

M&C SAATCHI TALK

EARNED MEDIA IS DEAD



LONG LIVE EARNED CONVERSATIONS.

Why the evolution of earned media means a rethink of PR communications.



Changing the approach to conversations that drive change.

The events of the last two years have dramatically accelerated changes in both the way earned media is created, and how it is consumed. The continued shift to digital and mobile has had a huge impact on how people access editorial. Media owners and publishing houses have reinvented themselves in an intense period of economic pressure and global crises. We are all being served news and wider editorial content in more ways than ever before.

The pandemic renewed consumer trust in, and respect for journalism and the power of influential voices. It has brought marketing and communications closer together. Public Relations has established a more powerful voice in the boardroom as a result.

Despite all this change – and the opportunities presented – the PR industry's approach to driving earned media coverage and sparking conversation hasn't progressed as much in the last 15 years.

It's time for a rethink: To modernise the approach to earning attention and leading conversations on behalf of brands, organisations and governments. To create more opportunities to drive meaningful change through meaningful conversation.

Attention that is earned is a powerful thing

Sales. Stock price. Search ranking. Reputation. Earned media impacts all of these and more, with communications having the ability to tell a story to affect real change for brands and businesses.

The power of an audience choosing to engage with a brand, the impact of word of mouth, the endorsement of a third party, the building of communities. All examples of the influence of earned channel activity.

“People want to do business with companies they feel good about, that support their values and priorities. The PR function communicates what the company stands for... things that build confidence in a company, things that are too corporate for a simple ad.”¹

Brian Brockman, VP of comms,
US and Canada, Nissan



+26%

Rise in overall ROI when earned media is incorporated in campaign planning²

Earned media (44%) has nearly double the impact of advertising (23%) when it comes to building trust in a brand³

That's why earned is in demand

New business consultancy and intermediary, AAR Group reported that Integrated and advertising briefs that include PR, rose 48.2% from 2020 to 2021 in its latest New Business Pulse Report.

Post-pandemic, we're seeing consumers gravitating towards authentic brands that offer real value to people. Never has authentic and meaningful brand communication been more important, an approach that comes naturally to PR and storytelling through earned channels, helping develop ideas that work harder, travel further and have greater impact, and never has it been more interactive – with a growing number of opportunities to converse with audiences, not just broadcast to them.

“More client briefs now ask for an earned first creative as the safety net of paid media is slipping away. Truth is that clients now realise that consumers are savvy to traditional adverts and see earned as the way forward to drive ideas that deliver real impact and return on investment for brands.”

Duncan Wood, Managing Partner, Ingenuity

+48%

Rise in integrated and advertising briefs that include PR among other disciplines, from 2020 to 2021⁴

**Earned ideas
have the
power to...**

**SHAPE
CULTURE**

OUT



**INSPIRE
ACTION**

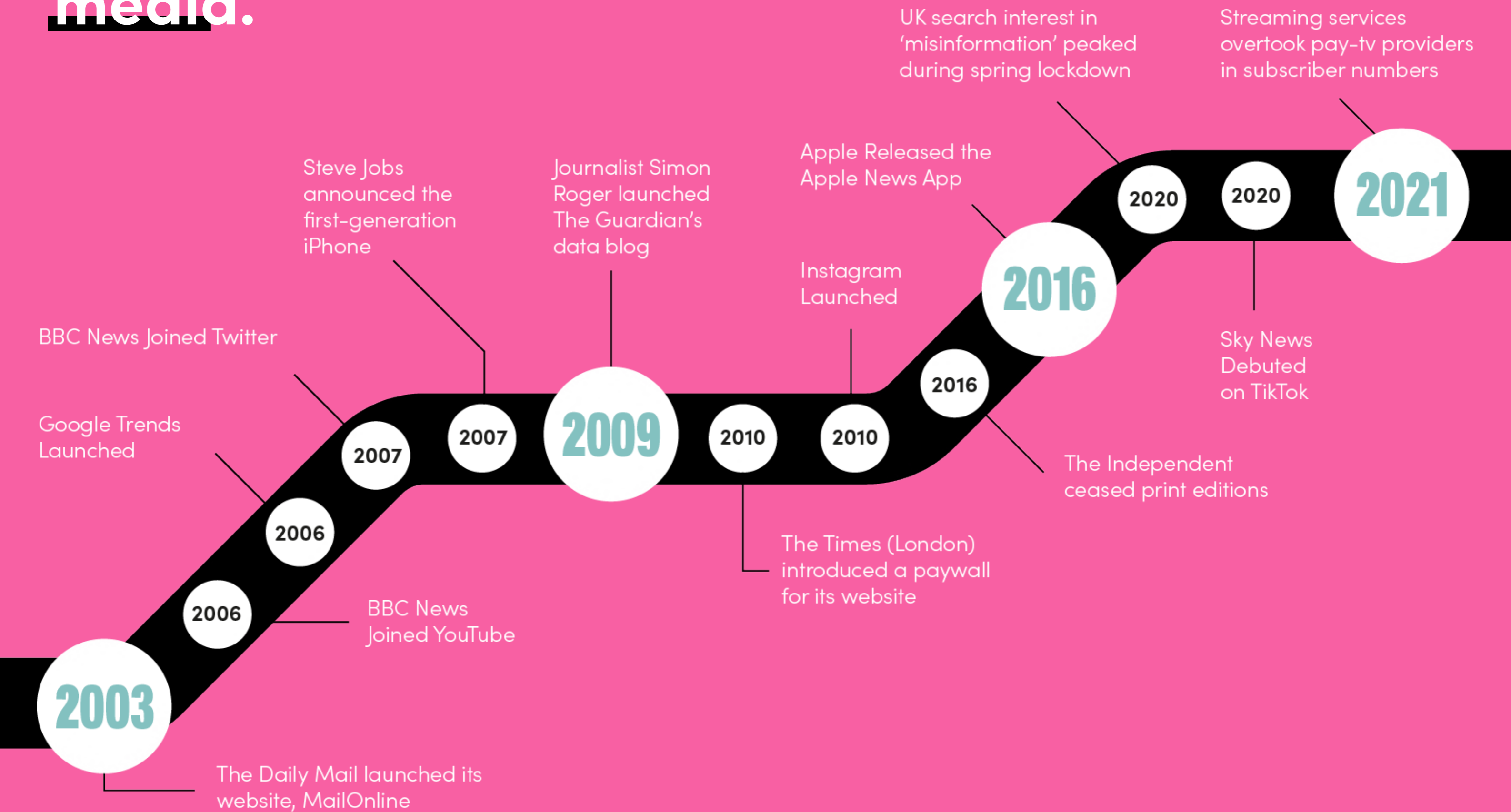
**CHANGE
BEHAVIOUR**



**THE
EVOLUTION
OF EARNED**



Two decades of change in earned media.



