

2018

The Great Divide of Media Access



Introduction

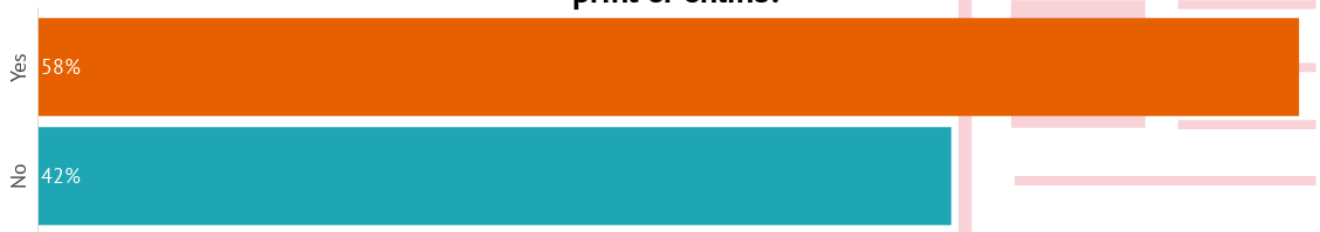
Don't worry; you don't have to turn off your ad blocker to enjoy this content. You've likely seen this message pop up more and more as paid content subscriptions are the way forward for major news publications to keep the lights on. Even your local newspaper's website probably has a paywall now. Or maybe you need to access the news but your 10 free monthly articles have run out. You're out of luck. Other syndicated news sites may be relying on other ways like programmatic-ad-supported content, making the real news you need harder to access.

What does this all mean for those who do not want to (or don't have the means to) pay for quality news and reporting? This report highlights where people get their news, which news they trust, where they are willing to pay for content (or not), ad blocker usage and ad relevance, and the great divide that media access is creating.

Traditional newspapers continue to be relied upon for news.

Love it or hate it, news is everywhere, perhaps even more front and center in 2018. And, love it or hate it, over half of all U.S. adults read a newspaper online or in print despite what people may think about the industry.

On most days, do you have a traditional newspaper that you make a habit to visit or read either in print or online?

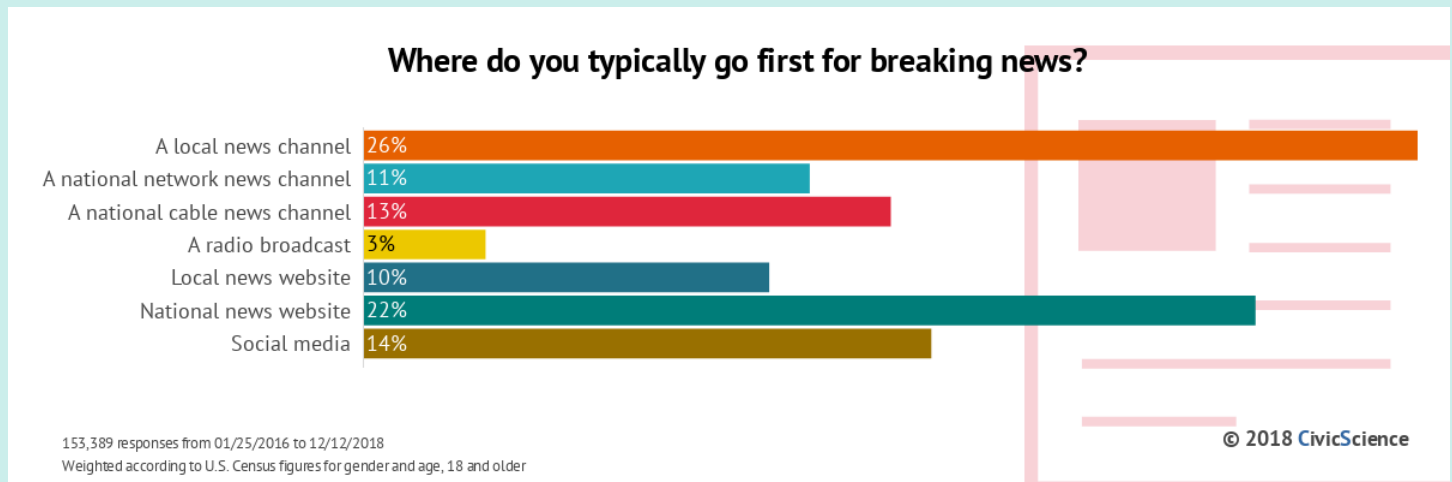


1,061 responses from 09/10/2018 to 12/11/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

