

Trust in News Media

Research Report
June 2025



“ If it tells the truth,
the whole truth and
nothing but the truth in
news reports, clearly
separating opinion and
content, I am more likely
to trust the provider. ”

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Executive Summary

CONTEXT

Research in New Zealand and overseas shows trust in news media has fallen significantly in the last decade. A recent report¹ by the AUT Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy also showed that trust in the news media is lower in New Zealand than international averages. The key objective of the research reported here is to understand the public's expectations regarding news content and to explore which factors are most likely to support increased trust in New Zealand's news media.

This research was conducted in April and May 2025 and consisted of an in-depth qualitative stage involving a week-long interactive community undertaking tasks and engaging in conversation daily, rounded off with six focus groups. This was followed by a quantitative survey of more than 1000 New Zealanders. The key findings of the research - what factors lead to greater trust in media, what erodes trust, and how media might go about restoring public trust - are set out below, supported with our detailed analysis.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

1. The project included some exploration of the relevant media landscape and how New Zealand consumers use the various news media available. The results showed engagement with news media to be very high (with 82% of those surveyed describing themselves as 'moderately', 'very' or 'extremely' interested in the news). Traditional media (TV and radio) continue to be used regularly by around half of the population (although this figure is skewed to some extent by results for those aged 55+).
2. Younger survey respondents were found to often source news from social media (with over three quarters using it regularly as a source of news and over half citing it as the source used most often). However, most people were seeking a range of sources (on average three) for their regular news.

3. Across all age bands, news websites are the source used most regularly and often.
4. Comments from the qualitative panel discussions included interesting reflections on the current environment including observations about:
 - a. an 'overwhelming amount of superficial news' leaving consumers 'paradoxically oversaturated and unsatisfied'
 - b. news in the past (with a much narrower range of news sources available) being socially cohesive, bringing people together with shared knowledge and a sense of purpose - contrasting with today where the conflicting versions and viewpoints available in multiple news sources are causing division and making it difficult to 'align the narrative' in a way that is trusted by everyone.

FACTORS THAT PROMOTE GREATER TRUST

5. **Adhering to Professional/Ethical standards -** These factors concern technical competence and demonstrating the principles of journalistic integrity. This means that consumers trust news outlets that demonstrate:
 - a. **Accuracy** - reporting facts correctly, verifying information through reliable sources and avoiding distortion of facts
 - b. **Fairness and Impartiality** - presenting multiple viewpoints without bias (giving fair airtime to other viewpoints) and avoiding emotive language, favouritism and ideological slants. However, bias seems to be a highly subjective trait: "*are they biased because you don't agree with them; because what they say does not feel right?*"
 - c. **Comprehensive Coverage** - detailed and in-depth reporting to allow a deeper understanding of the issues being discussed

1. AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy 5th annual Trust in News in Aotearoa New Zealand 2024 report

- d. **Independence** – remaining free from external influences (political, commercial or personal) that could compromise objectivity
 - e. **Transparency** – disclosing sources when appropriate, clarifying methods of information gathering and being open about potential conflicts of interest
 - f. **Accountability** – owning up to mistakes, issuing corrections promptly and being answerable to the public.
6. **Proven Track Record** – Consumers trust news outlets with a history of delivering to appropriate standards.
 7. **Nature of the Content** - Consumers apply higher trust scores to providers focused on hard news (e.g. politics, current and international affairs) than those focused on “lite” news (e.g. lifestyle or entertainment content).
 8. Unprompted, the key reason survey participants gave for trust in a news provider was ‘freedom from bias’. When prompted, the top four factors cited as influencing trust to the greatest extent were (i) reporting supported by credible, cited evidence (ii) neutral (unbiased) reporting (iii) in-depth reporting allowing a good understanding of issues and (iv) mistakes acknowledged and corrected promptly.
 9. While bias (or freedom from bias) appears as a strong influence on trust, comments by panel participants also highlighted the complexity involved in perceptions of bias, noting evaluations of what was ‘trustworthy’ seemed to vary based on personal perspectives.

DRIVERS OF TRUST EROSION

Distrust in news media is driven by many of the same factors that promote trust, only inverted.

Failure to maintain any of the professional/ethical standards listed above begins to erode trust. However, failure to demonstrate accuracy, fairness and impartiality, and accountability will hasten the decline of trust, more than the other factors.

