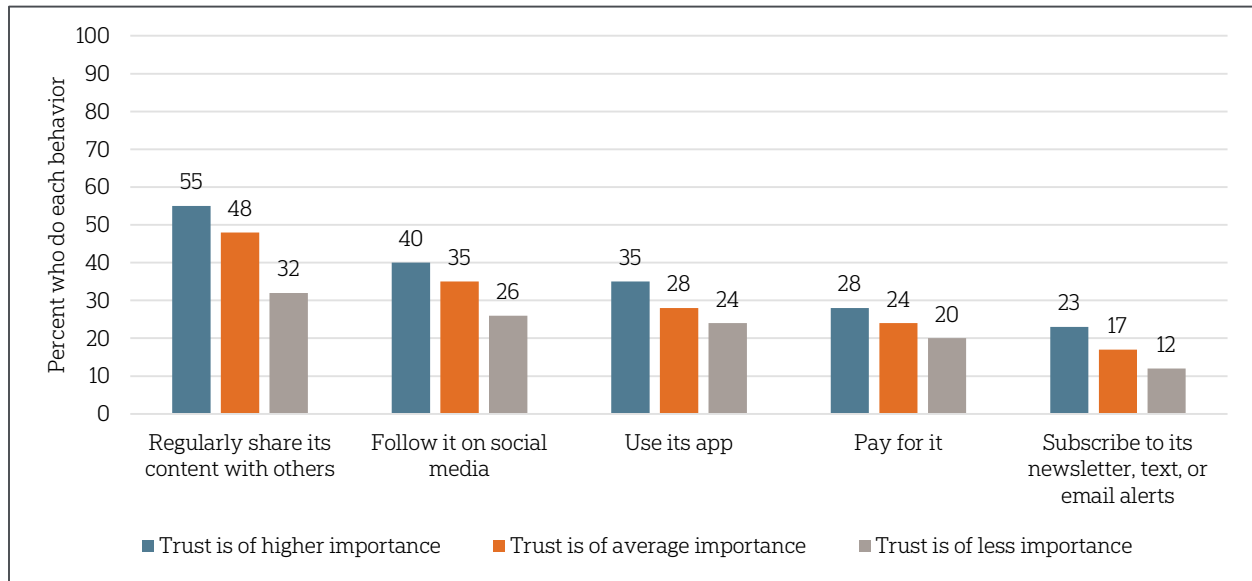
Those who put the highest premium on trust-related factors are also more likely to use the sources' mobile or web app (35 percent vs. 24 percent).

Those who put a premium on trust factors are also more likely to pay for the source of news they use (28 percent vs. 20 percent). And they are nearly twice as likely to subscribe to the news organization's newsletter, text, or email alerts (23 percent vs. 12 percent).

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<sup>9</sup> We examine respondents' importance ratings across all 12 actionable trust components and take the one-fourth of respondents who rate these items highest and compare them to the one-fourth of respondents who rate their importance lowest. Respondents falling into the middle are grouped together as providing average importance ratings.

**Those who place a higher value on factors related to trust are more likely to interact with news sources, including paying for it.**



Question: In which of the following ways do you interact with [NAMED SOURCE], do you...?

The focus group discussions about the relationship between trust and engagement provided additional context.

The focus group participants described trust as more than just accuracy or balance. It also includes an emotional connection. People talked about a trusted source consistently meeting their needs, and that they go to trusted sources more frequently and usually first because it saves them time and energy.

People also said they will take steps to proactively engage with a trusted source, such as following it on social media or paying more for it. In particular, several said they would pay only for apps from a trusted source.

“For the sources I trust more, I typically subscribe to their apps, website, and social media sites,” said Sonya, an older, hard news consumer. “They are my go-to sources. I know the names of anchors and casts. I know the segment shifts.”

At the same time, we heard in the focus groups that a loss of trust can lead people to turn to other news outlets. “If you lose my trust, I just move away and I’m not coming back,” said Drew, a younger, hard news respondent. “There are plenty of other sites to look at and you’re all competing for our eyes.”

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT DIFFERS BY NEWS TOPIC.**

As with trust in general, the relationship between trust and engagement varies based on the topic of the news. This is especially the case when it comes to paying for a source and following it on social media.

Among those who follow foreign or international issues, for instance, the people who put a premium on trust-related factors are four times as likely to pay for news as those who rate these factors as less important to them (69 percent vs. 14 percent). However, there are not significant differences between these groups when it comes to paying for news on other topics.

People who put a premium on trust-related factors are far more likely than those who do not to follow a news organization on social media to get its coverage of national politics (40 percent vs. 21 percent) and domestic issues (39 percent vs. 25 percent). But there are no substantial differences between whether people in these different trust groups are likely to follow a favorite news organization for other topics.

Likewise, people who place a higher value on trust-related factors are more likely than those who do not to subscribe to newsletter, text, or email alerts for news about politics (23 percent vs. 11 percent) and domestic issues (25 percent vs. 14 percent) from their favorite sources. But putting a higher premium on trust factors does not correlate to engaging in these ways for most other news topics.

There is one form of engagement where a higher value on trust matters virtually no matter what the topic. People who put a higher premium on factors related to trust are more likely to share news content from a favorite source on social media, across topics. The only exceptions to that are sports and foreign or international news.

## **CONVENIENCE AND ENTERTAINMENT FACTORS ALSO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT.**

In addition to factors traditionally associated with trust – such as getting the facts right or having the latest details – engagement is also correlated to convenience and entertainment.

For example, those who highly value that a news source presents news and information in a way that it can be easily discussed with other people are about twice as likely as those who place less importance on this to share content from a favorite news source (51 percent vs. 27 percent).

People who say that it is important that news is presented in a way that is entertaining are more likely than those who place a lower importance on this quality to follow that news organization on social media.

And history and habit matter, too. Americans who say it's important to them that a news organization is one they have relied on for a long time are more likely to subscribe to its newsletter, text, or email alerts than those who do not consider that quality all that important.

## SECTION 5: HOW TRUST CAN BE BROKEN AND THE DECLINE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESS

Research from others has noted that Americans' trust in the press has been declining, with occasional interruptions, for roughly two decades.

This study finds that the majority of Americans, however, cannot recall a specific experience with a news source that made them trust it less. In all, only 4 in 10 recall a specific bad experience they had with a news source that they say has caused them to lose trust in an organization.

Of those who could, the most common complaint is they saw something that was inaccurate or they perceived it as bias.