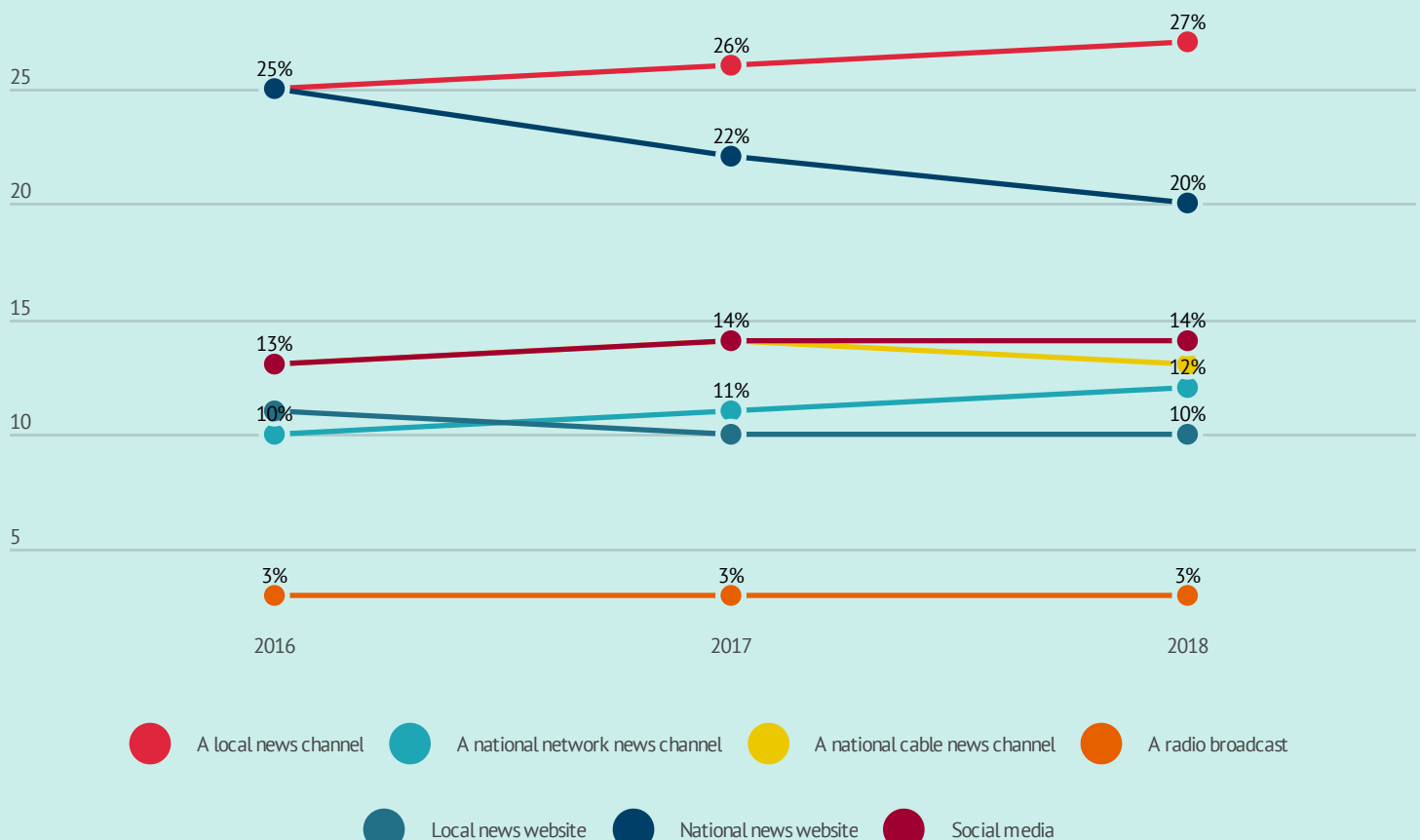
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Local news TV is the reigning champ of breaking news.

When you think of the news, most of us want to check the latest breaking news. Since 2016, CivicScience trending data has shown that local news TV is the reigning champ of breaking news. Over ¼ of American adults turn on a local news channel to stay informed when something breaks.

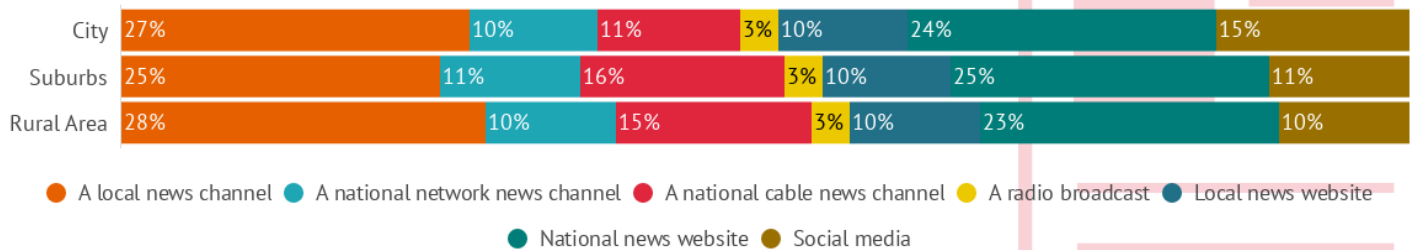


Over time, local news channel preference for breaking news has only grown, with national news websites decreasing as breaking news outlets for Americans since last year.



When it comes to who is accessing which media, those in rural areas are more likely to rely on local news channels, more than those in the city or suburbs do.

In what type of area do you live? -compared with- Where do you typically go first for breaking news?