Unprompted, survey participants identified bias, spreading of misinformation, sensationalism, lack of fact checking, and funding sources as factors which may lead them to believe a provider was untrustworthy. When asked to select from a list of factors, the top five selected as influencing distrust ‘to a great extent’ were:

- Misleading/sensationalist headlines/clickbait
- Failure to acknowledge and correct errors
- Too much opinion and not enough factual reporting
- Too much ‘attack journalism’ (aggressive or bullying questioning)
- Advertisements presented as news.

Other factors having a material impact towards distrust included discriminatory/inappropriate depiction of minority groups, bias, superficial reporting, poor language/spelling/grammar, and opinion presented as news.

Throughout the research, it became apparent consumers are overwhelmed with the volume of news outlets and the ‘dark’ content of the news. This level of overwhelm leads consumers to disengage from the news. This does not mean that they are distrustful of the news coverage, but that they feel powerless to influence the situation, especially with regards to global conflict and international politics, so they choose not to engage with it.

REGAINING LOST TRUST

Trust is easier to lose than it is to regain. Some of the reporting on events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, United States election coverage, coverage of global conflicts (Iraq war, Israel-Hamas conflict) and local political or cultural issues (use of ethnic stereotypes in news coverage) has been pivotal in diminishing trust. These events are often seen to involve emotionally charged reporting, perceived bias, or misinformation, which can deeply affect public perceptions of the trustworthiness of the news outlets.

Several strategies can be implemented to mitigate distrust and to help rebuild trust in news media. These include:

1. **Prioritise Transparency and Accountability**
 - Providers must promptly acknowledge and correct errors, and clearly communicate updates on a developing story. It is also important that news providers disclose their funding sources and ownership structures.
2. **Maintain Clear Editorial Boundaries**
 - It is important to separate news from opinion, entertainment, and advertising. Label commentary and sponsored content clearly and consistently.
3. **Commit to Impartial, Fact-Based Reporting**
 - When dealing with contentious issues, present multiple perspectives. Avoid emotionally manipulative language and attack journalism.² Avoid sensationalism. Ensure that verifiable evidence is presented. Whether consumers check the source or not is moot. The fact that the provider makes it possible to be checked reinforces credibility and trust.
2. This form of aggressive and bullying questioning, often characterised by limiting the opportunity of the interviewee to respond fully, was not welcome and led the viewer/listener to question the skills and integrity of the interviewer, the producers and the channel supporting this approach.

EXPECTATIONS OF A PUBLICLY FUNDED OR OWNED MEDIA ENTITY

Just over half (54%) of survey participants did not have any different expectations of publicly funded or owned news organisations compared to their commercially funded counterparts. However, around a third of participants (34%) did.

For those who did hold different expectations of publicly owned/funded news providers, the key expectations of such providers were:

1. **Total Impartiality and Objectivity**
 - Public broadcasters are expected to remain politically neutral and avoid government influence, especially in sensitive areas like national politics.
2. **Accuracy and Accountability**
 - There is a strong expectation for rigorous fact-checking and prompt correction of errors. Public providers are seen as needing to uphold higher editorial standards and be subject to public scrutiny.
3. **Quality and Style of Journalism**
 - Publicly owned outlets are expected to prioritise in-depth, investigative journalism over entertainment or clickbait. Audiences want 'just the facts', with minimal opinion or fluff.
4. **Balanced Coverage**
 - There is a desire for balanced reporting that includes diverse perspectives and reflects the full scope of public interest, not just dominant narratives.

In contrast, perceptions of commercial news organisations cited in some of the panellist discussions included:

- Risks of conflicts of interest/bias
- Prioritisation of audience engagement and revenue over authentic, unbiased, non-sensationalist news reporting
- Paywalls can signal a commitment and investment in quality journalism, independent of external influences. However, some resent paywalls as barriers to access, excluding some consumers from quality news.