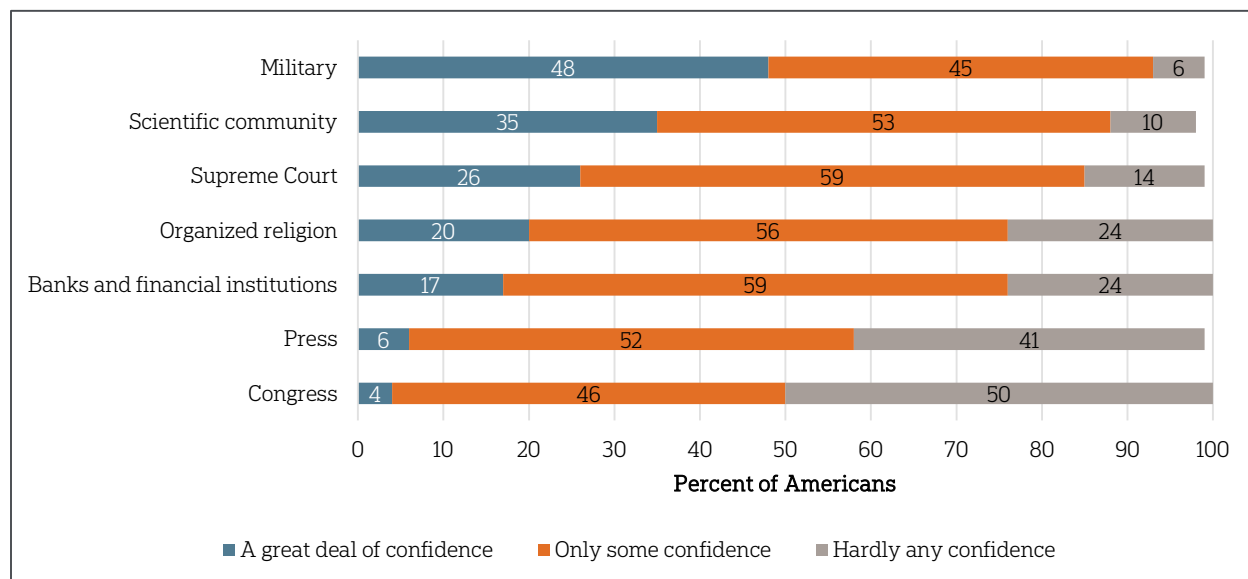
### **CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESS IS LOW, AND THE LEAST CONFIDENT AMERICANS ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO VALUE BALANCE AND TRANSPARENCY.**

Public confidence in the press by many measures is low. In this survey, for instance, 6 percent of people say they have a great deal of confidence in the press, 52 percent say they have only some confidence, and 41 percent say they hardly any confidence. These findings are similar to the results of other recent studies. For example, a September 2015 Gallup survey found 7 percent of Americans have a great deal of trust and confidence in the mass media, 33 percent have a fair amount, and 60 percent have either not very much or none at all.

This survey, however, does not delve deeply into the issue of confidence; nor does it analyze its trends over time. Our goal is to try to understand what makes people trust, rely, and turn to news sources and to understand what concrete steps news organizations can take to increase that trust.

General questions about how much confidence people have in the news media are quite different than probing what it is people like about the news organizations they rely on. In an increasingly diverse media landscape, people may see more media they dislike and also see more that they find useful as well. That paradox can be seen in two divergent trends. By many measures in different surveys people say they are consuming more news than they used to even while the trajectory about trust and confidence in the press in general has been trending downward.

That said, the survey asks about confidence in different institutions so that we can assess the relationship between how important certain trust factors are to people and their confidence in the press in general. At that broad comparative level, Americans' confidence in the press is low compared with other institutions such as the military, the scientific community, the Supreme Court, organized religion, and banks and financial institutions. Public confidence in the press is similar to confidence in Congress.

**Confidence in the press is low compared to most other institutions.**

Question: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?

A lack of general confidence in the press does seem related to a “healthy skepticism” when it comes to what people value in their news coverage.

Americans who express low levels of confidence in the press generally are more likely than those with only some confidence to say that it is very important that a trustworthy source be complete (81 percent vs. 74 percent), accurate (89 percent vs. 84 percent), balanced (71 percent vs. 64 percent), and transparent (72 percent vs. 66 percent).

Similarly, the small group of people who do express a high degree of confidence in the press place a higher value on entertainment and other factors that are not directly related to trust when it comes to why they say they rely on a source.

Nearly half (49 percent) of those who say they have a great deal of confidence in the press say that making the news entertaining is an important reason they rely on their chosen source compared to 39 percent of those who have only some confidence and 35 percent of those who have hardly any confidence. Similarly, 68 percent of people with a great deal of confidence in the press say that having a history with the source is an important reason they rely on it compared to 51 percent of those with only some and 50 percent of those with hardly any confidence.

### **PERCEIVED BIAS AND INACCURACIES HAVE MADE A SIZEABLE MINORITY OF AMERICANS WARY OF SOME NEWS SOURCES.**

The survey also asked people about whether they could recall a specific experience that caused them to trust a media organization less than they once had, hoping that we could probe what it was that caused that erosion in confidence.

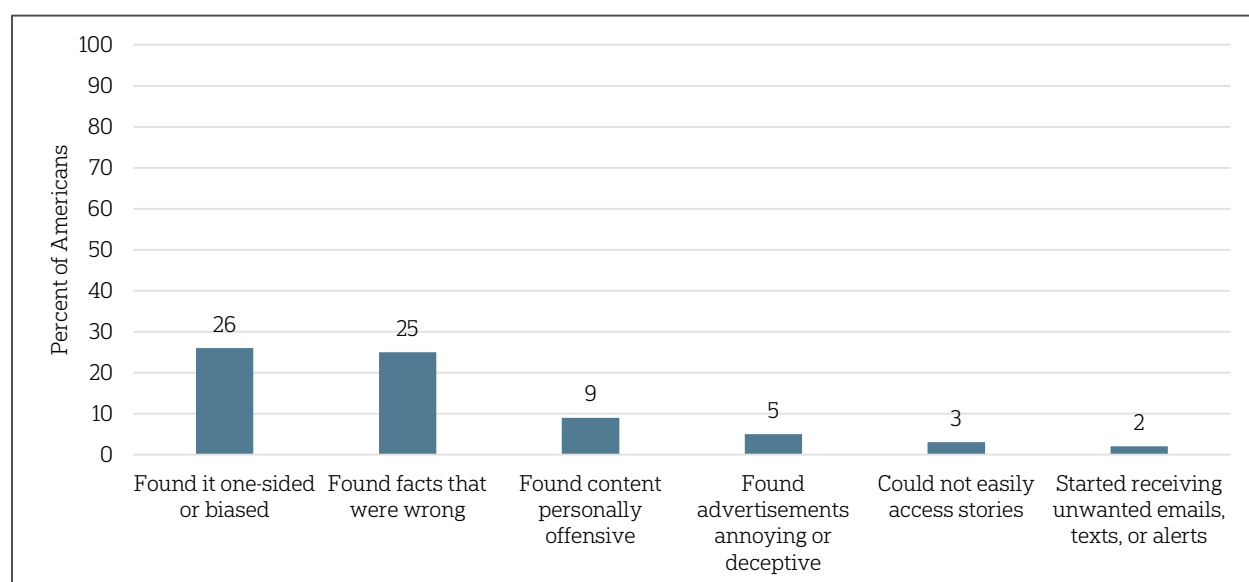
The majority of Americans cannot cite any specific instance. In all, about 4 in 10 people (38 percent) report that they have had an experience that made them trust a news or information source less.

