



## Shifting Trends in Online News Consumption

**For Prelims:** [Information Technology \(Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code\) Rules, 2021](#), Press Council of India (PCI), Regulatory Authorities for Press and Media.

**For Mains:** Role of digital media in fake news spread and its impact on social harmony and national security, Responsibilities of media organizations in ensuring accurate and unbiased reporting.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

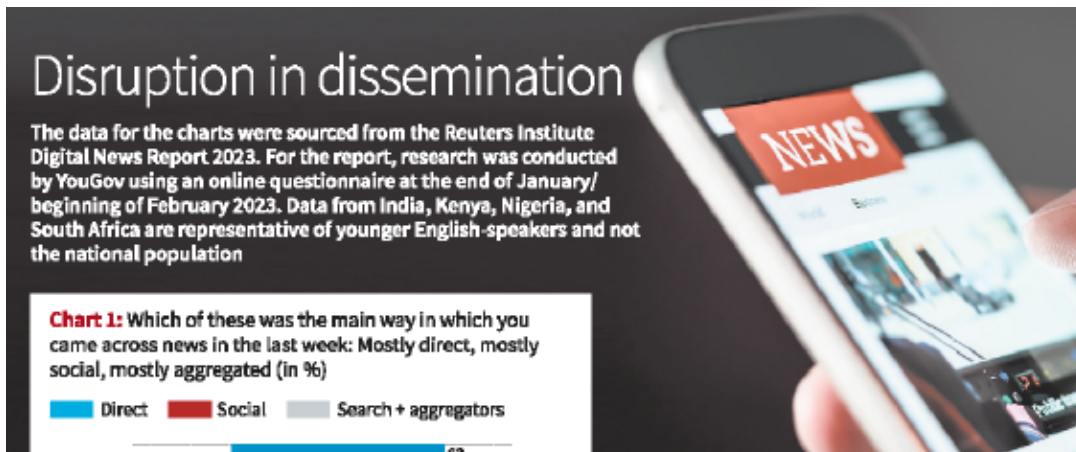
The Reuters Institute's recently published **2023 Digital News Report** has unveiled significant shifts in online news consumption patterns across the globe.

- The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is **dedicated to exploring the future of journalism worldwide through debate, engagement, and research.**

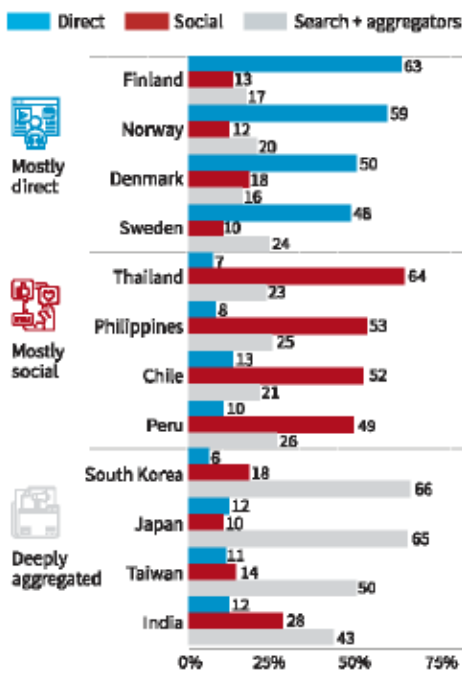
### What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **Shifting Patterns in Online News Consumption in India:**
  - Indians are increasingly turning to **search engines and mobile news aggregators(43%)** (online platforms or software devices that collect news stories) as their **primary sources of online news**, moving away from traditional news websites.
    - Only 12% prefer reading news from direct sources, i.e. newspapers, while 28% prefer social media for news reading.
  - Prefer **watching or listening to news content over reading it.**
- **Regional Contrasts in Online News Engagement:**
  - [Scandinavian countries](#) maintain direct engagement with established news brands.
  - Asia, Latin America, and Africa rely heavily on social media for news.
- **Diverse Preferences Across Countries:**
  - Reading dominates in Finland and the UK (80%).
  - **India and Thailand** prefer **watching news online (40%).**
  - The **Philippines leads with 52% favouring video news.**
- **Impact of Covid-19 on News Consumption:**
  - There are alarming declines in both the reading and sharing of news in India. The data show that access to **online news** has sharply fallen by 12 % points between 2022 and 2023.
    - Television viewership, especially among younger and urban individuals, has also decreased by 10%.
  - The decline in news engagement can be linked, in part, to the diminishing influence of the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) since the relaxation of lockdown measures in April 2022.
- **Trust in News:**
  - Trust in news in **India has remained stagnant at 38%** between 2021 and 2023, ranking among the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.

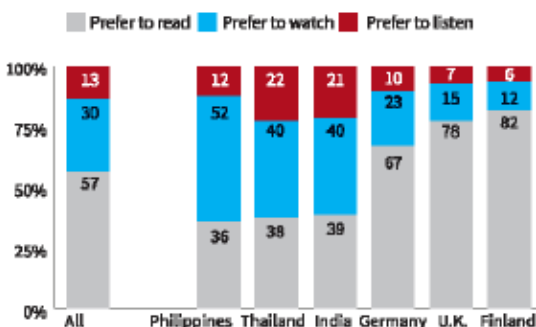
- In countries such as **Finland (69%)** and **Portugal (58%)**, trust levels are higher.
- On the other hand, **countries with higher degrees of political polarization** such as the United States (32%), Argentina (30%), Hungary (25%), and Greece (19%) **have lower trust levels.**