We're accessing information in more ways than ever

Most people in the UK get their news via their mobile device (68%) – more than laptops at 43% and tablets at 24% – and this shift has led to a change in the shape of news and the way it's presented to us.⁵

News related video clips, email and notification alerts and radio news and podcasts are some of the methods of accessing news that have grown over the last four to five years.

Another channel rising in use is the e-newsletter. Online newsletter publisher Substack has over 1M paying subscribers, giving writers and creators the power

to run their own media empire. We are seeing social platforms jump on this in response to rising popularity, with Facebook exploring a new publishing platform integrated with Facebook Pages.

Receiving email alerts or notifications of news



3%

Listen to radio news online



2%

Share existing news related video clips



2%

Watch news related video clips



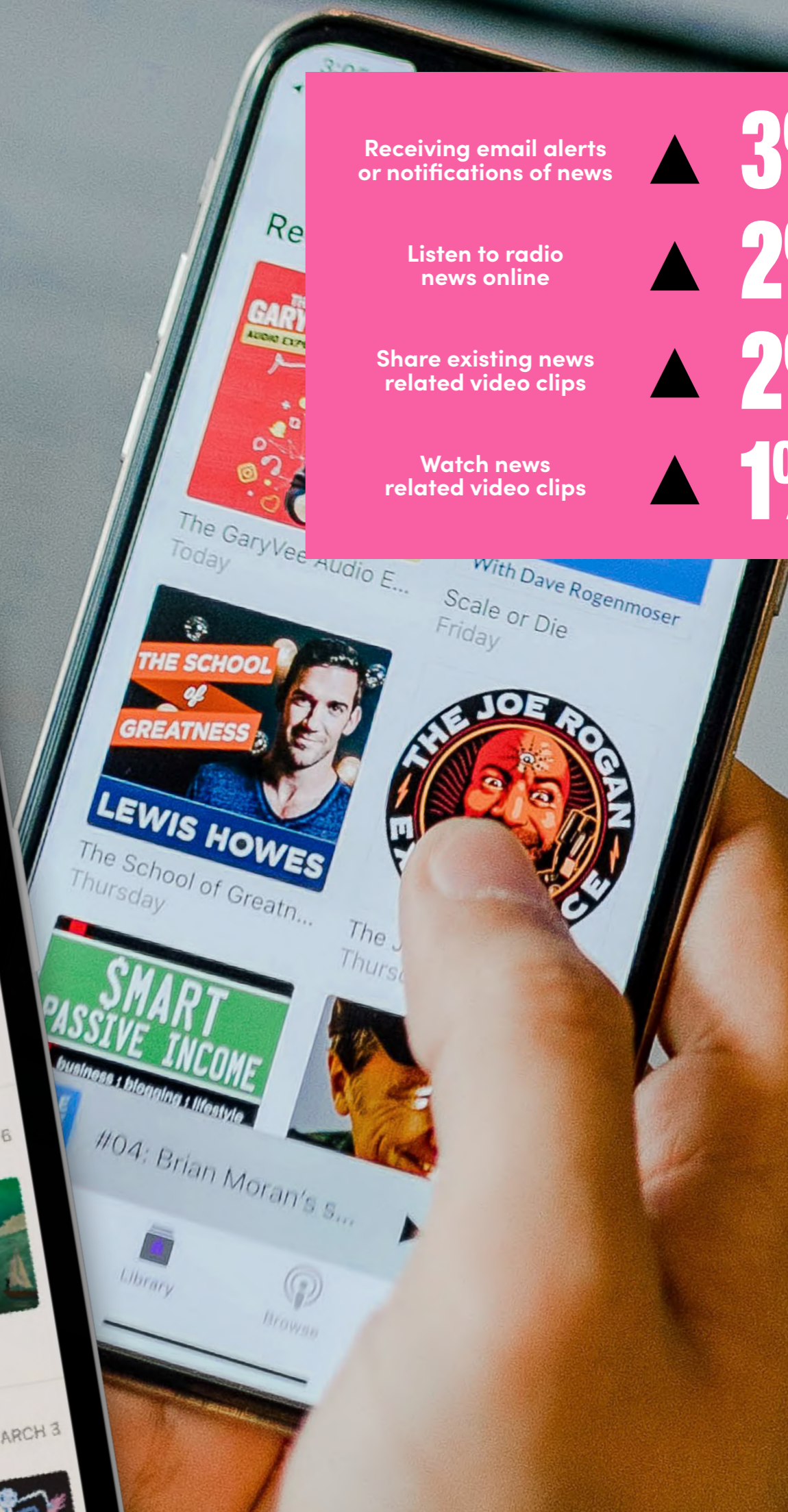
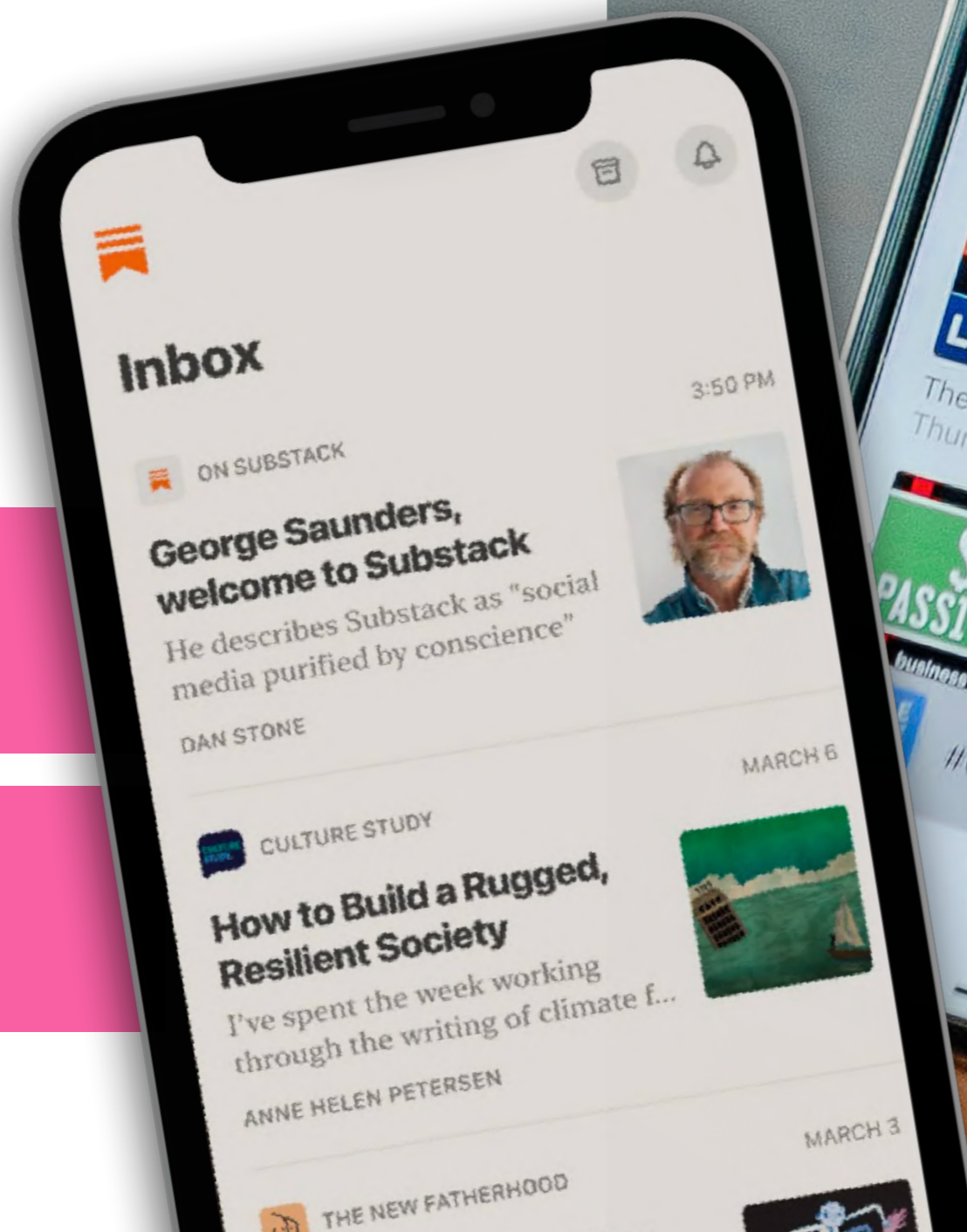
1%⁸