Of those who could recall such an instance, we asked about the nature of the incident. The two most common problems people cite are incidents that they perceived as evidence of bias or that showed a news source had been inaccurate.

In total, 26 percent of Americans say that they had a bad experience in which they found the source one-sided or biased; 25 percent report they had a bad experience in which they found that facts were wrong.

Much smaller percentages of the public report experiencing decreases in trust due to being personally offended by content (9 percent), finding advertisements annoying or deceptive (5 percent), not being able to easily access stories (3 percent), or starting to receive unwanted emails, texts, or alerts (2 percent).

**Bias and inaccuracy are the most common reasons Americans cite for an experience that made them trust a news source less.**



Question: What happened that made you trust that news and information source less? Please select all that apply.

These bad experiences, however, seem to have made a difference. Those with low confidence in the press overall are much more likely than others to say they have had a negative experience with a news source that has made them trust it less. Fully 45 percent of those with hardly any confidence in the press in general could recall a specific incident that made them lose trust, compared to 28 percent of those with a great deal of confidence and 34 percent of those with only some confidence. Among those who have had such an experience, those with hardly any confidence in the press are more likely than those with more confidence to say they found it to be one-sided or biased.

The focus group discussions provided important context for understanding how a bad experience can erode confidence. Participants were generally positive about their overall news experiences. However, when probed to really focus on a bad experience with a source, they were able to articulate very emotional and visceral reactions to the situation. Many focus group participants said they feel like they have been personally wronged, taken advantage of, or fooled when they have a bad experience with a news source.



“I’m angry when a news source does something that causes me to lose trust in it,” said Kimberly, a lifestyle news consumer. “[I’m] also a bit scared for what other things they have gotten wrong or only given half-truths to.”

Several people told us a bad experience with one story could lead to a total loss of trust in a source. For example, a bad experience with one television anchor could lead to a distrust of an entire television network.

“When a news source does something that causes me to lose trust in it, it makes me lose all faith in their integrity, which means how can I trust anything they say, which makes me want to go out and find new sources,” said Robert, a younger, hard news consumer.

Importantly, several focus group participants said they do not expect news sources to be perfect and how a source reacts to errors can actually build trust. Several people said that owning up to mistakes and drawing attention to errors or mistakes can show consumers that a source is accountable and dedicated to getting it right in the long term.

“We all make mistakes,” said Kimberly. “If an outlet is wrong and is transparent about it and they screwed up, if they say I messed up and take ownership that makes me trust you more.”

**“I lose trust in a news source when they are incorrect and they don’t admit or retract it,” said Pat, an older, hard news consumer. “It’s okay to be wrong as long as you admit and fix it if you can.”**

## SECTION 6: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERAL NEWS HABITS AND TRUST IN THE NEWS

The majority of the public follows news and information with great interest and frequency.

And trust seems to be an important component related to how much people interact with news in general. Those who get news more frequently are more likely to put a very high value on certain specific factors related to trust, particularly that news organizations they rely on get the facts right and always have the latest news. They are also likely to say that the news is presented in a clear and concise way is important.

In contrast, there are not significant differences between people who follow news frequently and those who do not when it comes to other factors such as whether they care if the news is entertaining or that they like to be able to multitask when getting the news.

### MAJORITIES OF AMERICANS CONSUME NEWS FREQUENTLY, ACCESS IT FROM DIFFERENT DEVICES, AND BELIEVE IT’S IMPORTANT TO STAY UP TO DATE.

Americans are frequent and avid consumers of news. Eighty percent say they watch, read, or hear the news at least once a day, including 59 percent who say they do so several times a day.

A majority of Americans (60 percent) also say that keeping up with the news is very or extremely important to them. Just 8 percent report it is not very or not at all important to them.

News is now consumed on social networks, on mobile devices, and is “atomized” – or consumed throughout the day rather than just in a few “news sessions” at certain times of day. In this digital age, news consumers can be broken into two broad categories. There are news seekers, people who actively search out the news; and there are people whose behavior could be categorized as news bumpers, or who are more likely to discover news by accident as they are doing other things.

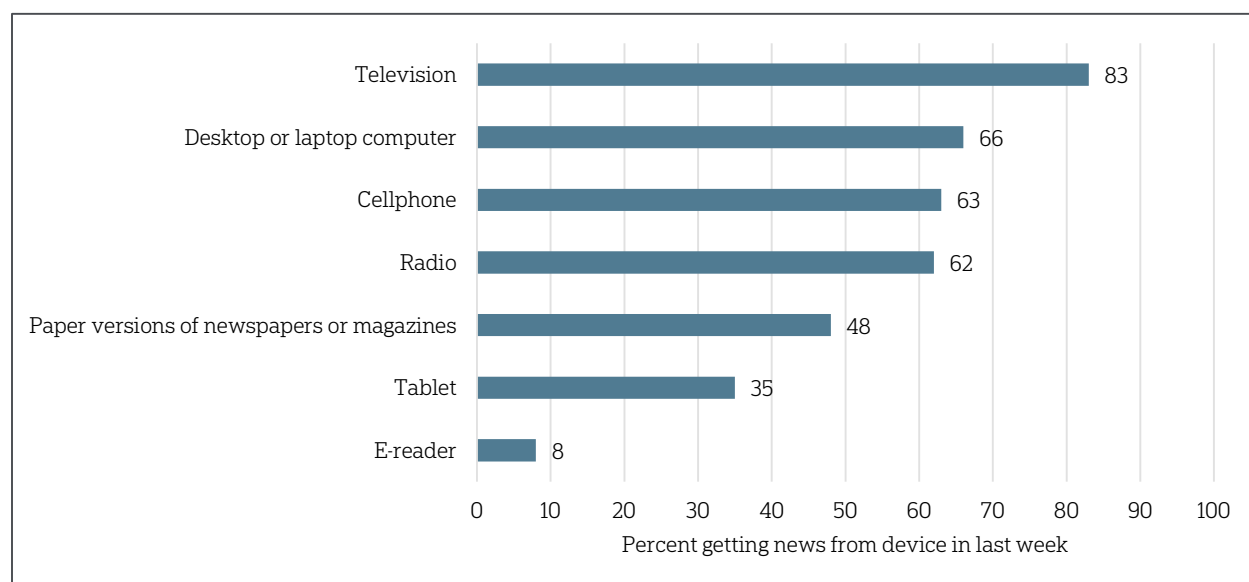
A year ago in a survey of adults under age 35, we asked people to tell us whether they were more prone to actively seek out news or would describe themselves instead as accidental news consumers. In that age group, the Millennial generation, 39 percent described themselves as seekers and 60 percent described themselves as bumping into news.