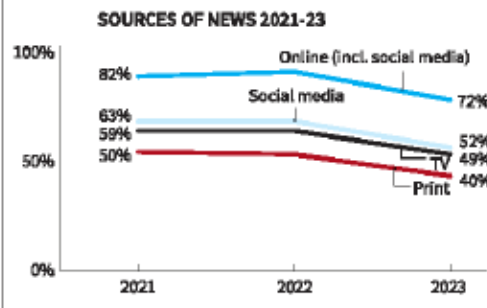
**Chart 1:** Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week: Mostly direct, mostly social, mostly aggregated (in %)



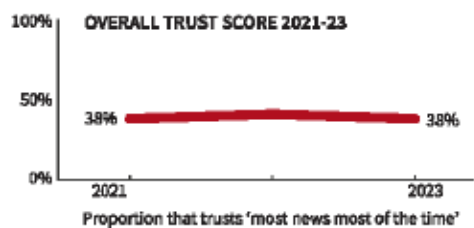
**Chart 2:** In thinking about your online habits around news and current affairs, which of the following statements applies best to you: Prefer to read, prefer to watch, prefer to listen? (in %)



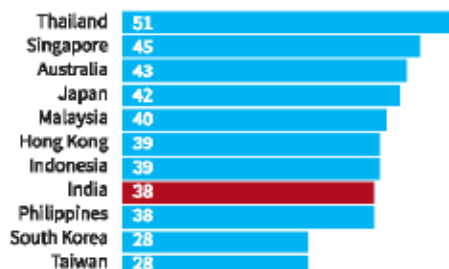
**Chart 3:** The chart shows sources of news for Indian news consumers between 2021 and 2023



**Chart 4:** The chart shows trust in news among Indian consumers between 2021 and 2023



**Chart 5:** The chart plots the share of respondents across nations in the Asia-Pacific who said that they trust 'most news most of the time'



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## What are the Challenges Faced by India Due to Changes in News Consumption Patterns?

### ▪ Misinformation and Fake News:

- The shift away from traditional news sources and increased reliance on search engines and social media **may contribute to the spread of misinformation and fake news.** This

can lead to **public confusion, false beliefs, and even social unrest.**

▪ **Quality of Journalism:**

- A decreased preference for traditional news websites and newspapers could impact the quality of journalism.
  - Independent and credible journalism may **face financial challenges**, potentially **leading to a decline in investigative reporting and in-depth analysis.**

▪ **Democracy and Polarization:**

- The influence of social media as a news source can contribute to **political polarization.** People may be exposed to biased information, which can ultimately affect the democratic process.

▪ **Media Trust:**

- India's persistently **low trust in news is concerning for a healthy democracy.**
  - Rebuilding trust in the media is essential for informed citizenship.

▪ **Youth Disconnect:**

- The drop in television viewership among younger people suggests a disconnect between traditional news mediums. Engaging and informing the younger generation through **reliable news sources is essential for their civic education.**

▪ **Dependence on Algorithmic Feeds:**

- Relying on search engines and social media for news means individuals are exposed to **content determined by algorithms. This may limit exposure to diverse perspectives and important news stories.**

## What Initiatives Have Been Taken to Curtail Fake News in India?

▪ **[Information Technology \(Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code\) Rules, 2021:](#)**

- Proposes that social media **platforms must delete content labeled false by the Press Information Bureau's fact-check unit.**
- Rule aims to **curb the spread of fake news and misinformation on social media platforms.**

▪ **IT Act 2008:**

- **[Section 66 A of the IT Act 2008](#)** regulates offences related to electronic communication.
- This includes **punishing individuals who send offensive messages through communication services** or social media platforms. This act can be used to penalize those who spread fake news through electronic communication.

▪ **Indian Penal Code of 1860:**

- It **regulates news that causes riots and information** that causes defamation. This act can be used to hold individuals accountable for spreading fake news that incites violence or defames someone's character.

▪ **Related Authorities:**

◦ **Press Council of India (PCI):**

- It is a statutory body established under the **[Press Council Act of 1978.](#)**
  - The PCI also issues guidelines and codes of conduct for the print media.
  - PCI helps maintain "high standards of public taste" and foster responsibility among citizens.

◦ **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB):**

- The MIB grants licenses and permissions to private broadcasters, and monitors their content and performance.

◦ **News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA):**

- It is an independent body that serves as a representative of private television news, current affairs, and digital broadcasters.
- The NBSA's purpose is to **set high standards, ethics, and practices for news broadcasting.** The NBSA also considers and decides on complaints against broadcasters related to the content of their broadcasts.

◦ **Broadcasting Content Complaint Council (BCCC):**

- Admits complaints against TV broadcasters for objectionable TV content and fake news.

- **Indian Broadcast Foundation (IBF):**
  - It also looks into the complaints against content aired by channels.

## Way Forward

- Promote **media literacy programs** in schools and communities to help individuals **critically evaluate news sources and identify misinformation.**
- Encourage partnerships between **fact-checking organizations**, government agencies, and social media platforms to identify and correct false information.
- India should explore the possibility of enacting legislation similar to **Australia's that mandates digital platforms to pay local media outlets for using their content.**
  - This can help support the struggling news industry and ensure fair compensation for content creators and **encourage them to provide authentic and original information.**

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Mains**

**Q.** What are social networking sites and what security implications do these sites present? **(2013)**

**Q.** Religious Indoctrination via digital media has resulted in Indian youth joining ISIS. What is ISIS and its mission? How can ISIS be dangerous to the internal security of our country? **(2015)**

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