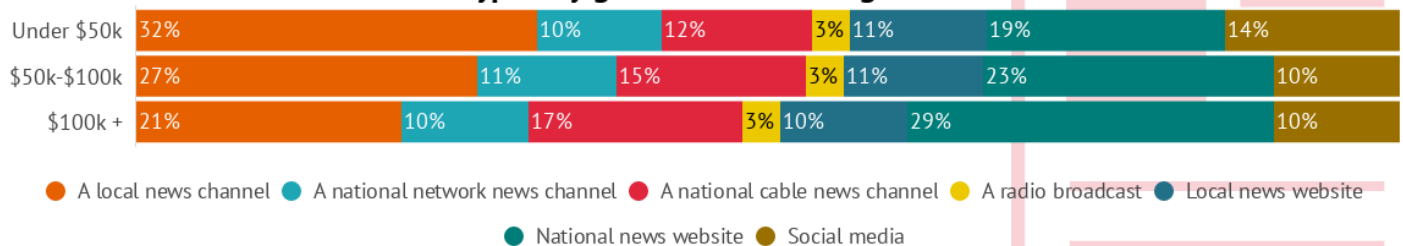


99,993 responses from 01/01/2016 to 12/12/2018
 Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

© 2018 CivicScience

Those with lower income/without a degree rely more on local news channels than higher income/college-educated folks, who tend to go to national news websites more often. This likely comes down to access (money, time, and internet access). Local channels may not wish to cover a story or have the resources to cover a story with the same depth as a national website. This causes a divide in media coverage which will only be exacerbated as more content becomes paywalled and people have to choose which they'll pay for, or if they'll simply go to a source they're already buying (cable). What will that mean for society as time goes on?

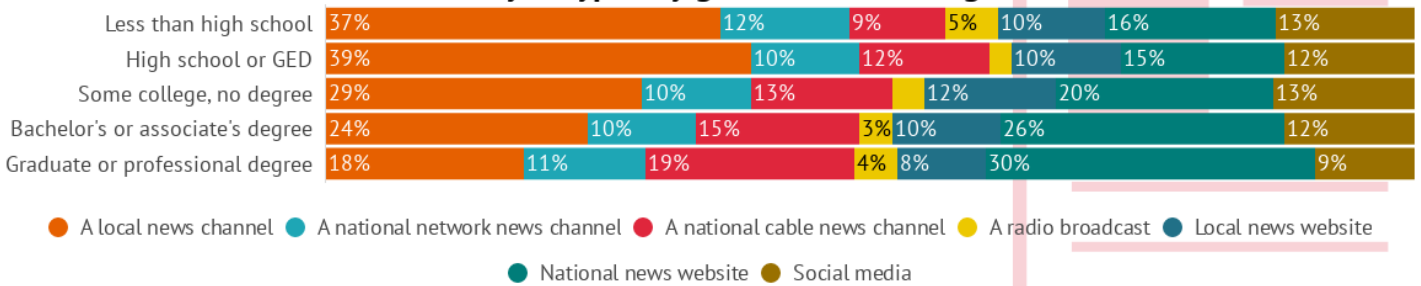
What is your expected annual household income before taxes? -compared with- Where do you typically go first for breaking news?



90,310 responses from 01/01/2016 to 12/12/2018
 Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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Which of the following is the highest level of education you have attained? -compared with- Where do you typically go first for breaking news?



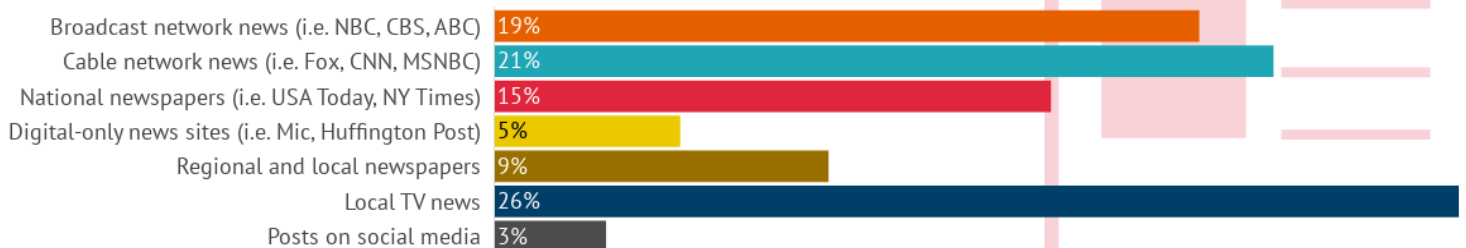
90,005 responses from 01/01/2016 to 12/12/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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Is it local?

People turn to local news for breaking news, often out of necessity, but this section highlights it's also about trust. The most recent 2018 data shows that year to date, 26% of U.S. adults trust local tv news the most -which could be either a channel or a website. U.S. adults are 37% more likely to trust local than broadcast news.

Which news source do you trust the most to deliver unbiased news?