Research Approach

Research Approach

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH CONTEXT:

Research in New Zealand and overseas shows trust in news media has fallen in the last decade. Research from the AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy³ showed New Zealanders' general trust in the news dropped from 53% in 2020 to 33% in 2024, well below the international average of 40%.⁴

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The key objective of this research is to better understand the public's expectations of news content and explore which factors are most likely to support increased trust in New Zealand's news media. Insight is required specifically to increase understanding of the following:

- The methods of presenting news stories that promote greater credibility or trust.
- Whether the provision of additional information supports greater trust in a news story.
- What factors, beyond method and provision of additional information, contribute to trust.
- Of the factors that promote trust, which are most important to the public.
- Whether the public have different expectations around publicly owned media entities and, if so, what these are.
- For those who have stopped getting news from a particular provider due to loss of trust, what are the prospects of getting them back and what factors would support a return to the provider.

RESEARCH DESIGN – QUALITATIVE:

An online community of 35 participants was recruited to an agreed profile to represent a broad range of New Zealanders (see appendix 1 for detail of recruitment criteria). This community engaged in a 10-day conversation with experienced moderators on the online guided discovery platform Recollective, completing the following activities as part of this engagement:

- **Diary tasks:** Over the first four days, respondents were set a series of daily tasks to complete, designed to reveal real-time engagement preferences and perceptions to provide valuable and unique insights for participants as individuals.
- **Guided engagement:** Moderators prompted the community with set stimuli to test how perceptions as a group differed and generate group discussion. This provided the opportunity for the moderators to probe specific comments or themes in more detail, and for participants to interact with each other.
- **Online Focus Groups:** At the end of the 10-day engagement period, the community members took part in a moderated 90-minute discussion, led by an experienced facilitator. There were six focus group discussions held over a two-day period. The profile for these groups was informed by their responses to the earlier activities, specifically how frequently they interacted with news and how trustworthy they find New Zealand news media (see appendix 1 for details of these profiles).

Participants in the 10-day engagement activities and focus group discussions received koha for their participation.

3. AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD) 5th annual Trust in News in Aotearoa New Zealand 2024 report
4. As above p10-11

RESEARCH DESIGN – QUANTITATIVE:

The insights generated by the qualitative phase were used to inform the development of a quantitative survey, designed to provide robust and transferable insights representative of the general population of New Zealand.

This survey engaged a national sample of n=1,008 adults aged 18+ and was administered via an online panel.

Quota targets were set on age and gender to represent as closely as possible the national population as reported in the 2023 Census.

Quota targets were also placed on region, but this was designed as a proportionally adjusted national sample. This approach involved slightly reducing the number of interviews in the major city regions and reproportioning to the other regions, thereby maintaining relative representation in the sample whilst allowing greater confidence in the data at a regional level (see appendix 1 for details of quota targets and achievement).

It should be noted, in this report, figures have been rounded to whole numbers. Due to this rounding, some charts, tables and summary measures may not add up precisely to the totals provided or 100%.

Ethnicity was allowed to fall out naturally within the sample.

The online survey was active from 12–29 May 2025.

USE OF AI IN THIS RESEARCH:

Generative Artificial Intelligence tools were employed during the initial stages of the project to assist with the analysis of free text data across both qualitative and quantitative components. Specifically, generative AI was used to support the identification and organisation of key themes within the dataset. All subsequent analysis, interpretation, and reporting of findings were carried out exclusively by human researchers to ensure contextual accuracy and academic rigour.

- 1 -

The Media Landscape

“Hard news is being watered down now... It can be difficult and depressing, and I’m not sure that we have the appetite for it in New Zealand”

The Media Landscape

ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS MEDIA

Engagement with news media is high: over three quarters of the public (82%) describe themselves as 'moderately interested', 'very interested', or 'extremely interested' in news (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Interest levels in news and current affairs



Q: How much interest do you have in news and current affairs?

Base: total n=1,008

There are differences by age in interest and engagement with news. Whilst interest is lower among a younger audience (those aged 18-24), still nearly three quarters of this group (72%) describe themselves as moderately to extremely interested in news and current affairs (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Interest in news and current affairs by age