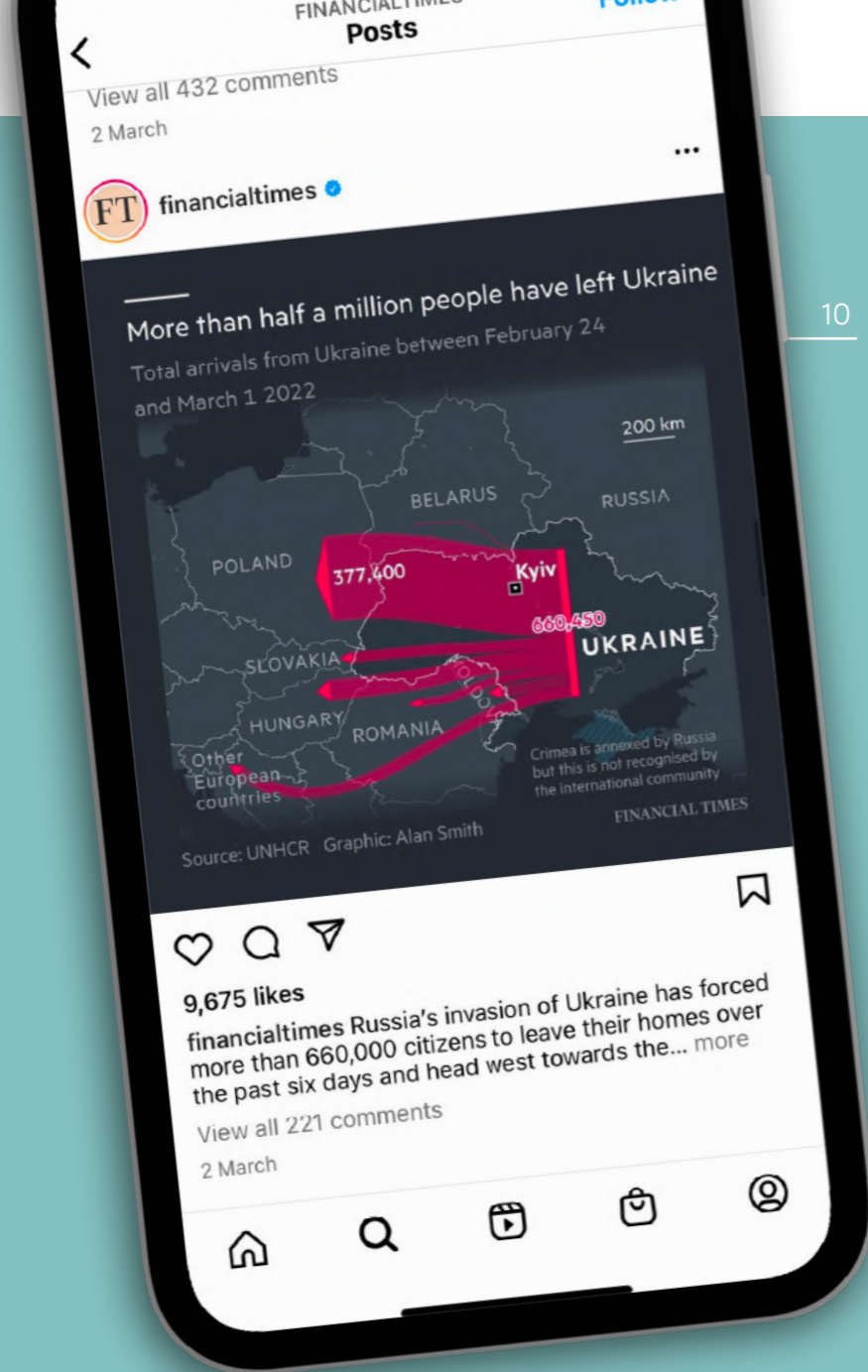
1.2M

new podcasts were added to the Spotify platform in 2021 alone⁶

1M

Paying subscribers to the Substack newsletter⁷





10

“Being creative in how you tell stories through infographics, explainers and video... It’s a recognition the audience consumes content in different ways.”⁹

Damian Radcliffe, honorary research fellow at Cardiff University’s School of Journalism



Editorial comes in many different shapes and sizes

New story formats are also being used by publications to capture consumer attention.