In this study of all adults, we asked the question again. The numbers are almost reversed. Among this larger population, 65 percent say they are more inclined to actively seek out news and information while 34 percent report that they mostly just bump into it as they do other things or hear about it from others.

Our past research also has found that people do not tend to have a preference for a particular device to getting the news – an idea that stands in some contrast to the television age. People say they will use whatever device fits the news they are seeking or the context in which they find themselves.

This new study reinforces that notion. Television does remain the most popular device for news in the United States; more than 8 in 10 say they have received news from a television in the past week. But it’s not the only source. More than 6 in 10 say that they have received news from a computer, cellphone, or radio. Fewer people use paper versions of newspapers or magazines, or tablets, and less than 1 in 10 receive news through an E-reader.

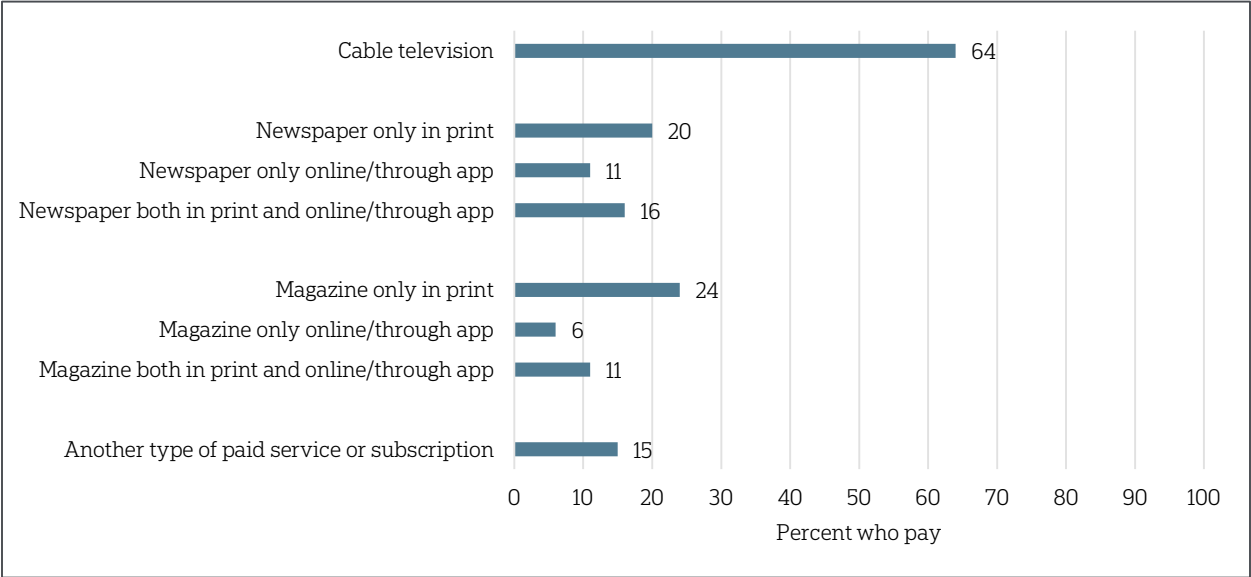
**Television continues to be the most popular device used by Americans to get news.**



Question: Here are some different devices or technology that you might or might not use to get news and information. Did you use each device or technology to get news and information in the last week, or did you not? How about [ITEM]?

Despite Americans’ high frequency of news consumption, less than half say they pay for a newspaper or magazine either in print or online (47 percent). Print-only subscriptions to newspapers and magazines are more popular than online or app subscriptions, but more Americans subscribe to cable television than subscribe to any type of newspaper or magazine.

**Many Americans subscribe to newspapers or magazines, with print subscriptions remaining slightly more popular than online subscriptions.**



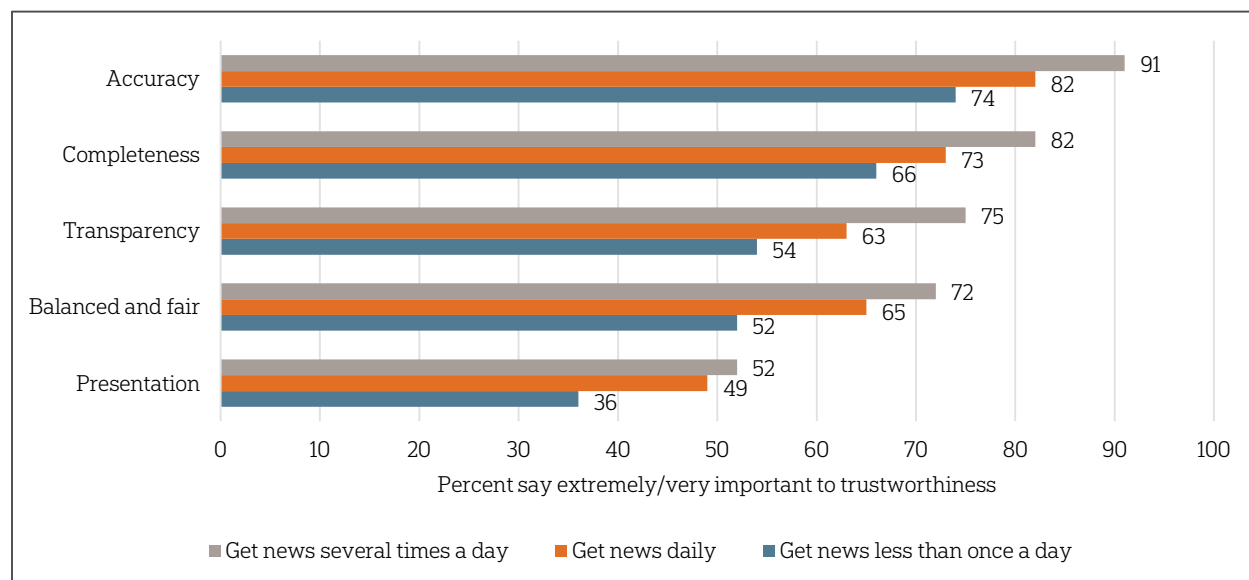
Question: Do you currently use a PAID service or subscription that includes access to... [ITEM]?