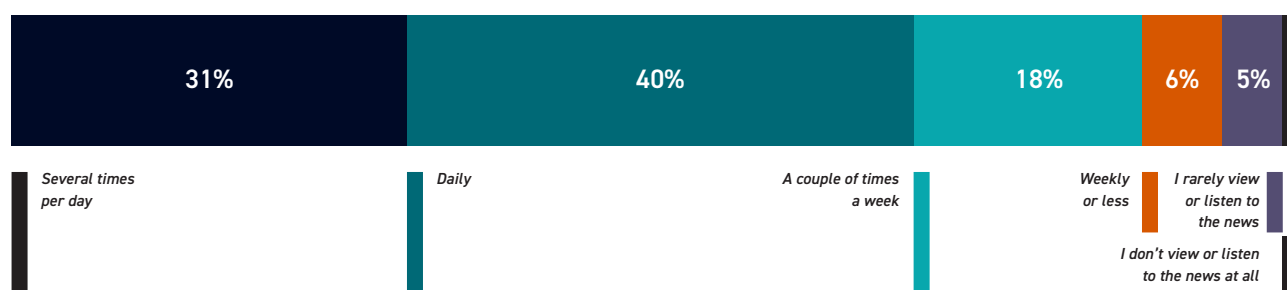
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Extremely interested	5%	8%	12%	16%	21%	25%
Very interested	30%	36%	33%	25%	35%	45%
Moderately interested	37%	31%	35%	38%	33%	20%
Slightly interested	21%	17%	15%	14%	10%	6%
Not interested	7%	7%	5%	7%	1%	2%
Total n	121	167	187	162	154	216

Q: How much interest do you have in news and current affairs?

Base: total n=1,008 (1 person refused to give their age)

The most frequent consumers of news are skewed to an older age group, with 90% of those aged 55 and older (reference table 1.2) viewing or listening to news daily or more often, compared to around half of those aged 18–24 (49%) and 25–34 (54%) (Figure 1.2 & Table 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Frequency of news consumption from any source



Q: How often do you view or listen to news from any source?

Base: total n=1,008

Table 1.2: Frequency of news consumption from any source by age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Several times per day	7%	17%	22%	27%	42%	57%
Daily	42%	37%	39%	44%	45%	35%
A couple of times a week	23%	29%	29%	17%	10%	4%
Weekly or less	18%	10%	5%	4%	1%	1%
I rarely view or listen to the news	8%	7%	4%	7%	2%	2%
I don't view or listen to the news at all	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Total n	121	167	187	162	154	216

Q: How often do you view or listen to news from any source?

Base: total n=1,008 (1 person refused to give their age)

The older respondents on the panel tend to have a more structured approach to their engagement with news media, often scheduling TV news programmes and routinely reading the newspaper in the morning.

Older participants value the traditional formats and presenters who they perceive to be authoritative.

In contrast, younger respondents navigate a more fragmented, 'always-on' news environment, and often source their news from social media, blending information and entertainment.

One of the key challenges identified was the sheer volume and variety of sources, which made it difficult for some to identify which were trusted news sources. For older respondents, particularly, there is a perceived erosion of journalistic standards and authority, leading them to be more sceptical about the news content.

STUCK BETWEEN TOO MUCH AND NOT ENOUGH

We saw an apparent contradiction in the qualitative discussions about a frustration that the news lacks detail, and yet that there is too much news. It appears there is an overwhelming amount of superficial news content – a mile wide but only an inch deep – leaving users both oversaturated and unsatisfied.

In conversation with panellists, we see a pattern in the types of news people typically engaged with, and the different topics/areas had differing impacts. Engagement with news provides not just information, but also a sense of belonging, identity, relaxation, and challenge.