Text remains the most popular format through which people access news with 68% of respondents in the UK in 2021 saying they read news stories online.¹¹

However, the way online publishers structure stories with text has changed. The golden rule of journalism is that the first few lines of a story should grab the reader straight away. We are now seeing this come to life instead as attention-grabbing video titles and ‘clickbait’ style

copy hooks, with journalists borrowing lessons from advertising copywriters and even YouTubers.

Video formats are also gaining traction in online news, with 28% more people in 2021 watching video related clips than in the previous year.¹²

Increasingly, data is used in creating or elevating news stories. Visualising and mashing data has historically been the responsibility of designers and coders, but an increasing number of people with editorial backgrounds are trying their hand at both.

41%

**news penetration
on social media of
those aged 18-24**

49%

**of adults use
social media
for news**

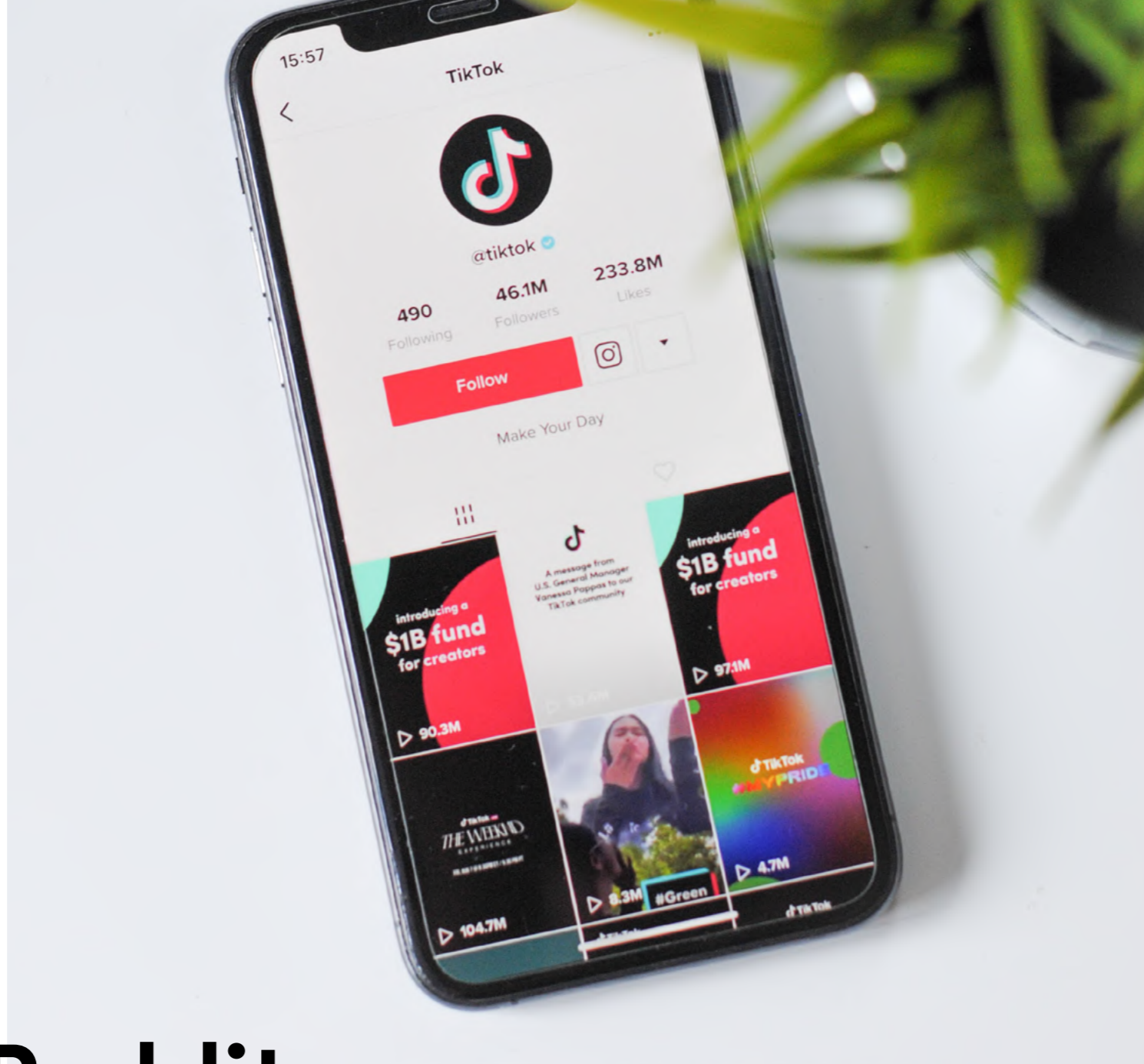
Half of adults now get their news from social media

When it comes to news consumption, the use of social media platforms for access to a variety of news sources online, has steadily increased by 21% from 2013 to 2021, resulting in nearly half of adults (49%) using social media for news today.¹³

Shockingly, this is now higher than people who consume news via newspaper websites (11%) and print newspapers (7%).¹⁴

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the rise in editorial consumption on social media has largely been driven by the younger demographics, with Gen Z (aged 18-24) and younger millennials (aged 25-34), leading the charge.

News penetration on social media has reached 41% of those aged between 18-24, followed by TV at 33%.¹⁵



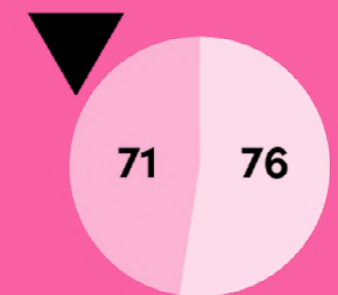
TikTok and Reddit are the fastest growing social sources of news

Of the social platforms, Facebook continues to lead as the key channel for news consumption. However, as overall users of the platform decline in number, fewer adults are using Facebook as a source of news in 2021, dropping 5% on the previous year.