**HEAVY NEWS CONSUMERS SAY ACCURACY AND COMPLETENESS ARE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF TRUST.**

In general, the study finds a strong correlation between how much people value the general principles of trust and their level of news consumption.

People who follow news several times a day are more likely than those who do not follow news daily to believe that general principles like accuracy, completeness, transparency, and balance are important.

**People who follow news more frequently place greater importance on accuracy, completeness, transparency, and balance.**



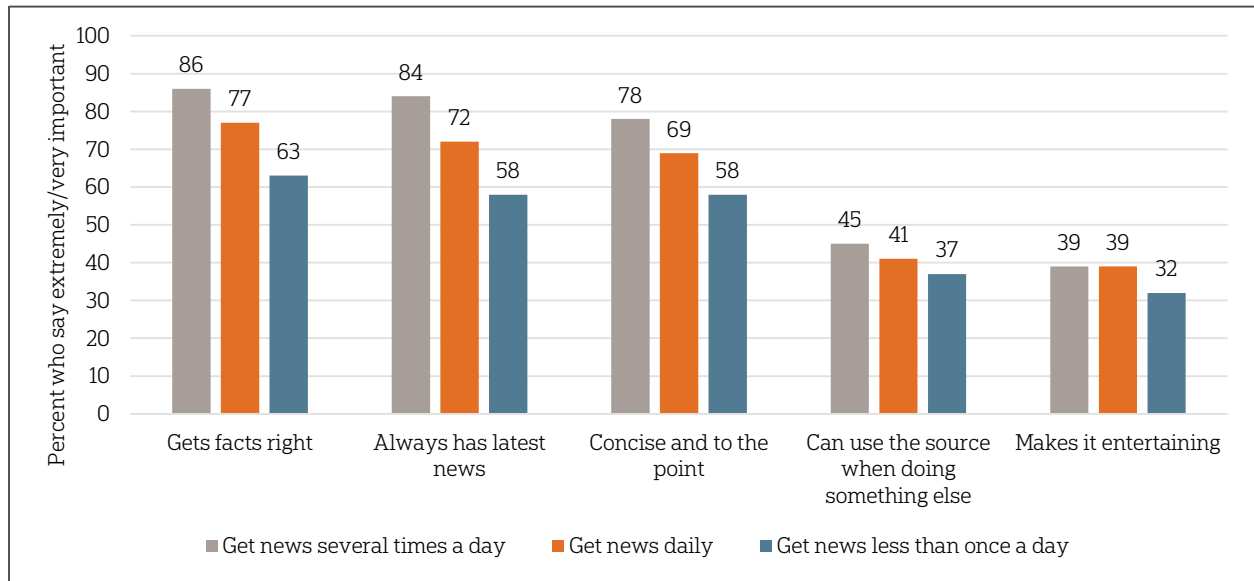
Question: You may trust some sources of news more than others. Thinking about the sources you consider trustworthy, how important is each of the following factors?

This correlation also holds when we dig down into the more specific factors associated with trust.

For example, those who get the news multiple times a day are more likely to cite accurate facts as very important to them than are those who get news less often (86 percent vs. 63 percent). They are more likely to put a premium on a news source always having the latest details than those who get news less often (84 percent vs. 58 percent). They are also more likely than less frequent news consumers to rate concise presentation of the news as important to them when they talk about the news sources they use most often (78 percent vs. 58 percent).

In contrast, there are not significant differences between people who follow news frequently and those who do not when it comes to making the news entertaining or being able to multitask when using the source.

The importance of several specific factors related to trust vary depending on how frequently people follow news.



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

## SECTION 7: HOW TRUST DIFFERS ACROSS GENERATION, SOCIOECONOMICS, RACE AND ETHNICITY, AND GENDER

What it means to trust the news and the reasons people cite for relying on specific news sources differ between generations, socioeconomic groups, racial and ethnic groups, and men and women.

Younger and older Americans share similar beliefs generally about what trust in news means to them. However, younger Americans place greater value on other factors less explicitly linked to trust in explaining why they rely on specific news sources. More digital in their news consumption overall, younger adults are also more likely place greater weight on specific factors related to its digital presentation and performance.

When it comes to socioeconomic status, Americans with higher incomes and more education are more likely to place greater importance on general concepts traditionally associated with trust, such as accuracy, completeness, balance, and transparency.

In general, women and men have similar values when it comes to what they mean by trust. But women tend to place greater importance on the presentation of information, particularly in the delivery of digital content.

We do see some differences in race and ethnicity when it comes the more specific factors related to trust in news. For example, African American and Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to say it is very important that they see their communities and people like them in the reporting.

And there are some broad differences in levels of confidence in the press by political affiliation, but there are not consistent differences when we probe into what makes something trustworthy. For instance, Democrats are more likely to have confidence in the press than Republicans or independents. Seventy-one percent of Democrats have at least some confidence in the press compared with 52 percent of independents and 45 percent of Republicans. However, there are not systematic partisan differences in beliefs about what constitutes a trustworthy source or why people rely on certain sources.

### **YOUNGER AMERICANS PLACE MORE IMPORTANCE ON THE DELIVERY AND PRESENTATION OF DIGITAL NEWS THAN OLDER AMERICANS.**

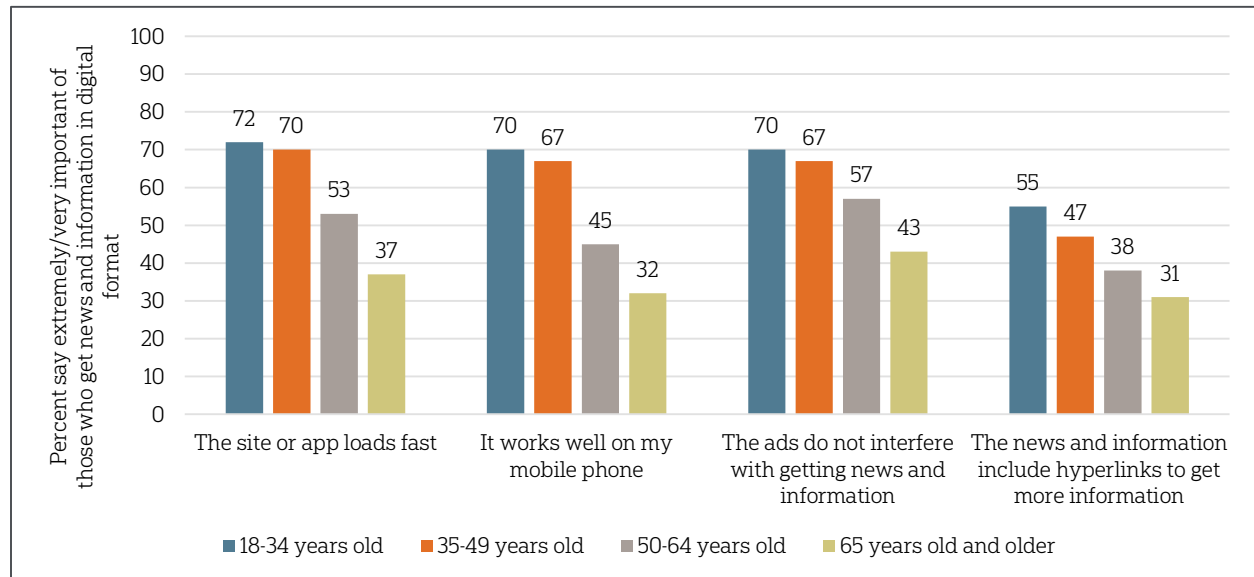
Younger and older Americans tend to have relatively similar attitudes about what makes a trustworthy news source, but there are age differences when it comes to relying on digital information and the value placed on the convenience of a news source.

