[GB] Ofcom reports AI and online intermediaries reshape news consumption

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The UK's communications regulator, Ofcom, published its latest report on how news is reaching UK audiences across broadcast and digital services. Its *News Report 2026* (NR) depicts a news market in which distribution is increasingly controlled by online intermediaries, while established broadcasters remain central to what audiences consume and trust.

The central finding concerns intermediation. More than four fifths of adults encountered news online during the month prior to the publication of the report (September 2026), while nearly three quarters used an intermediary such as social media, a video-sharing platform (VSP), search engine, news aggregator or AI tool. Fewer accessed news directly through publishers' websites and apps. Ofcom also estimates that online intermediaries account for over a third of daily time spent consulting news (NR, pp. 9-11). News is increasingly encountered incidentally through feeds, recommendations, search results and shares from other users rather than through deliberate access by visiting a broadcaster or publisher.

AI emerges as a gateway for the first time. Around one in five adults reported using an AI service, summary or overview for news, with ChatGPT being the most widely used tool. Use is concentrated among younger adults and more affluent households (NR, p. 10). Ofcom treats this as an emerging form of intermediation because users may receive generated answers or summaries without reaching the originating provider. Audience confidence remains limited, however. News delivered through AI services is rated below traditional platforms for trustworthiness, accuracy and impartiality, although above social media and VSPs on these measures like trustworthiness, impartiality and accuracy (NR, p. 22).

Social media and VSPs remain the dominant intermediary route. Six in ten adults use them for news. Facebook still has the widest reach, but YouTube is closing the gap. Ofcom notes that nearly half of in-home YouTube viewing in 2025 took place on television sets, underlining the overlap between internet distribution and conventional viewing environments (NR, pp. 12-13).

That shift has not removed established broadcasters from the audience's news diet. The BBC reaches 77% of adults through its own services and remains the

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most used news provider in every age group. Its reach rises further when BBC material encountered on selected social media and VSPs is included, particularly among younger adults (NR, pp. 13-18). Across the major social and video platforms measured, UK broadcasters account for a substantial share of news encountered. BBC News emerges as the most prominent individual provider, with Sky and ITV also visible. Intermediaries are changing where news is discovered without necessarily changing who produced it.

For 12-15 year olds, social media and VSPs are the main routes to news, with TikTok and YouTube leading individual services. Broadcaster material remains common across most platforms, but TikTok is the exception: children using it for news are slightly more likely to encounter influencers, independent commentators and online creators than UK broadcasters (NR, pp. 6, 20-21). Children also appear to place greater trust in broadcaster news than in news encountered on social platforms, and broadcaster content seen within those platforms is regarded as more trustworthy than material from online-native sources (NR, pp. 24-25).

Trust provides an important counterweight to the reported distribution pattern. Television, radio and newspapers receive significantly higher ratings for trustworthiness, accuracy and impartiality than online platforms overall, despite increasing competition. Social media and VSPs receive the lowest ratings (NR, p. 22). The contrast is especially visible around democratic events. Research after a series of elections in May 2026 found that television was the most widely used source of election information, while almost two thirds preferred longer-form election coverage such as articles and news bulletins. Traditional providers, including public service broadcasters, were also rated more highly than social media for election news trust and accuracy (NR, pp. 6, 31-32).

Local news shows similar co-existence of digital access and established provision. Online routes are widely used, but BBC websites, apps and regional television bulletins remain among the leading local sources. Seven in ten adults regard local news as one of the most important forms of news, indicating that fragmented distribution has not removed demand for geographically specific provision (NR, pp. 6, 26-29).

Finally, one methodological detail deserves attention. Ofcom refined its survey approach to capture "more passive or incidental exposure" to news. This time, participants were asked to recall news they had encountered over the preceding month, replacing the rather elastic "nowadays" with a defined timeframe. The change was intended to elicit more considered accounts of their actual behaviour, rather than broad impressions of their usual habits. Reported consumption was consequently higher across platforms, so direct comparisons with earlier years require caution (NR, p. 3). Read on that basis, the broader picture reported in 2026 is that the UK's access routes to news are becoming more fragmented, more personalised and platform-dependent, while regulated broadcasters continue to

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supply much of the news reaching audiences and retain a comparatively strong position on trust.

News Report 2026: an overview of how people get their news and attitudes towards the provision of news

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/online-research/adult-and-childrens-news-consumption-survey-2026/news-consumption-in-the-uk-2026_research-findings.pdf?v=425341

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