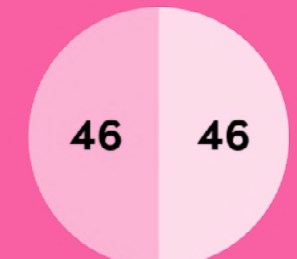
Both Reddit and TikTok have increased by 8% and 6% respectively, as publishers and media owners get to grips with these channels, specific audience behaviours and formats.

Social media channels being used for news¹⁶

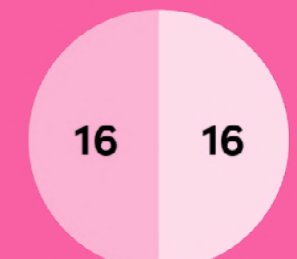
● 2021
● 2022



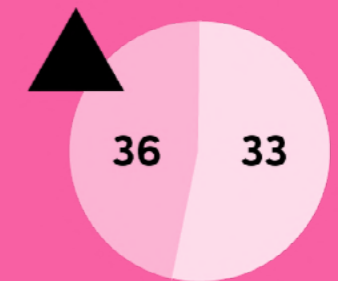
Facebook



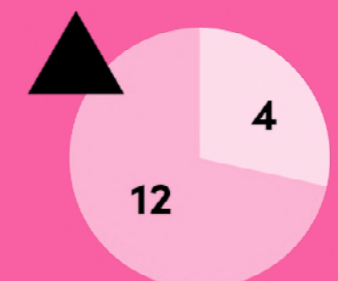
Twitter



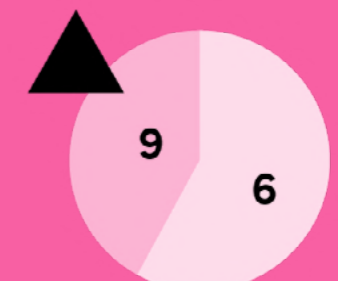
Snapchat



Twitter



Instagram



Reddit

Most news we read is still made by the news media

Perhaps reassuringly, the biggest source of the news we consume on social platforms is direct from publishers and news organisations. The rest is that shared by family, friends or others we follow.

This is especially the case for Snapchat users, as on that platform 67% of the news consumed is created and shared by news outlets. Twitter is the next most popular

for consumers viewing news organisation content (59%).

Good news for publishers, but for brands looking for a place within conversations, it also indicates that the most influential voices are still likely to be found within news media organisations.



Proportion of news accessed via news organisations on social media in 2021¹⁷



52%

Facebook



67%

Snapchat



59%

Twitter



50%

Instagram



Up 3%



Up 5%



No change



Down 5%



The resurgence of hyper local

Regional newspapers continue a year-on-year decline, with only 32% of adults using them for news.¹⁸ However, in recent years, green shoots have emerged from 'village pump' journalism, free papers both in print and online, and the 300 local community radio stations that have sprung up to take the baton.¹⁹

Over recent years, local newspapers have provided the social glue that brought communities to life, as places where people see themselves as participating in a joint enterprise with people they know and understand and care about.

On the whole, regional papers are less likely to intentionally publish misleading information. Unlike national papers, local news companies maintain higher standards of fact-checking and subbing,

ultimately leading to more trustworthy sources according to the Edelman Trust Barometer.

In the USA, Nextdoor, the neighbourhood social network, has seen explosive growth over the past two years as homebound users became more fixated on what was happening on a hyper-local level. One in three US households are on the platform, up from one in five a year ago. Last year, the number of daily active users increased 50% year-over-year.²⁰

Misinformation rages on...

Fake news and misinformation isn't new but its impact has increased sharply, especially in recent years, corresponding with the rise of social media.

Individuals have become sources of news, be that individual writers or just the opinionated. It means the spread of fake news is phenomenal - often the most shocking, remarkable and 'did you know' content is the most shareable.

As the platforms themselves do not have the same codes of ethics or safeguarding as regulated news journalism, audiences are not as well protected, meaning that content - from large-scale news events to small-scale product reviews - can be misleading.

Unfortunately, misinformation doesn't just impact the brands in question, it can affect consumer confidence across a whole category.

Brands should not sit back and leave misinformation unchallenged, even if they're not the one caught up in the argument.

They should have experts ready to step up and address misinformation. And for long-term impact, brands should look to partner with relevant expert voices of authority to make sure the truth cuts through the misinformation noise.



Regular users who feel social media is trustworthy²¹

33%

67%

of regular users feel print newspapers are trustworthy

Conversation insight #1: Chloe Combi

Author and Gen-Z expert

“Generation Z and (soon) Generation A, are the first truly digital native generation, where social media is their media, and it won't be unusual for a sample of any 100 fifteen-year-olds in the UK, Europe and the USA to have never bought or read a physical magazine or newspaper. Moreover, the days of younger audiences watching collective news programmes like the Six O'clock news even with parents has long passed.

Gen Z's are more media-savvy and hooked than previous generations of teenagers, simply because around 96% (on average) Western teenagers have or have access to a smart phone (by the age of 15 – 84% by age 11) and are therefore embedded in an endless news and information cycle of which every brand and company must compete for.

