

# Young people are abandoning news websites - new research reveals scale of challenge to media

By [Nic Newman](#)

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The crisis in journalism caused by the traditional news media's struggles to cope with the digital revolution has been well documented over many years. But news organisations now face a much more fundamental change driven by generations who have grown up with and rely almost entirely on various digital media.



Source: [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

Data published in this year's Reuters Institute Digital News Report shows an acceleration in the structural shifts towards more digital, mobile and media environments. This is where news content is delivered via social media and now, increasingly video-led platforms such as TikTok, rather than via what to a new generation of media consumers look like the more formal and stuffy traditional of "legacy" media, including newspapers and television.

Not only is consumption of traditional television news and print formats continuing to decline at a relentless rate, but online websites are also struggling to engage news users, despite the tumultuous times in which we live.

One benchmark of this shift is a question we ask about key gateways that people use to access news. Using average data across all 46 countries surveyed in our annual report, we found that more people choose social media each year, mostly at the expense of direct access via a traditional news website or app. Access via search and other aggregators has also increased slightly over time.

## Use of news websites/apps versus social media to access news

These are averages, and it is important to point out that direct connection remains strong in some markets – mainly in northern Europe, where there is keen interest in news and relatively high trust. But elsewhere – especially in parts of Asia, Latin America, and Africa – social media or other aggregators are by far the most important gateways, leaving news brands much more dependent on third-party platforms for traffic.

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Generational differences are also a big part of the story. In almost every country we find that younger users are less likely to go directly to a news site or app and more likely to use social media or other intermediaries.

## **Percentage of people using a news website or app**

Dependence on social media may be growing, but it is not necessarily the same old networks. Across all age groups, Facebook is becoming much less important as a source of news – and by implication as a driver of traffic to news websites. Just 28% say they accessed news via Facebook in 2023 compared with 42% in 2016, based on data from 12 countries we have been tracking since 2014.

This decline is partly driven by Facebook pulling back from news and partly by the way that video-based networks such as YouTube and TikTok are capturing much of the attention of younger users.

Twitter usage is also reportedly declining following the chaotic set of changes introduced by Elon Musk, even if our survey shows relatively stable weekly reach overall.

## **New platforms**

TikTok is the fastest growing social network in our survey, used by 44% of 18–24 year-olds for any purpose and by 20% for news (up five percentage points compared with last year). Our survey results also show that the Chinese-owned app is most heavily used in parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The report also provides evidence that users of TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat tend to pay more attention to celebrities and social media influencers than they do to journalists or media companies when it comes to news topics. This marks a sharp contrast with “legacy” – or more established – social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, where news organisations still attract most attention and lead conversations.

Although news organisations have been experimenting with TikTok accounts, many are struggling to adapt to the more informal tone where creativity is the key to attracting an audience.

These shifts are additionally challenging for publishers because they often require expensive bespoke content to be created and there are few ways to monetise short form videos, with limited linking opportunities back to websites or apps.



## Younger people less likely to read online

These platform shifts are part of a wider move away from reading and towards watching or listening to news content online. While all age groups say they still prefer to read news online because of the speed and control it offers, younger groups are more likely to express preferences for watching or listening to news content. And this translates into greater consumption of short-form videos and podcasts by this group, according to our data.

## News consumption preferences by age and media

Our research over more than a decade has captured the way that all age groups have adopted digital media, alongside more familiar formats such as TV and print. But now we are seeing the emergence of a generation of social natives that are not bound by traditional definitions of news.

As our previous research has shown, younger groups expect news to be engaging, participatory and to be available on their terms – in the networks and platforms where they spend their time. Trust is not a given, it needs to be earned – as much by journalists as by any other creator of content.

For all the difficulties this entails – around trust, attention and business models – this is the media environment that the public is increasingly choosing for themselves. It is one where journalists and news media will need to carve out their place if they want to maintain their relevance and connection with the wider public.

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