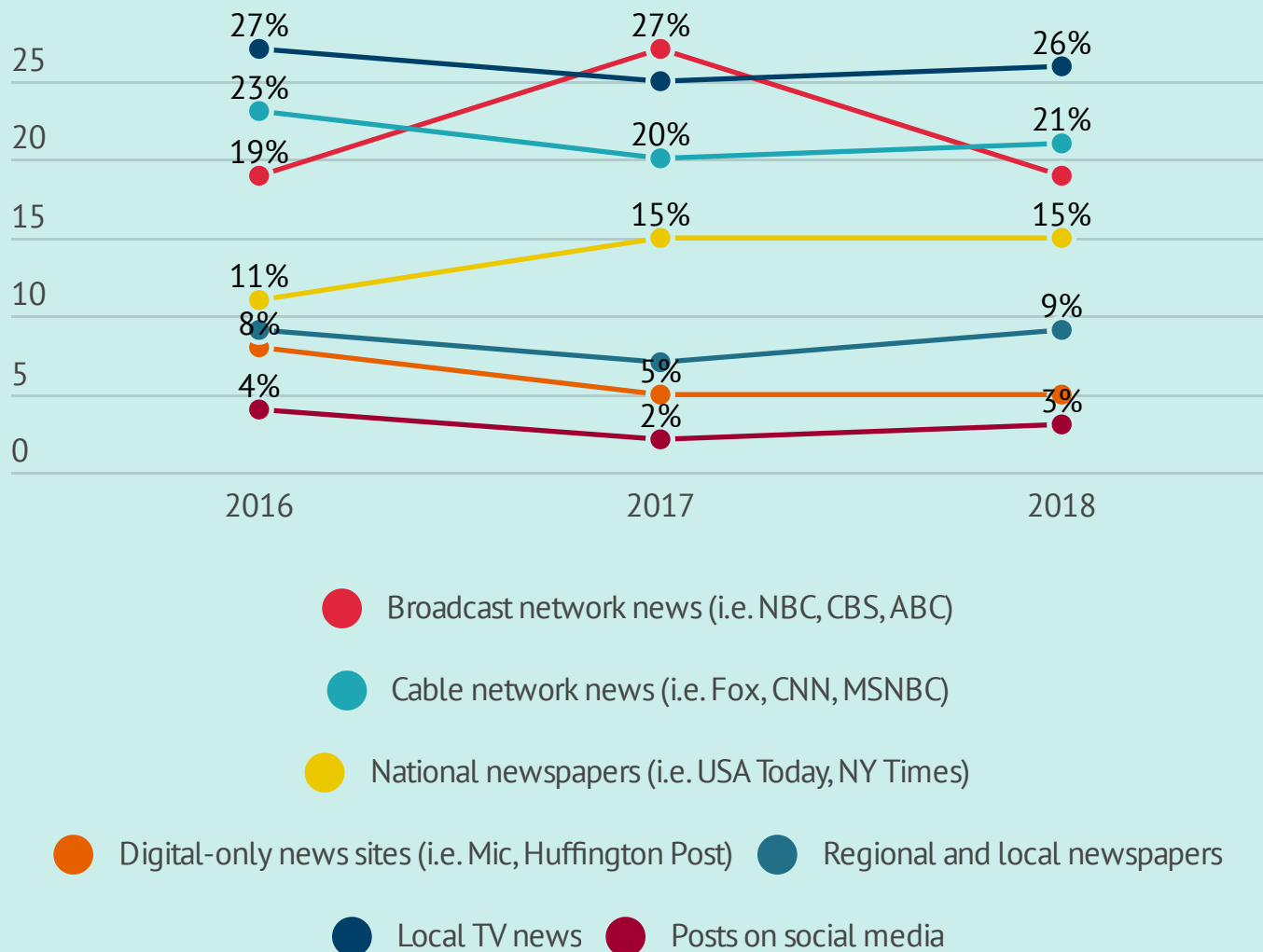


4,500 responses from 01/30/2018 to 12/12/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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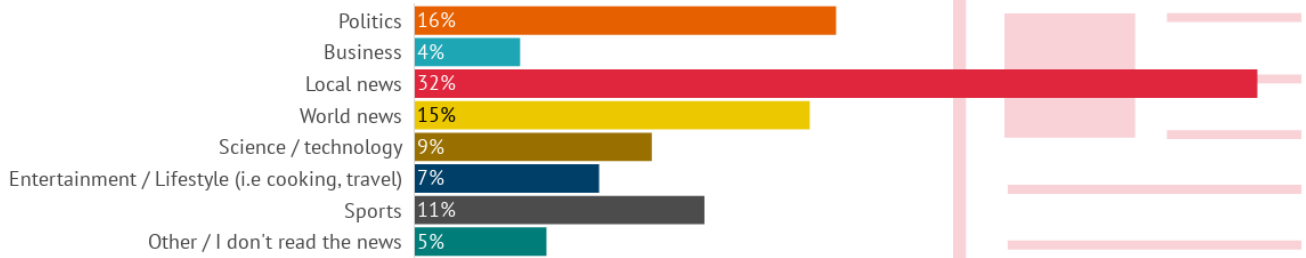
A mere 3% trust social media for news, and only 5% trust digital only sites such as Huffington Post, etc.

This trust in news outlets has been somewhat of a saga. Broadcast news networks have faced a steep decline since 2017, surpassed once again by local TV news as a trusted source. Cable news networks have declined in viewer trust since 2016, but appear to be making a slight comeback.



The desire to read local news stories is also why people are switching on the local channel or reading local happenings online. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of U.S. adults indicate that they are most likely to read local news stories over others. Again, this is likely chalked up to news as a necessity; to know about what's happening in your own neck of the woods. However, local news people look to is mostly not even local, as this recent [Duke study points out](#).