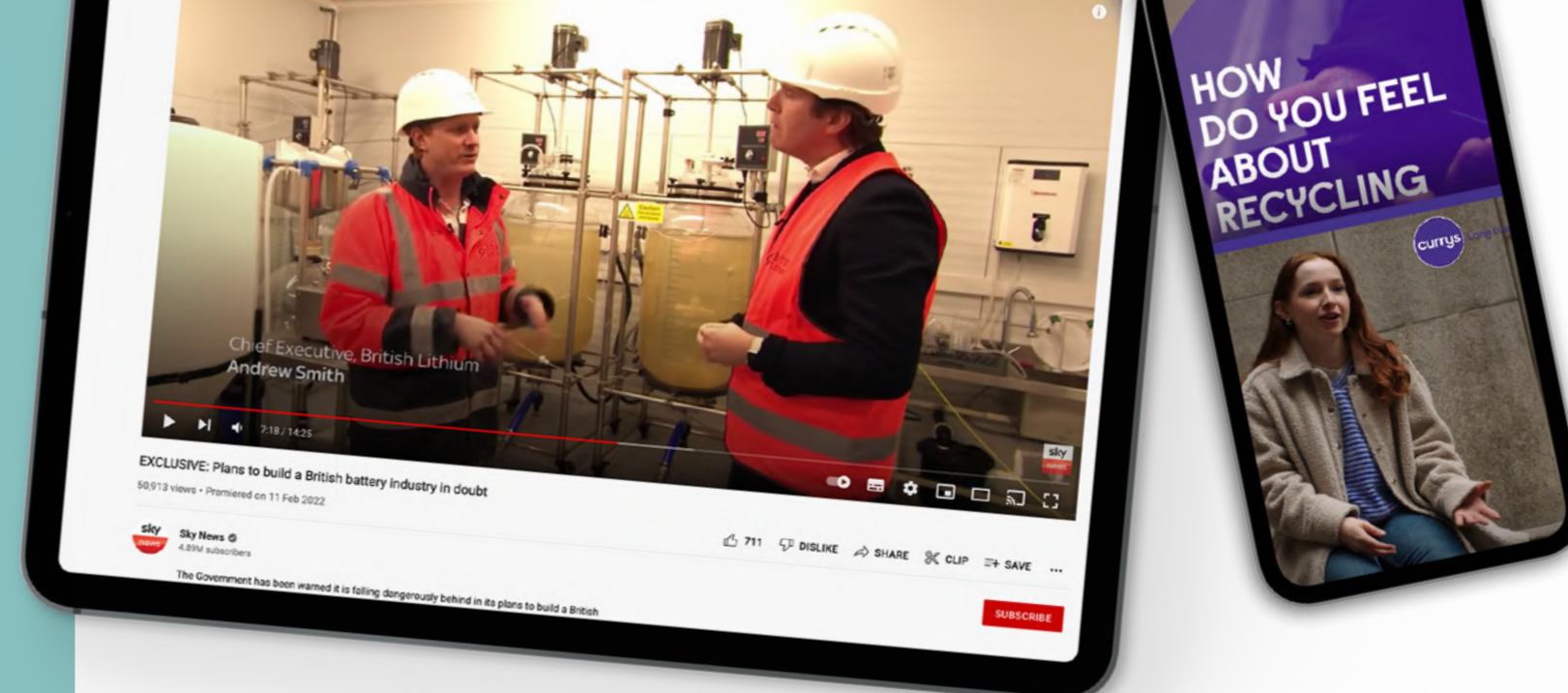
Gen Z's primary source of news is social media. Closely behind this for older Gen Z's in particular, is news alerts they will get from their phone, which they can personalise to their interests. Almost all Gen Z's over 15 will receive news alerts whether football, celebrities or more serious news content, and these often divert them to longer reads or more typically video sources on YouTube or news sources like the BBC, Sky News, Ch.4 etc. Though Gen Z will use platforms like YouTube and TikTok to find news, surprising numbers of them will specifically seek out serious news channels (as opposed to for example popular YouTubers or TikTokers) as news sources.”

An evolution in story formats

The rise in new platforms and formats, has led to many publications diversifying how they tell one singular story with a variety of assets across channels.

Everything from short 60 second clips on TikTok to audio only and even longer form video content.

Providing a single press release or even one video format is no longer adequately serving the needs of digital journalists.



Conversation insight #2: Scott Beasley

Assistant Editor at Sky News

“Whilst linear TV audiences continue to decline slowly, big stories like Covid and Ukraine show that when important news happens people still turn to TV – in a big way – with viewing numbers soaring at times of crisis.

But it's just as important to tell the story on the right platform at the right time. Stories should be multi-platform aware – why not think podcast first? Or how about making a story visual to get increased pickup from social media platforms.

The truth is news organisations are delivering stories on new platforms – both the BBC and Sky News have caught up with new upstarts by creating a big presence on the like of TikTok and Snapchat.

In fact, most serious news organisations now have specific journalists dedicated to the audiences they have on these platforms.

Also, audio continues to grow at pace in terms audience and importance, with more resource still flooding into podcasts and even linear radio.

But another trend is clear – the fusing of visual and audio formats with podcasts being simulcast in video and vice versa. In fact, new broadcaster TalkTV will effectively fuse the radio and TV output for large parts of the schedule.

So, just as the news media are facing up to times of change, it's equally important that brands and PR agencies adapt their approach to the stories they want to tell.”

Mainstream media conversation doesn't reflect the lives of ethnic minorities

Ethnic minority groups are 140.6% more likely than the GB average to access news through blogs not associated with media organisations, and 27.2% more likely to use social networks as source of news. They are also more likely to access news via Email newsletter or RSS feed.

This audience is 50% less likely than average to read print newspapers.²²

On top of this, publishers are not representing ethnic minorities in their workforce.

Non-white journalists comprise of 8% of total journalists compared with 12% of the general UK workforce.

Over the course of a week, not a single report by a Black writer made the front page of a UK newspaper and in the week monitored, just one Black woman was quoted on a front-page report out of 111 interviewees.²³

But, instead of pulling back, it's now time for brands to go out and engage with expert voices from communities to help them identify the right conversations, find the right voice and the most relevant messaging.

27.2%

Ethnic groups are more likely to use social networks for news than the GB average

Conversation insight #3: Omar DaCosta-Shahid,

Diversity & Inclusion Entrepreneur

Omar DaCosta-Shahid is an entrepreneur within the diversity and inclusion space, with a speciality within the Muslim market and has co-founded multiple marketing agency start ups. He is a former journalist for the Times, Guardian and Independent and was named one of Forbes 30 under 30 in 2021

“Engaging with ethnic minorities comes down to relatability and finding a connection through these spaces. Even those in the community not necessarily experiencing the same struggles will still look to unite with those through collective sentiment and contribute through shared rage at an injustice, joy for a breakthrough or celebration of progress achieved. The value of community response and participation is hugely significant for these audiences.

In recent years, there has been an increasing emergence of community-driven content platforms and TV channels, particularly Muslim-specific channels to meet audience demands. These are evolving at pace and branching out to meet the variety of languages spoken among them, such as English to meet the third-generation cohort and Urdu to cater to those in the first and second generations.

Social platforms can also experience upticks in engagement according to the cultural calendar. For example, Twitter becomes increasingly popular during Ramadan as it's perceived by Muslims as an outlet, and a place to share charity and caused-based news and messages for Zakat.”



How do we measure successful stories?