Older Americans are more likely than Millennials to say the fact that a source is one that they've always used is important, but they are less likely to report that entertainment or multitasking are key qualities. Nearly half of younger adults, for instance (49 percent of those 18-34 years old and 48 percent of those 35-49 years old), place high importance on the ability to use these news sources while multi-tasking. By comparison the same is true of closer to a third of people over 50 years of age (38 percent of those 50-64 years old and 31 percent of those 65 and older).

There are even more pronounced age differences when it comes to the use of digital sources. To begin with, younger Americans are more likely to get to their favorite sources in a digital format. Fully 59 percent of those who are 18-34 years old and 56 percent of those 35-49 years old report using a digital format of the source, compared with 39 percent of those 50-64 years old and 24 percent of those 65 and older.

But age also plays a significant role in the way people evaluate a news organization's digital content. Younger digital news consumers place higher levels of importance than older digital news consumers do on load times, ease of use on mobile phones, lack of interference from ads, and inclusion of hyperlinks.

### Younger Americans place greater value on fast loading speeds and other digital considerations.

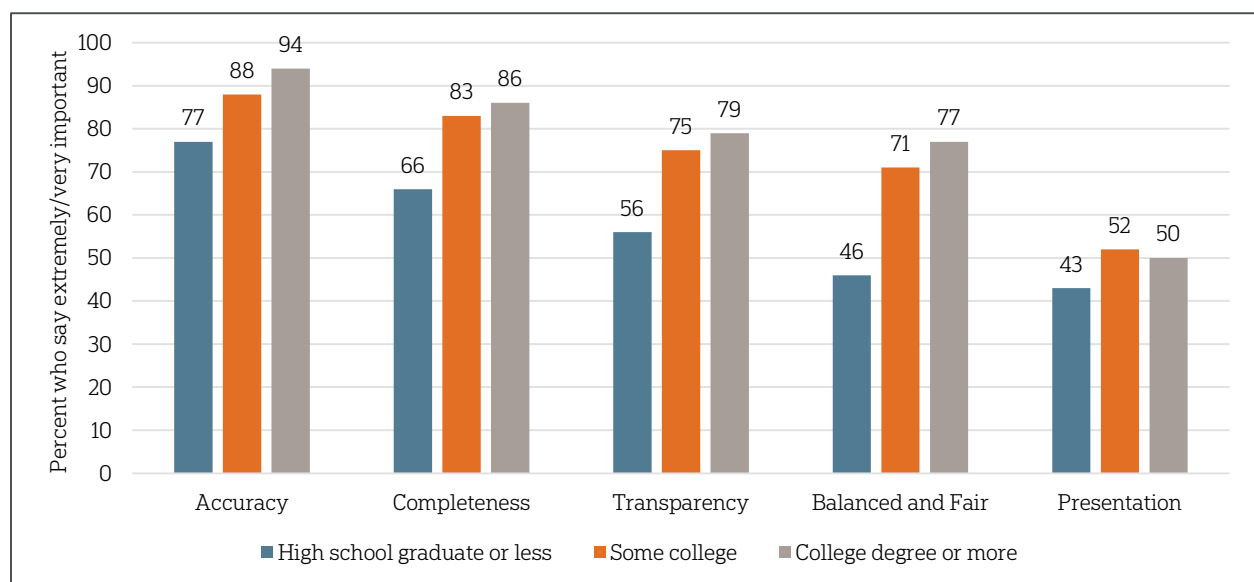


Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you?

### AMERICANS' EDUCATION AND INCOME IMPACT THE ROLE OF TRUST IN THEIR NEWS HABITS.

People with different educational backgrounds and income levels vary in the way they evaluate news sources. Americans with higher incomes and more education tend to place more importance on general principles traditionally associated with a trustworthy news source such as accuracy, completeness, balance, and transparency. Yet, there are not substantial socioeconomic differences when it comes to the value of presentation.

#### The importance of general principles of trust varies by education levels.

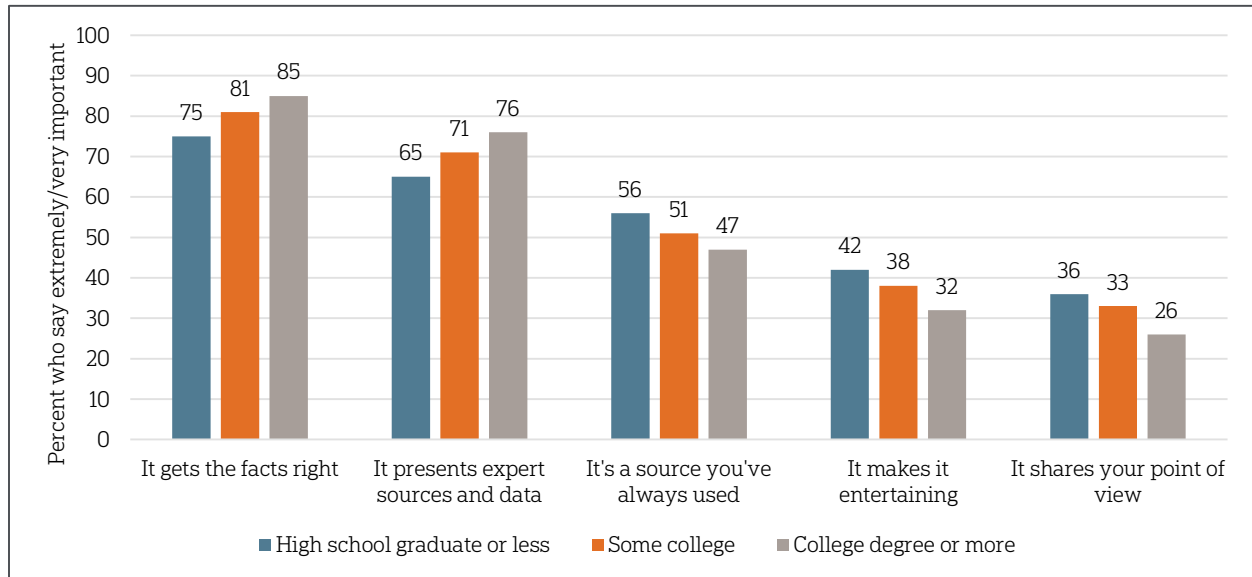


Question: You may trust some sources of news more than others. Thinking about the sources you consider trustworthy, how important is each of the following factors?

