

Think  
*new things*  
Make  
*new connections*

## BACKGROUND NOTES

### **The New Fourth Estate: building a resilient 21st-century information eco-system**

The business model for print media has been in decline for years with loss of readership and advertising revenue moving to digital media. Local newspapers and local radio are much reduced, if they exist at all in the UK and US. Meanwhile, the rise has been in platform sites and social media. One of the differences in underlying business models stems from the distinction between platforms (with user generated content) and publishers (applying editorial control). These different vested interests have yet to work out co-existence, how will these institutional formats evolve?

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's (RISJ) [Digital News Report](#) and the Pew Research's [State of the Media Report](#) have been tracking the transition in news journalism and its consumption for several years. Both point to a shift of news on-line and highlight the changing news consumption habits of younger people, those under 30 and particularly those under 24 who have grown up with social media.

The RISJ 2022 Digital News Report describes the acceleration of a shift towards a more digital, mobile and platform-dominated media environment. Facebook is said to remain the most-used social network for news, but younger groups have switched attention to **more visual networks**. TikTok is currently the fastest growing. The study shows social division aligns with news sources and differentiation between social media platforms: Facebook and Twitter were associated with **journalists** whilst the much larger use of Tiktok, Snapchat and Instagram is associated with **influencers**. Notable, is the increase in the use of smart phones as the device on which to receive news.

The study highlights a development in supply of more upmarket news publishers for digital subscription. Although a large proportion of digital subscriptions go to a few big national brands there is evidence of multiple subscriptions by those who can afford it.

#### *A decline in trust*

Significantly, the RISJ report also points to a decline in trust in news and a turning away from news media with interest in news falling away particularly among younger groups. It describes a critical challenge news media face in connecting with people who have access to unlimited content online and getting their attention for 'news'.

Digital and social media offer a much wider range than print, radio or TV news. The report points to two issues identified in news consumption: first a group who are active online but disengaged from 'news' and secondly, a more generalised decline in news interest. The cause, it is suggested, maybe structural changes in the way news is distributed, the nature of the news cycle and the fragmenting of audiences.

What counts as news is also changing – both broadening in the context of user generated content of social media platforms but also tightening with a mainstream political news focus on a small number of personalities. At the same time a general phenomenon of ‘news avoidance’ is said to be growing.

Ditchley’s 2019 conference on [Trust](#) recognised the trust people place in individual journalists or presenters over and above a reliance on a news source (government, politician, scientific research, search engine). A trusted journalist is more like a much-needed friend mediating a swirl of contested ‘news’. Ditchley’s 2022 conference on [Freedom in Democracies](#) recognised the link between free expression and open information and that shared knowledge or truth, essential for public debate, has always been contested. But the changes in production, dissemination and the way information is now consumed, is materially altering the ways shared understanding or truth is made. The media are now at the intersection between democracy and technology.

### *Divides in digital cultures*

Negotiating trusted news sources is just one part of the on-line life. A digital life is learned as you go along. There is now no before or after, or on and off line. Digital technologies are the means of human mediation and will create new forms of interaction, creativity and new knowledge. How can the positive attributes of modern communication, which we now rely upon, be accentuated? The Digital News Report points to a growing difference between age groups and notes changes particularly among the 18-24 group which, it suggests, are unlikely to be reversed with age. There is a risk, that higher quality news resources maybe available to some young people and not others. Differences in education systems and in access to technology itself may reinforce these divides. There is an emerging divide between those growing up in digital cultures and able to manage, shape and act within them, and those growing up in digital cultures who cannot. Already, a risk is apparent in the flight of paid for digital media to wealthier elites who can afford subscriptions.

Many issues derived from technological change, media ownership, politics and geopolitics are now in play:

- The role of journalists is changing with digitization of traditional media and the rise of platforms, how will the core values of journalism evolve;
- Social media Influencers are having an impact on the news environment;
- Ideological pressure on public service media, notably the BBC in the UK is building;
- A decline in trust and ‘news avoidance’ is apparent amongst groups of news consumers;
- Externally driven ‘news’ disinformation, and the unacknowledged, unprepared for cyberwar;
- Internally driven ‘news’ misinformation and the willingness of governments and business to adopt bad faith media practices as a routine part of modern politics and business practice;
- Growing differences in consumption and behaviour between younger and older people;
- The older and wealthier have access to a range of ‘quality’ media – a strong market;
- A weaker market for ‘quality’ mass market media and hence a dominant role for Facebook?
- Younger people are more likely to get news via social media, aggregators and search engines and more visually focussed sites (TikTok, Instagram, Telegram);
- The definition of ‘news’ is broadening;
- The flow of undifferentiated, unmediated ‘news’ stream is increasing;
- And yet the benefits of a transformed communication system are also playing out across the world with innovation in ‘news’ provision (fact-checking) and more direct communication, greater transparency, immediate and uncensored citizen to citizen information.

Can we define both the challenges and opportunities of digital culture for more trusted information? What kinds of understanding might lead to further innovation that advances the public interest in democracies and supporting pluralism in news?

## **RELATED PAST DITCHLEY CONFERENCES**

Ditchley's work on the media.

Hilary Cockhill's paper on past Ditchley conferences

<https://www.ditchley.com/programme/archives/ditchley-and-media-21st-century>

**1963**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Transatlantic images presented by mass media of communication**

**1970**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Responsibilities of mass media to society**

**1974**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Responsibilities of Government, Legislatures and the media towards the public in regard to Government policy and actions**

**1980**

**Ditchley conference:**

**The media and developing countries**

**1984**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Freedom and Accountability of the Media**

**1990**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Politics and the Media**

**1998**

**Ditchley conference:**

**[The Media and the Law](#)**

**2003**

**Ditchley conference:**

**[The Impact of the Media on the Politics of Our Time](#)**

**2005**

**Ditchley conference:**

**[The Challenges of Governing in a Freer and More Complex World](#)**

**2008**

**Ditchley conference:**

**[The Media and Democracy](#)**

**2011**

**Ditchley conference:**

**[Democracy and the Power of the Individual](#)**

**2013**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Is Serious Journalism Still Possible?**

**2015**

**Ditchley conference:**

**Global Ambitions and Local Grievances: Understanding Political Islam**

**2019**

**Ditchley conferences:**

**Trust: in Leaders, Experts and Institutions. Where and Why Has It Gone and What Can We Do to Renew It?**

**The Rise of Populism: Crisis of Democracy or Noisy Renewal?**

**2020**

**Ditchley Summer Project session:**

**What Are The Main Lessons So Far for the Media in the Pandemic?**