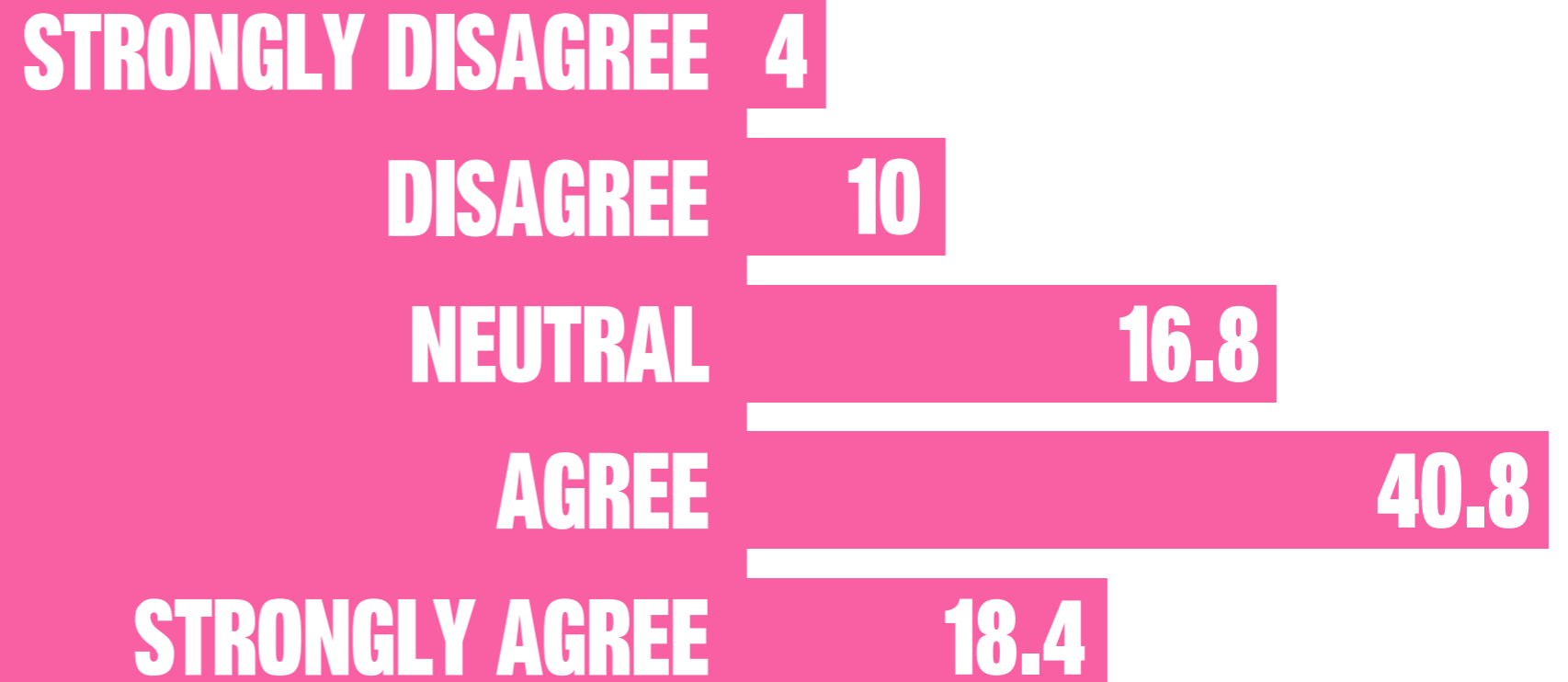
What does a big news story look like in 2022?

59% of journalists agree that the availability of detailed audience metrics (views, engagement, demographics) has changed the way they evaluate stories. Is this digital evolution hailing the end of more traditional metrics, such as reach and getting stories on the front page?

Instead, many are focusing on stories that will generate the most traffic and shares across social media – or that work best for aggregators and other distribution channels in an effort to draw the almighty

advertising dollar (and job security). Some publishing groups, such as Reach in the UK, have begun targeting individual journalists with minimum page view targets.

It seems like an obvious thing to state, but it's vital for PRs to understand what type of content will perform well against these metrics, and therefore make the journalist look good (and more inclined to cover our brand stories).



Do you agree that the availability of detailed audience metrics (views, engagement, demographic data, etc.) has changed the way you evaluate stories?²⁴

Today's news is no longer tomorrow's fish 'n' chip paper

A brand's digital presence – including how they show up in search – is an extension of who they are and what they do.

As authoritative, visually-rich, factual content, earned coverage in digital media is the gift that keeps on giving: its value lives far beyond the day of publication.

And that's not just value in terms of reputational impact, but instant commercial impact by supporting SEO.

Many of the most authoritative sites on the net are established earned media outlets. It's one game that traditional media wins over newer sources of editorial. PR can play a vital role in securing the type of stories and content that search engines love to see.



Apple News is the most trusted digital-first news brand in the UK with 45% of users accessing the app at least once a day²⁶

“The long-term search value of a media piece written by a premium publication is forever”²⁵

Eddie Kim, founder and CEO of Memo

Algorithms and the curation of editorial

Fewer people are choosing the news they read and fewer editors are curating it for us. More and more editorial content is being curated by algorithms based on user behaviour, or search history and content preferences. As well as adding to our own personal echo chambers, it has changed the way news is chosen, ordered and served to us.

By understanding how the algorithms work, knowing the most popular aggregators with target audiences and then developing content relevant to each service, brands can take advantage of this evolution in editorial distribution.



**HOW SHOULD
PR COMMUNICATIONS
EVOLVE?**

“Marketing is the
influence of opinion
through content”²⁷

Larry Weber

**IS EARNED
MEDIA DEAD?
LONG LIVE EARNED
CONVERSATIONS.**

1. Long Live Earned Conversations

Earned publications and platforms clearly have a place in the modern media age, but is the term 'earned media' still applicable when we talk about it as a channel? Does it work as a catch all phrase? Is it valid as editorial continues to shift more towards social media and messaging services for stories.

And if brands focus on only traditional earned media coverage, will they attract the attention needed?

The challenge for brands now, is to tell their story in a way that can be adapted for different channels and spark conversation.

It's not just earned media, it's earned conversations. And these often don't

start with what a commercial entity wants to say. These conversations start with what an audience wants to hear. What they see value in. What they may already be talking about.