In general, highly educated Americans also place more importance on specific factors related to trust. Those with less education tend to place more importance on factors linked to convenience or entertainment.

For example, 76 percent with a college degree say it is very important that a news source presents expert sources and data; the same is true of 65 percent of those with a high school degree or less education. At the same time, people with a high school degree or less are more likely to report it is very important that a source is entertaining (42 percent) than those with a college degree (32 percent).

**The specific factors people value when it comes to their news sources depend on their education.**



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

Americans with higher education also evaluate news and information on social media with more skepticism than those with less education.

For instance, people with higher levels of education are more skeptical when getting news on Facebook. In all, 27 percent of college graduates say that they trust the news and information on Facebook very little or not at all compared to 18 percent of those with some college experience and 14 percent of those with a high school education or less.

Those with higher educations are also somewhat more likely to weigh their knowledge and trust of the news organization that did the reporting. Three-quarters of those with a college degree report their knowledge and trust of the original source is very or extremely important in whether they would trust what they saw on Facebook. That is true of a sizable but smaller majority (two-thirds) of those with some college experience and just over half of those with a high school education or less.



## WOMEN PLACE GREATER IMPORTANCE ON THE DELIVERY OF DIGITAL NEWS THAN MEN.

Women and men tend to have similar beliefs about trusting news sources, but there are some gender differences in attitudes, especially regarding the delivery of digital content.

For instance, women are more likely than men to report that presentation is very important (51 percent vs. 44 percent).

With digital news and information, women also place more importance than men on fast loading speeds (67 percent vs. 59 percent), working well on a mobile phone (66 percent vs. 53 percent), and little interference from ads (69 percent vs. 58 percent).

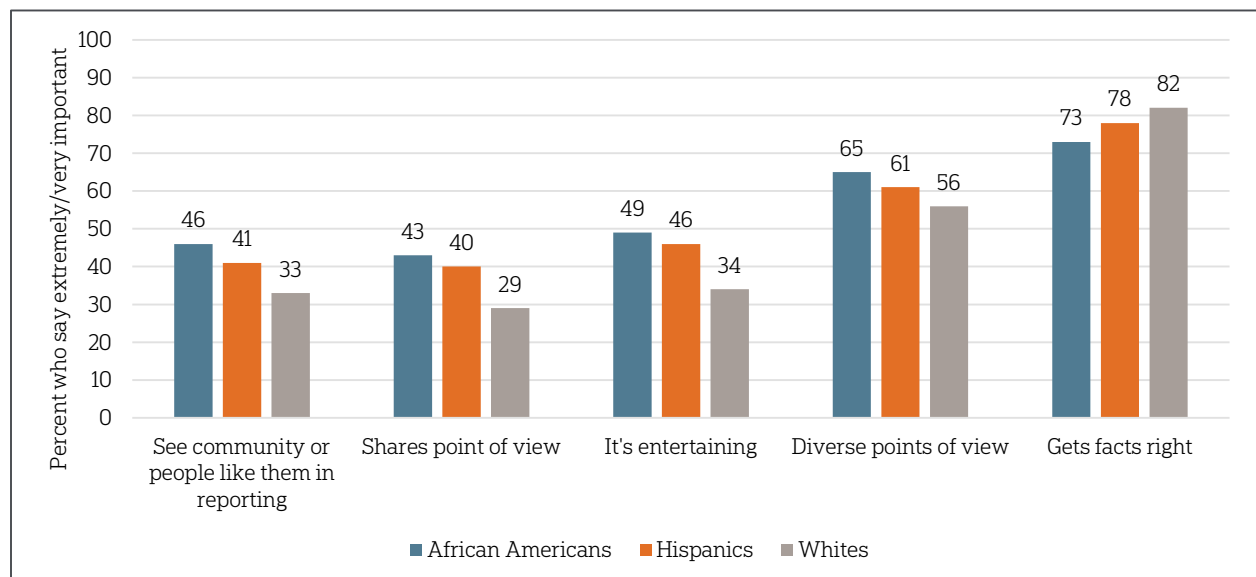
## WHEN IT COMES TO THE REASONS AMERICANS RELY ON CERTAIN SOURCES, THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY.

We see Americans' attitudes toward the 12 specific factors related to trust in a news source vary based on race and ethnicity, even when we control for education and income differences.

In particular, African American and Hispanic Americans are more likely than white Americans to say it is very important that they see their communities and people like them in the reporting. They are also more likely to put importance on sources that shares their points of view, and on the news being presented in a way that is entertaining.

In addition, African American adults assign greater importance on the presentation of diverse points of view than do white adults.

**There are racial and ethnic differences in why Americans rely on certain sources.**



Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

## ABOUT THE STUDY

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the Media Insight Project, an initiative of the American Press Institute (API) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The survey was conducted from February 18 through March 6, 2016. The survey was funded by API. Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and AP collaborated on all aspects of the study.

The Media Insight Project also received input on the study design and suggestions for the survey from industry experts in both academia and the media during a day-long meeting in Washington D.C. on January 21, 2016.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 2,014 completed the survey – 1,603 via the web and 411 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 40.3 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 36.9 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 94.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 14.1 percent.

The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey (\$2 or \$4 depending on their initial panel recruitment). All interviews were conducted in English by professional interviewers who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study.

Once the sample was selected and fielded, and all the study data had been collected and made final, a poststratification process was used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under- and over- sampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

All analyses were conducted using STATA (version 14), which allows for adjustment of standard errors for complex sample designs. All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or less) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling. Additionally, bivariate differences between subgroups are only reported when they also remain robust in a multivariate model controlling for other demographic, political, and socioeconomic covariates. A comprehensive listing of all study questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on the Media Insight Project's website: [www.mediainsight.org](http://www.mediainsight.org).

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Insight Strategy Group conducted the qualitative research in collaboration with staff from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute.

The research included both ethnographic and focus group components. Thirty-six news consumers between the ages of 18-64 were recruited to participate in the ethnographic portion of the research. Focus Pointe Global recruited the participants based on what news topics they follow and how closely they follow such topics. Half of the participants were recruited from the Philadelphia area so that they could participate in the focus group portion of the research and the other half were recruited from across the country.