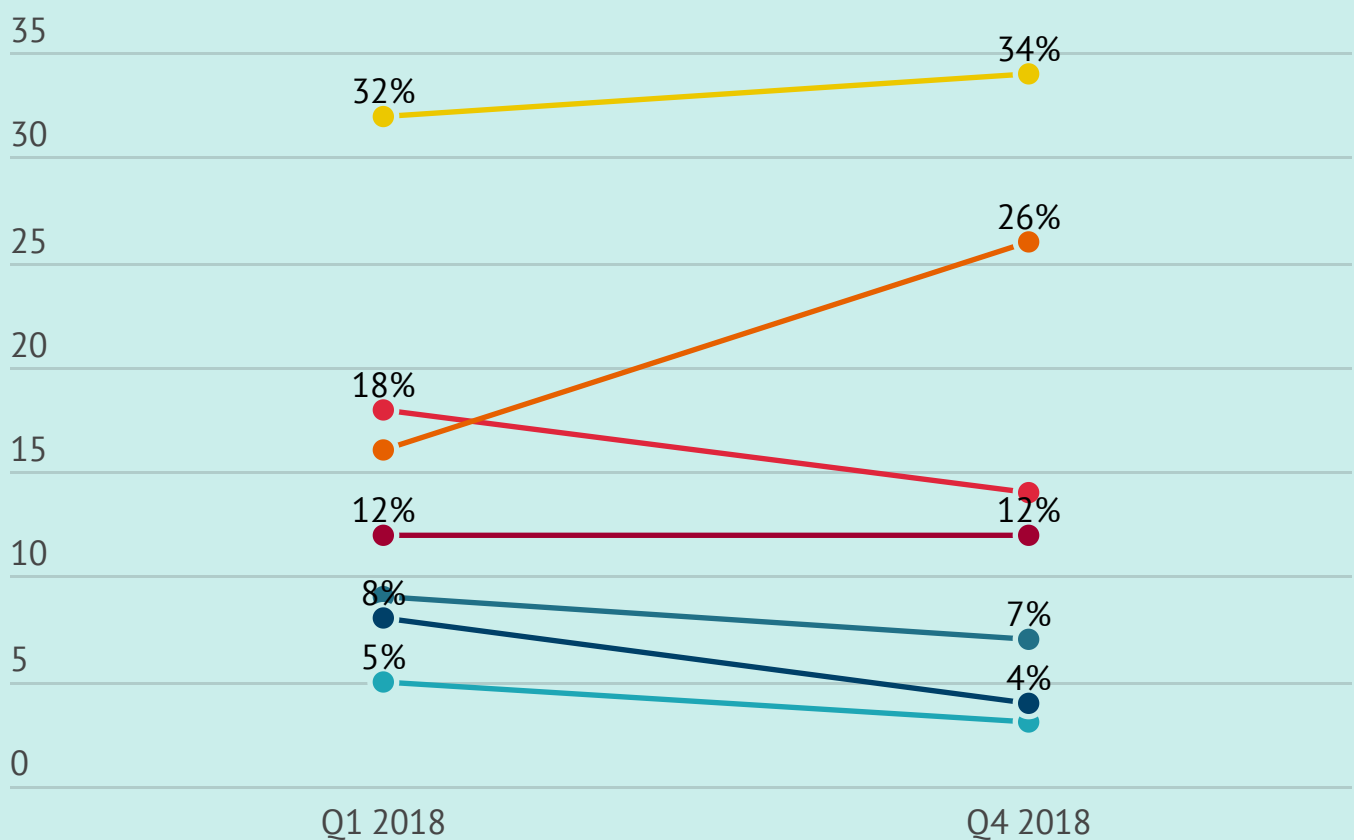
Which type of news story are you most likely to read?