And earned conversations can start anywhere for consumers. Whether that be in media, on social and increasingly, through search, brands can influence across a number of channels through the power of PR.

Brands must try harder to identify the conversations and trends in culture that matter to consumers, and stakeholder groups right across society.



2. Knowing where conversations happen

For some time now, the approach in paid digital media has been hyper-targeted to specific audiences, tailored in its delivery of content to consumer groups and trackable in its ability to attribute views and clicks to commercial metrics.

PR communications is playing catch-up but can follow digital media in better understanding where content is being consumed and by who, and then designing conversations to earn attention in the right spaces.

Campaigns should be created with the nuance required to engage a specific audience on a specific channel, at a relevant moment.

Brands can take advantage of the latest tools to pinpoint the platforms and moments where the most impactful conversations are taking place and what content and messages are resonating the strongest.



3. Knowing when conversations happen

Conversations don't only happen around traditional calendar moments or major events throughout the year, nor do they happen to suit a brand's own timetable. They can happen any time an audience chooses to engage on a topic.

Data tools and services can help us identify emerging themes, trends and conversation topics before they achieve a critical mass, and design stories that join the conversation or lead it in a different direction.

But it's not all about the future. Insights into when an audience have been talking about specific topics are invaluable when planning to release content. Why wouldn't a brand look to drive conversation in the moments its target audience are most likely to be having similar conversations themselves?

For example, more people talk about recycling packaging following the Christmas period or ask questions about planting bulbs in March.



4. Knowing the influential voices that drive impact

Gone are the days of media lists with 200+ targets. The age of the scattergun, hit-and-hope approach has passed.

This in turn means a recalibration of what success looks like: often, greater impact can be driven by fewer stories told by genuinely influential voices, as opposed to quantity of coverage.

5. Embracing the blend between social and earned

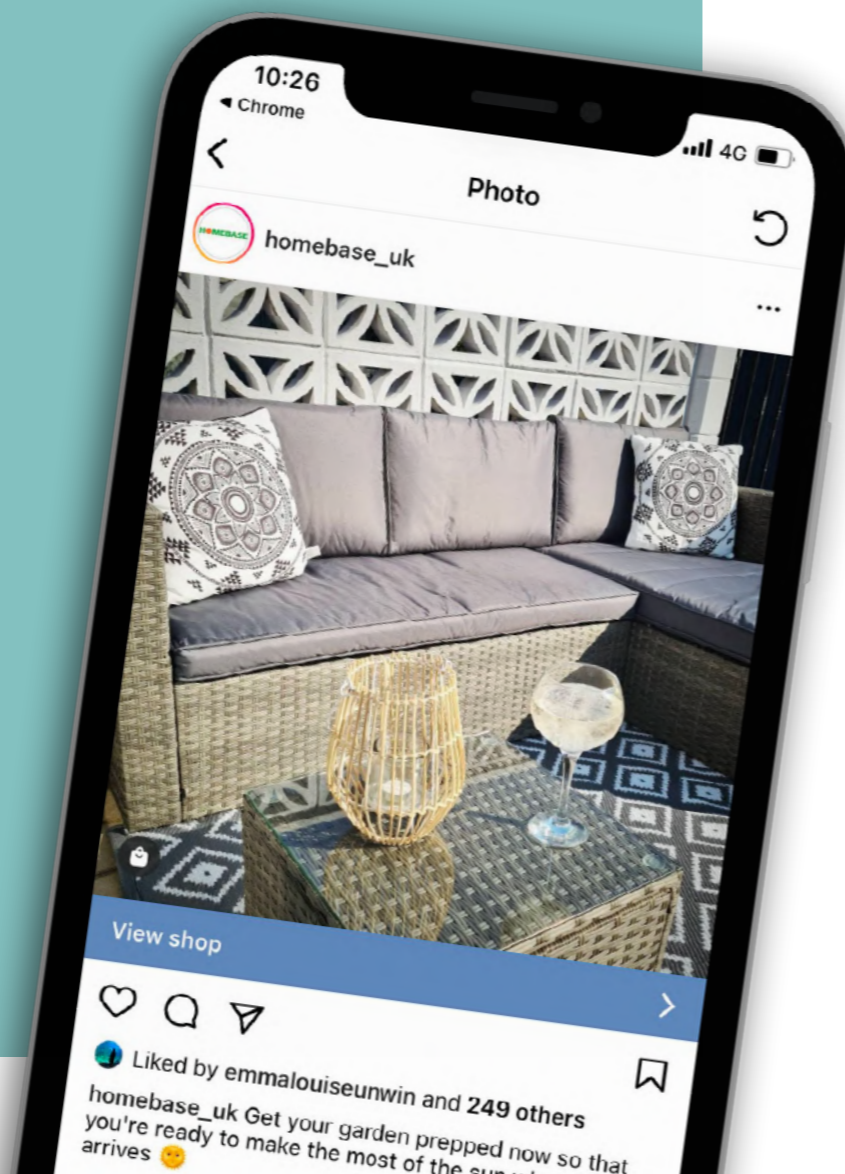
Earned media is no longer leading the news agenda.

Today, fewer of the conversations that matter to consumers – across most age groups and communities – originate from a brand-led campaign that began in earned media.

This trend was accelerated by the events of the last two years leaving brands who favour earned media-led strategies with limited share of voice in key conversations.

As consumers are now dictating the rules of engagement, brands must identify the appropriate channel while adapting their messaging and assets to fit the role consumers expect them to play.

It means no longer focusing on either earned media or social media channels but looking to lead earned conversations with a blended approach across all channels and platforms where the audience is consuming, sharing and creating content.



6. Knowing what success looks like.

Share of Conversation

Share of voice is not a new concept for marketers. For decades eSOV (the relationship between what you spend on advertising and your market share) was the infallible totem of the industry, but a new wave of research into effectiveness is questioning its premise and construct.

The industry is re-evaluating the data they use as the marker of success. What has come to prominence is the validity of other “share of...” metrics, notably search, and logically media and social.

Ultimately the more people talking about you, the more people choosing you.

Which is why the meaningful metric to use in modern PR communications is Share of Conversation.

A composite measure which balances the volume and longevity of conversation across different stages of the customer journey, and which connects sentiment to sales, conversation to conversion, and attitudes to action. Both for clients and their competitors.

By measuring this across the short term content can be optimised, and over the long term ROI can be improved.

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Becoming Audio Creators -](#)
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