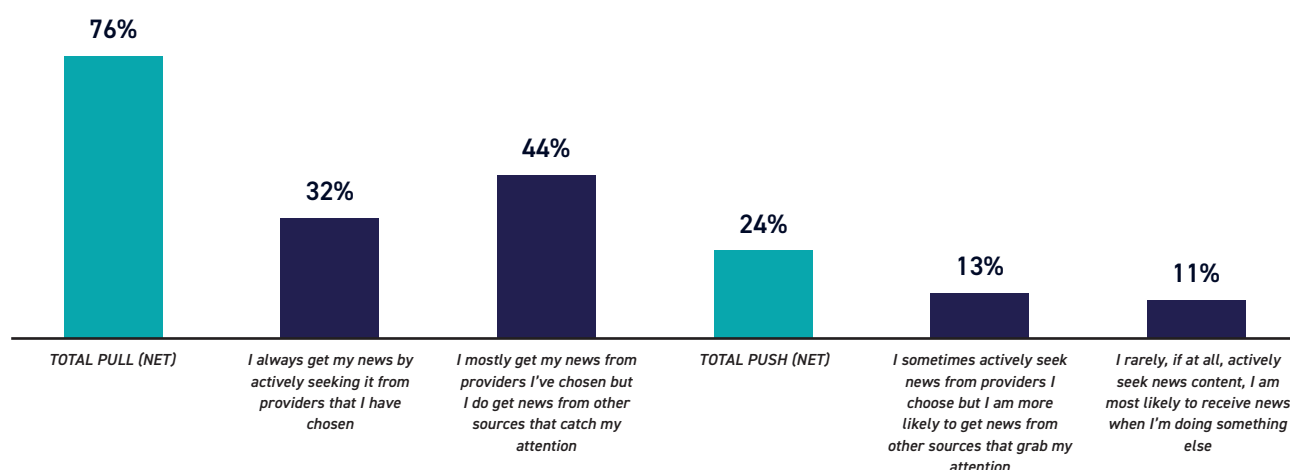
This makes it a complex environment to navigate - and some have channelled their choice into areas they feel have a less draining and more positive emotional impact on them. This also demonstrates trust is more important in some areas than others, and these are held to a higher standard.

ACTIVE VS PASSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS

How a consumer engages with news media is dependent on how interested they are in it. If a consumer is engaged and interested in news, they will actively seek it out. That is called "pull" as they are pulling content to them. If someone is not interested in news, it might still appear to them anyway. That is called "push" as the content is being pushed into their view.

Overall, respondents indicated they are more likely to actively engage with news providers of their choosing rather than consume news via “push” media (76% vs 24%) (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: How news is obtained



Q: Which of the following best describes how you get your news?

Base: total n=1,008

Even though the younger age groups (aged 18-34) show a greater exposure to “push” media than the population at large, the majority still, for the most part, choose their news media sources (64% vs 36%) (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3: How news is obtained by age

	18-34	Total
TOTAL PULL (NET)	64%	76%
I always get my news by actively seeking it from providers that I have chosen	22%	32%
I mostly get my news from providers I've chosen but I do get news from other sources that catch my attention	42%	44%
TOTAL PUSH (NET)	36%	24%
I sometimes actively seek news from providers I choose but I am more likely to get news from other sources that grab my attention	19%	13%
I rarely, if at all, actively seek news content, I am most likely to receive news when I am doing something else	17%	11%
Total n	288	1,008

Q: Which of the following best describes how you get your news?

Base: total n=1,008

The more engaged the public is with news and current affairs, the more likely they are to “pull” media they’ve actively chosen; 60% of those with little-to-no interest in news tend to rely on media content that is “pushed” their way (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: How news is obtained by levels of interest in news

	No – low interest in news	Moderate – high interest in news
TOTAL PULL (NET)	40%	84%
I always get my news by actively seeking it from providers that I have chosen	15%	36%
I mostly get my news from providers I’ve chosen but I do get news from other sources that catch my attention	25%	48%
TOTAL PUSH (NET)	60%	16%
I sometimes actively seek news from providers I choose but I am more likely to get news from other sources that grab my attention	19%	12%
I rarely, if at all, actively seek news content, I am most likely to receive news when I am doing something else	41%	4%
Total n	181	827

Q: Which of the following best describes how you get your news?

Base: total n=1,008

The sources of news media our panel members, regardless of age, most commonly and consistently actively engaged with were news websites, social media and, for older participants, traditional media such as television, radio and newspapers.

News websites were preferred by all because they enable people to consume news from a source of their choice, that they perceive to offer structured and reliable content.

Social media is a major source of news for younger panel members (especially those 18-24 years) who actively go to platforms like Facebook, TikTok and YouTube to access news. Although this can be considered passive consumption, many younger users are adept at navigating online (social media) news content, demonstrating a degree of intentional engagement while acknowledging their content is oftentimes algorithmically fed.

WHY PEOPLE ENGAGE WITH CERTAIN MEDIA

In the qualitative panel it was discussed that news providers do not appear to have the respect of the viewing public the way they might have had in the past, and younger people are taught to question more than ever. Greater distrust is seen as a good thing – to a point. Despite criticism of this shift in news consumption and trust, some see the audience of the past as more trusting than they should have been and welcome the shift in today's media.