4,101 responses from 01/30/2018 to 12/11/2018
 Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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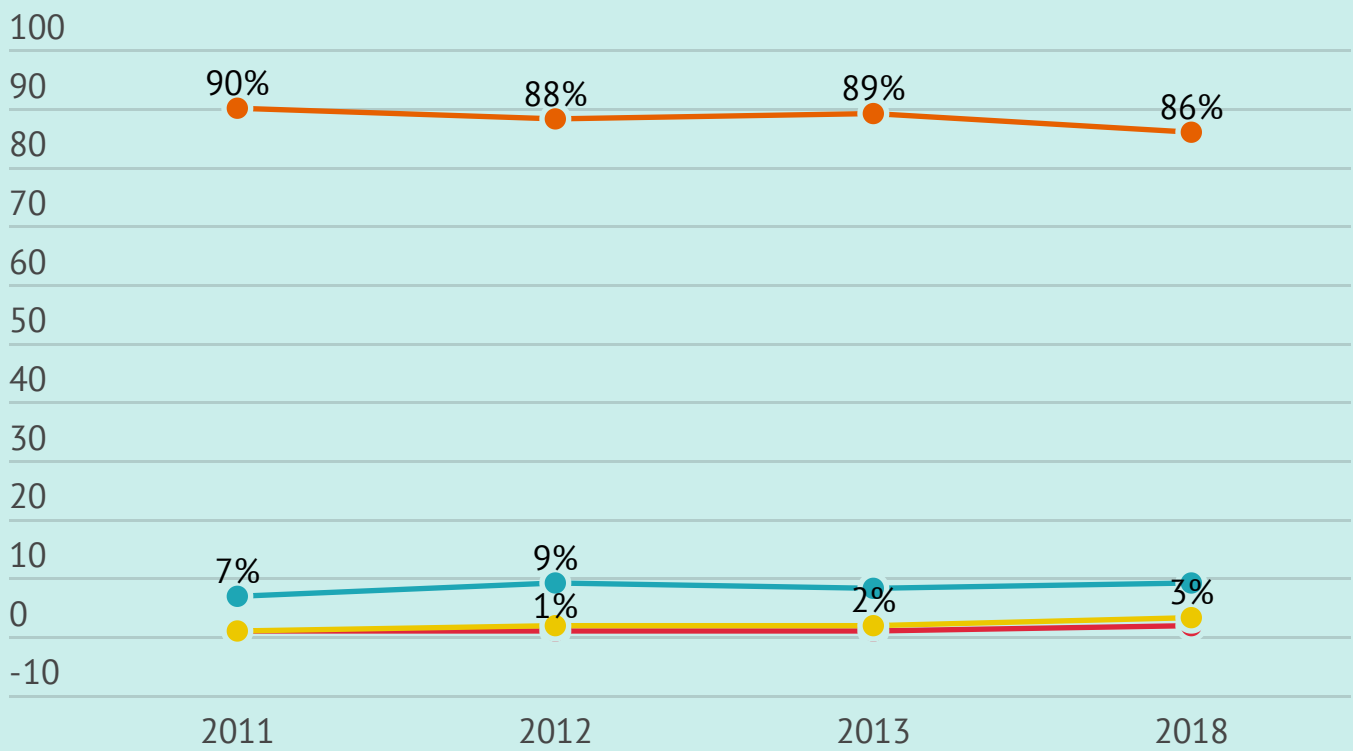
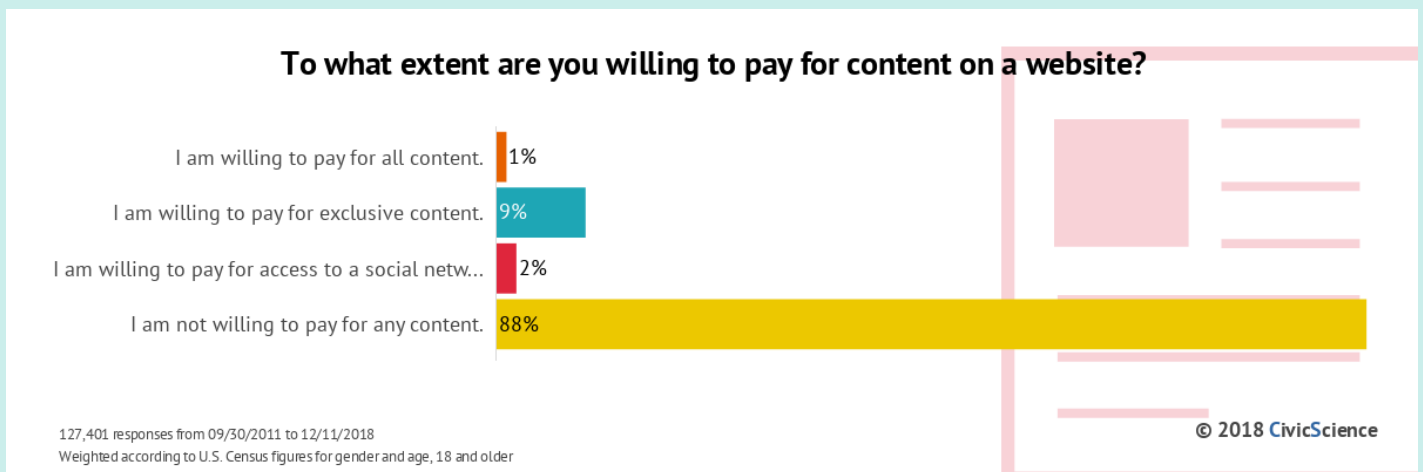
Looking at this over time, excluding those who indicate they do not read the news, we see that in 2018, local news as the most sought-after content type is growing. World News has made a huge jump, too. The red line indicates that the likelihood of reading political stories is on the decline.



- Politics
- Business
- Local news
- World news
- Science / Technology
- Entertainment / Lifestyle (i.e cooking, travel)
- Sports

People don't want to pay for content.

Whether or not they can afford it, people just don't wanna. The percentage of people who are willing to pay for digital content is small and barely growing. Only 1% of U.S. adult respondents are willing to pay for all content on a website. And 9% would pay for exclusive content, like in-depth reports or even video content.



● I am willing to pay for all content. ● I am willing to pay for exclusive content.

● I am willing to pay for access to a social network such as a forum or discussion board.

● I am not willing to pay for any content.

The more money someone makes annually, the more likely they are to be willing to pay for online content – but it’s still very unlikely overall. Even those who make \$100k or more a year aren’t keen on the idea of paid content.

What is your expected annual household income before taxes? -compared with- To what extent are you willing to pay for content on a website?



107,291 responses from 09/30/2011 to 12/12/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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Of those who would be willing to pay up to \$5, \$10 or \$15 for a news subscription, business, tech and politics readers indicate they would open their pockets more for this content, while local news is probably on the lower end (up to \$5). Sports fans are likely to only pay up to \$5.