The participants were classified into three groups based on their age and topics they follow: 1) 18-34-year-olds who follow “hard” news topics such as politics, local news, crime or education (n=14); 2) 35-64-year-olds who follow “hard” news topics such as politics, local news, crime or education (n=12); 3) 21-64-year-olds who follow “lifestyle” news topics such as sports, celebrities, or entertainment (n=10).

Researchers examined participants’ news behaviors and attitudes around trust in news with Insight Strategy Group’s Mobile Moderator™ app and online platform. From February 24 through February 26, 2016, the participants completed a series of online activities that included sharing information about themselves and their news behavior, answering a series of open-ended questions, and analyzing different aspects of real and hypothetical news stories.

Following the online activities, the 18 participants from the Philadelphia area took part in one of three news forum discussions on March 2, 2016, in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Each news forum lasted about two hours and included six participants who had similar news behaviors. One group included 18-34 year olds who follow hard news, one group included 35-64-year-olds who follow hard news, and one group included 21-64-year-olds who follow lifestyle news. During the discussions, a moderator asked the group members a wide range of questions about their news behavior and what led them to either gain or lose trust in different sources of news.

All of the participants received \$150 for completing the online activities, and an additional \$100 for the focus groups.

## CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

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Amanda Zamora, *ProPublica*  
Carla Zaroni, *The Wall Street Journal*

The views and findings in this report reflect those of the Media Insight Project, and may not reflect those of the experts.

## ABOUT THE MEDIA INSIGHT PROJECT

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration of the American Press Institute and the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with the objective of conducting high-quality, innovative research meant to inform the news industry and the public about various important issues facing journalism and the news business. The Media Insight Project brings together the expertise of both organizations and their respective partners, and involves collaborations among key staff at API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press.

## ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

The American Press Institute conducts research and training, convenes thought leaders, and creates tools to help chart a path ahead for journalism in the 21st century. API is an educational nonadvocacy 501(c)3 nonprofit organization affiliated with the Newspaper Association of America. It aims to help the news media – especially local publishers and newspaper media – advance in the digital age.

## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

The founding principles of the AP-NORC Center include a mandate to preserve carefully and protect the scientific integrity and objectivity of NORC and the journalistic independence of AP. All work conducted by the Center conforms to the highest levels of scientific integrity to prevent any real or perceived bias in the research. All of the work of the Center is subject to review by its advisory committee to help ensure it meets these standards. The Center will publicize the results of all studies and make all datasets and study documentation available to scholars and the public.

## PHOTO CREDITS

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## APPENDIX A: COMPLETE TABULATIONS OF TRUST COMPONENTS BY TOPIC AND SOURCE TYPE

The percent of people who say an item is very or extremely important depends on the topic.

	National politics	Domestic policy	Foreign or international news	Crime and public safety	Local news	Weather or traffic	Sports	Lifestyle
	Percent extremely/very important							
Accuracy								
It gets the facts right	85	82	79	88	77	82	76	65
It presents expert sources and data	79	76	73	68	62	66	66	48
Completeness								
It always has the latest news and information	81	76	78	81	75	78	74	62
The reporting is in-depth	77	72	69	73	64	63	64	49
It covers <i>all</i> the day's events	66	60	68	72	68	59	61	40
Presentation								
It's concise and gets to the point	80	73	70	80	71	73	61	55
It is easy to find news and information you're looking for	73	68	74	75	69	71	68	64
Transparency								
You know and trust its journalists	68	64	62	64	55	58	60	48
It explains the way it gathers and reports news and information	61	59	55	63	58	52	47	47
Balance								
It provides diverse points of view	65	64	57	58	57	48	50	44
You see your community and people like you in the reporting	33	37	25	53	40	35	27	31
It shares your point of view	34	35	19	40	29	36	23	33

	National politics	Domestic policy	Foreign or international news	Crime and public safety	Local news	Weather or traffic	Sports	Lifestyle
<b>Convenience or entertainment</b>								
It presents news and information in a way you can talk about it	70	65	57	67	62	61	65	50
It's a source you've always used	55	51	41	62	55	53	52	42
You can multitask or use it when you're doing something else like household chores	38	44	41	48	39	44	43	38
It makes it entertaining	30	40	26	41	33	38	54	53

Question: Think about why you rely on [insert] for the coverage of [insert]. How important is each of the following for you?

The percent of people who say an item is very or extremely important depends on the type of news source.

	Local TV	National TV	Radio	Newspaper	Media focused on one topic	Online only
<b>Percent extremely/very important</b>						
<b>Accuracy</b>						
It gets the facts right	83	81	83	78	77	72
It presents expert sources and data	70	76	68	70	65	68
<b>Completeness</b>						
It always has the latest news and information	82	77	77	71	79	75
The reporting is in-depth	72	72	66	64	62	57
It covers <i>all</i> the day's events	71	67	57	53	47	47
<b>Presentation</b>						
It's concise and gets to the point	78	76	71	66	69	69
It is easy to find news and information you're looking for	75	70	64	67	74	74
<b>Transparency</b>						
You know and trust its journalists	64	64	63	57	53	53
It explains the way it gathers and reports news and information	59	59	55	48	49	49

	Local TV	National TV	Radio	Newspaper	Media focused on one topic	Online only
<b>Balance</b>						
It provides diverse points of view	58	62	60	56	47	61
You see your community and people like you in the reporting	50	31	33	35	25	36
It shares your point of view	37	35	30	23	26	33
<b>Convenience or entertainment</b>						
It presents news and information in a way you can talk about it	67	66	63	61	63	63
It's a source you've always used	62	51	47	53	50	40
You can multitask or use it when you're doing something else like household chores	48	43	53	20	39	41
It makes it entertaining	42	35	35	28	46	44

Question: Think about why you rely on [NAMED SOURCE] for the coverage of [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED]. How important is each of the following for you?

The topic of the news dictates which features of online news are valued most by digital consumers.

	National politics	Domestic policy	Foreign or international news	Crime and public safety	Local news	Weather or traffic	Sports	Lifestyle
<b>Percent extremely/very important</b>								
It uses visuals such as photos, videos, lists, or charts	47	52	43	72	38	68	47	56
It allows people to comment on news and information	28	35	23	50	23	36	22	29
The news and information include hyperlinks to get more information	43	48	41	60	40	51	36	49
The site or app loads fast	63	63	57	78	57	72	72	69
It works well on my mobile phone	55	60	40	78	56	72	63	70
The ads do not interfere with getting news and information	64	63	55	77	61	70	64	72

Question: Thinking about when you get news from [NAMED SOURCE] on [NEWS TOPIC FOLLOWED] in a digital format, how important is each of the following for you?