

Digital news study reveals the power of star journalists

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(Phys.org) —The power of key journalists in helping drive traffic to online news brands has been revealed in a new study published by the University of Oxford.

The Reuters Institute Digital News Report, based on YouGov surveys of more than 18,000 people in 10 countries, shows that the reputation of individual writers was cited as one of the few reasons why people might be prepared to pay for [online news](#).

In France, Spain and the US, the role of the reporter is now considered

as being almost as important in creating trust as the role of the news brand itself. In the UK, Germany and Finland, mainstream news brands are still the main drivers of trust, but even in these countries the journalist is an important factor. The growing importance of individual journalists has been fuelled by the ease with which new enterprises can set up and distribute content in the internet era, suggests the report.

The journalists were a key reason for taking out an online news subscription in France (40%) and the United States (35%). Those surveyed said other key factors were the role of the news brand in pulling together a broad package of news coverage and the freedom to access news on any device.

There is also evidence to show how journalists are playing a key role in [social media](#). In the UK, YouGov's analysis for the Reuters Institute (which tracked actual usage across a representative sample of Twitter users) suggests that 64% (c. 5.4 million) are following a professional news account, with 48% (c. 2.6 million) following at least one journalist account, compared with 40% (c. 2.2 million) who follow a breaking news account.

Report author Nic Newman, a research associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, said: 'Digital and social media seem to be encouraging journalism with a human face. In an increasingly competitive market there is likely to be an increasing economic premium attached to the very best writers and journalists.'

The report identifies the main threats to the traditional sources of news – with the smartphone and social media as the most powerful agents of change. A generational split in how people find and interpret news is also emerging: younger people 'snack' on news throughout the day, whereas older news consumers prefer to read a newspaper or watch a news programme.

The report tracks how the rapid shift to mobile consumption of news has meant that some news organisations are outpaced. In the UK, Denmark, Finland and Germany, traditional news brands have managed to maintain market share online at the same time as driving editorial and business innovation. However, the report remarks that in Japan and the US, many established news organisations are finding it hard to move offline success to the digital world.

WhatsApp is emerging as a key network for news in some countries, while Twitter turns out not to be as popular as British and American journalists often assume. YouTube is a vital tool in some countries while it remains virtually unused for news in others, adds the report.

Smartphones are encouraging users to consume news more frequently, reducing the dependence on appointment to view television and newspaper editions, says the report. It adds that as these trends increase, profound effects on society are possible if different groups develop their own narrow relationship with news sources rather than sharing a broader range of views.

Director of the Reuters Institute and joint editor of the report, Dr David Levy, said: 'In some countries such as the UK established news brands have retained their loyalty in the more competitive online environment, but the rapid growth of social media as a way of discovering and consuming news has a range of possible ramifications. While choice proliferates, consumption may narrow and reliance on recommendations from like-minded friends could mean people are less exposed to a broad [news](#) agenda.'

Provided by Oxford University

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