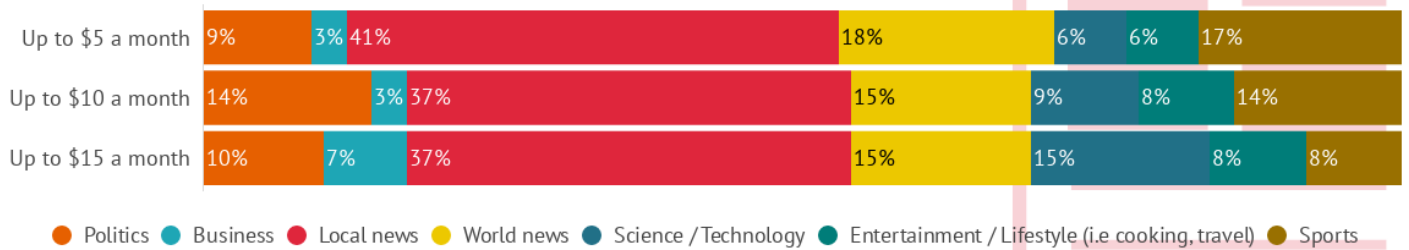
How much would you be willing to pay for a print or digital news subscription?



4,000 responses from 11/30/2016 to 12/07/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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How much would you be willing to pay for a print or digital news subscription? -compared with- Which type of news story are you most likely to read?



496 responses from 11/30/2016 to 12/10/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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When it comes to memberships vs. subscription models, the former is almost 2x more popular, while a combination of both is half as popular than a solo subscription.

Think about the publication you read the most (in print or online): would you



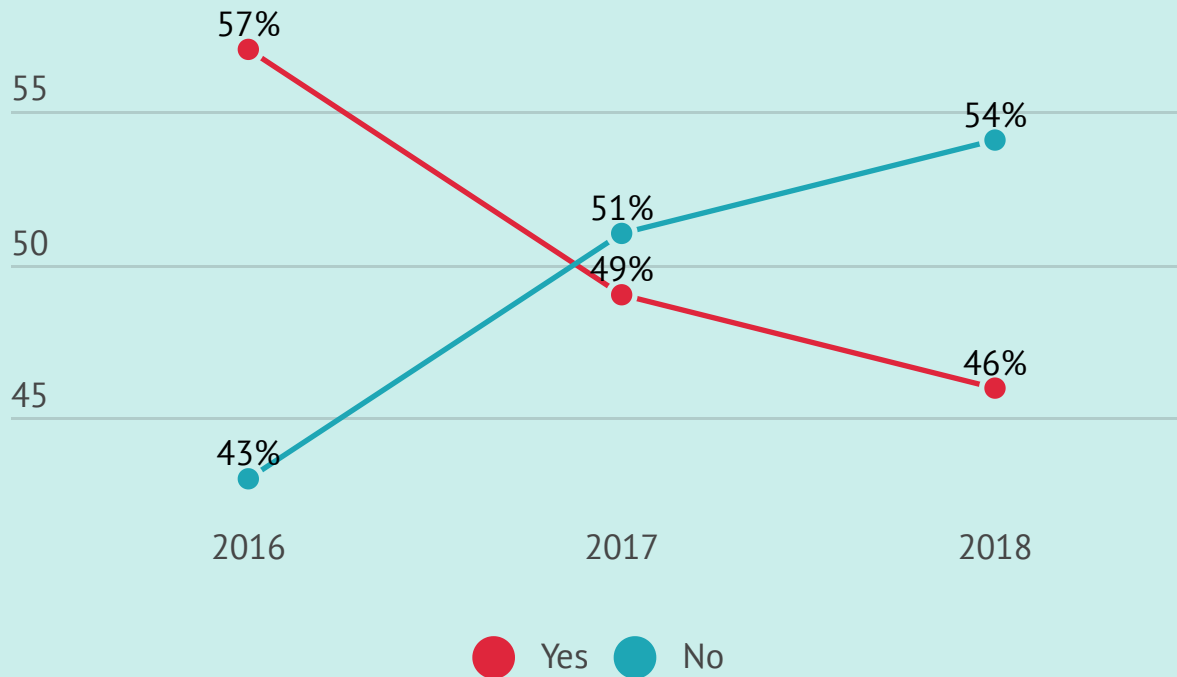
2,356 responses from 09/24/2018 to 12/07/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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Are ad blockers out?

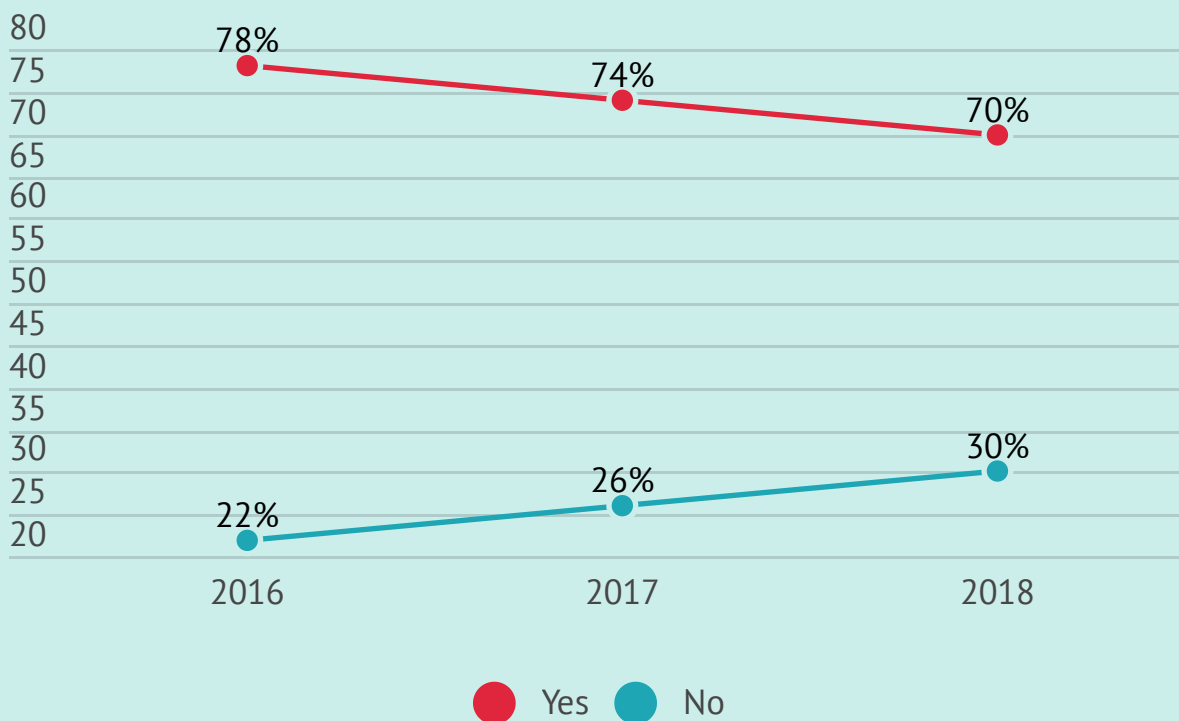
The next chart begs the question ... Which came first: the ad blocker or the paywall? Do new paywall / adblock messages steer people from using ad blockers, then? It's a real possibility.

