



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?

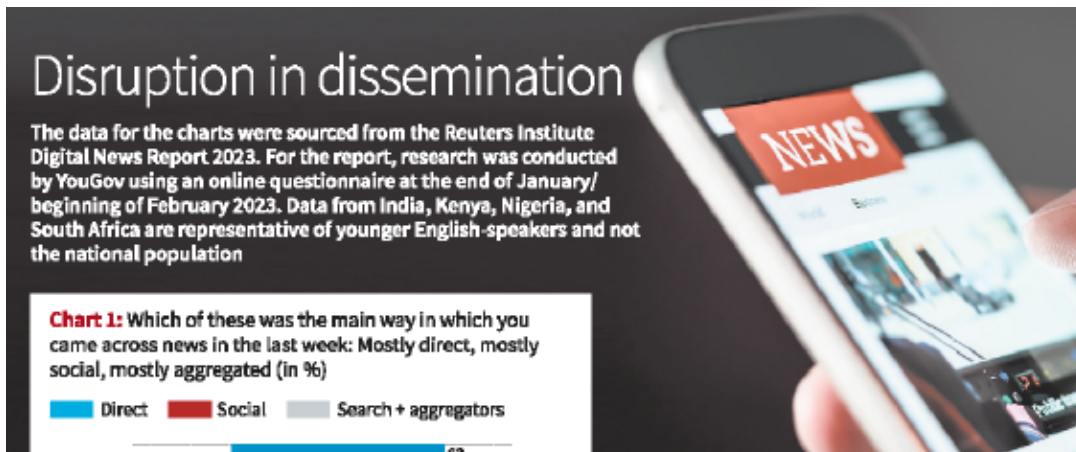
The Reuters Institute's recently published **2023 Digital News Report** has unveiled significant shifts in online news consumption patterns across the globe.

- 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.**



Disruption in dissemination

The data for the charts were sourced from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023. For the report, research was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire at the end of January/ beginning of February 2023. Data from India, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are representative of younger English-speakers and not the national population

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 %)

Direct Social Search + aggregators

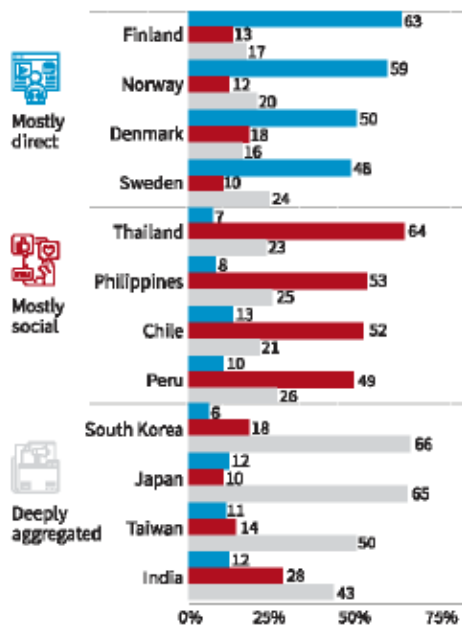


Chart 2: In thinking about your online habits around news and current affairs, which of the following statements applies best to you: Prefer to read, prefer to watch, prefer to listen? (in %)

Prefer to read Prefer to watch Prefer to listen

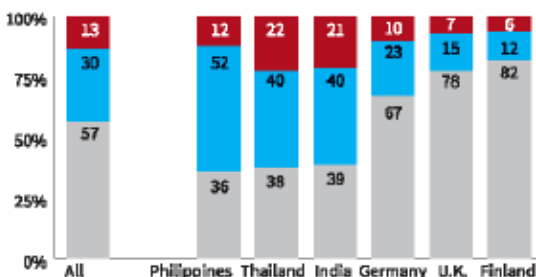


Chart 3: The chart shows sources of news for Indian news consumers between 2021 and 2023

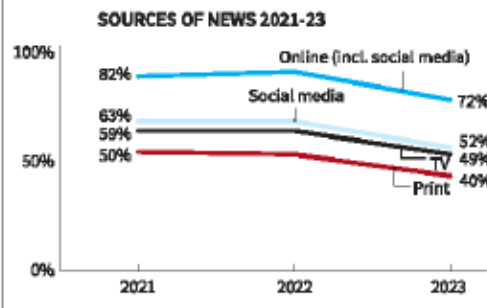


Chart 4: The chart shows trust in news among Indian consumers between 2021 and 2023

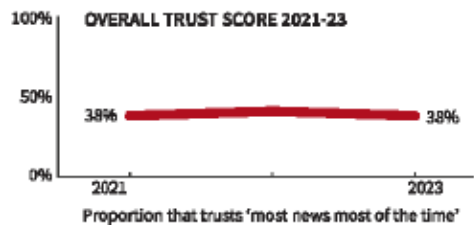
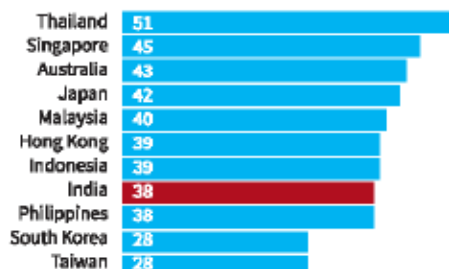


Chart 5: The chart plots the share of respondents across nations in the Asia-Pacific who said that they trust 'most news most of the time'



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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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