Do you use an ad blocker on your computer?



Though installation of an ad blocker on a smartphone has slowly grown in the past 3 years, it hasn't made up for the decline in ad blockers used on computers. Perhaps blockers aren't as widely known in the phone format.

Do you use an ad blocker on your smartphone?



Relevant ads aren't getting into the right 'hands'.

So, with all those ad blockers turned off you'd think people would be getting served all the right ads, right? Wrong. Consumers' perception of internet ads is ugly. 72% deem ads they see as irrelevant to their own interests. Younger people see the most relevant ads, but the numbers point to the reason of heavy social media use. People who spend a hefty amount of time on social media each day see more relevant ads. It is designed to work that way, after all.

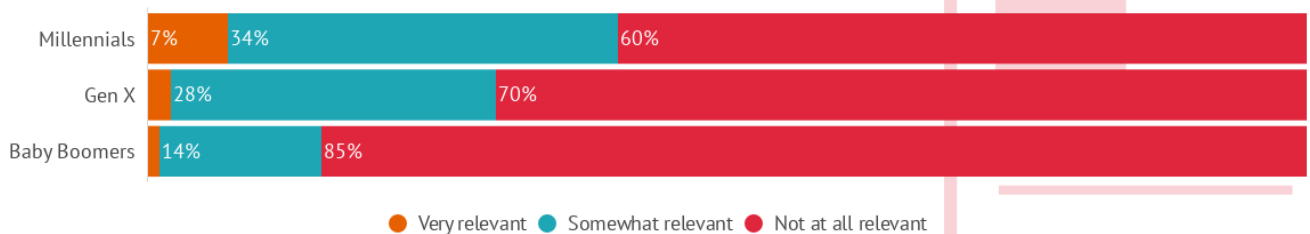
How relevant to your interests are the majority of digital advertisements you see?



2,639 responses from 09/17/2018 to 12/07/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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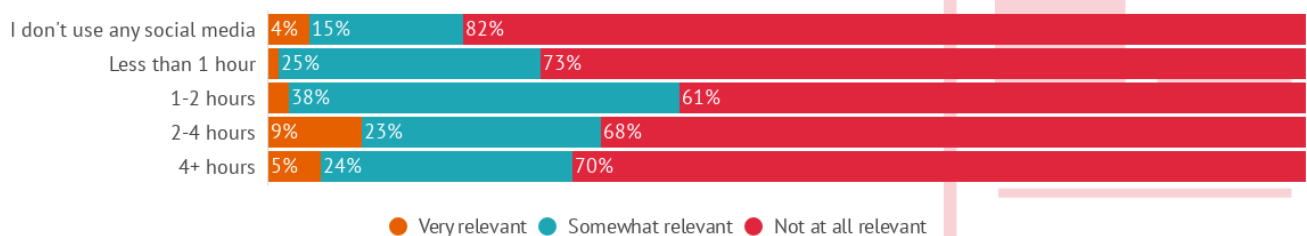
To what broad age group do you belong? -compared with- How relevant to your interests are the majority of digital advertisements you see?



2,878 responses from 009/17/2018 to 12/11/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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On an average day, how much time do you spend in total on social media sites and apps? - compared with- How relevant to your interests are the majority of digital advertisements you see?



1,477 responses from 009/17/2018 to 12/11/2018
Weighted according to U.S. Census figures for gender and age, 18 and older

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That all being said, this is bad news for digital news sites who rely on ad sales and for the resources they have available for quality reporting. Unlike billboards, online ads aren't making the majority of their money simply by showing you an ad--the big bucks come from clicks. Without relevant ads, their ability to provide quality journalism is diminished.

Conclusion

The need for news isn't going anywhere, but universal access to it continues to suffer as news outlets struggling with profitability try out different revenue models. People are going to have to choose which content they pay for, so will the informational divide between people who can subscribe to in-depth reporting on current events and those who rely on only local news with fewer resources also continue growing?

For more information:
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