During the panel discussion our participants explained why they chose to engage with their preferred news media. Most participants curate a set of preferred news media that reflect their interests and roles, demonstrating that relevance and personalisation are key drivers of engagement. In addition to seeking out news media that reflects their interests, they also choose a source of news media that they perceive as credible or that aligns with their expectations of a trusted source (e.g. publicly owned, New Zealand-based).

The younger participants look for convenience and accessibility from their preferred news sources, so often gravitate towards digital and social platforms because of their immediacy and ease of integration into their daily lives.

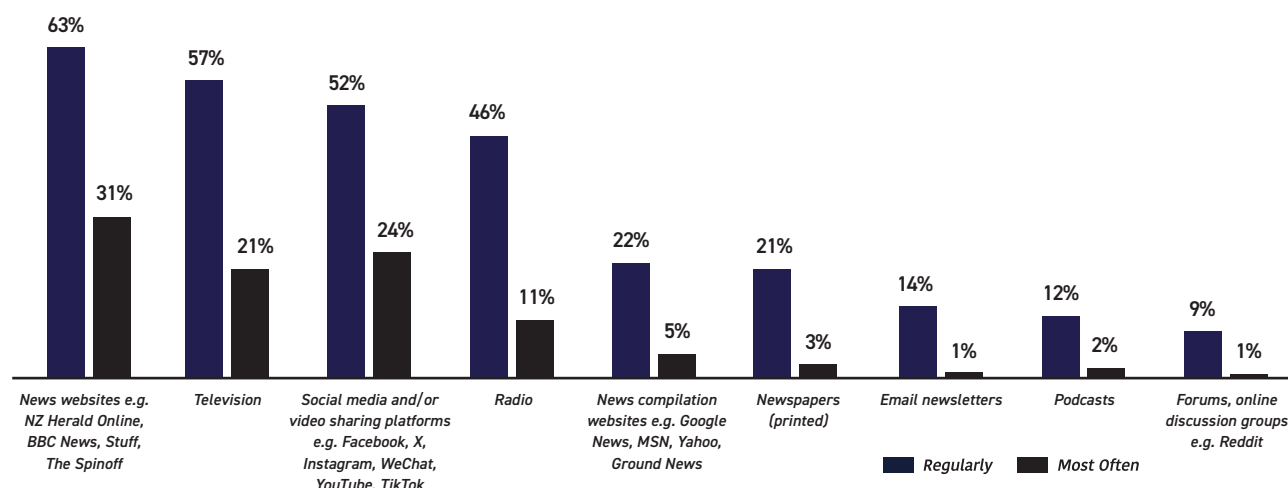
Our older participants prefer traditional formats because they offer a clear, predictable structure that helps them distinguish between news, opinion, and entertainment.

SOURCES OF NEWS MEDIA USED

People are seeking a range of sources for their news; on average three different sources are claimed to be used regularly. Across all age bands, news websites are the source used most regularly and often (Figure 1.4, Table 1.5, and Table 1.6).

Whilst traditional media sources such as TV and radio are used regularly by around half of the overall population, this is skewed by the older population (those aged 55 or older). Social media plays a key role for youth, with over three-quarters (83%) using it regularly as a source of news and for over half (56%), it is the source they use most often (Table 1.5 and Table 1.6).

Figure 1.4: Sources used regularly and most often



Q: Where do you get your news from regularly?

Base: NOT rarely or ever view or listen to news from any source n=951

Q: And which one of these would you get your news from most often? SINGLE CODE

Base: Get news from at least one source regularly n=947

Table 1.5: Sources used regularly by age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
News Websites e.g. NZ Herald Online, BBC News, Stuff, The Spinoff	53%	62%	67%	64%	67%	61%
Television	42%	34%	46%	60%	64%	83%
Social media and / or video sharing platforms e.g. Facebook, X, Instagram, WeChat, YouTube, TikTok	83%	69%	65%	42%	40%	25%
Radio	33%	34%	39%	42%	58%	62%
News compilation websites e.g. Google News, MSN, Yahoo, Ground News	17%	14%	25%	25%	30%	20%
Newspapers (printed versions)	12%	18%	16%	15%	23%	33%
Email Newsletters	13%	10%	6%	11%	16%	23%
Podcasts	12%	14%	16%	14%	10%	8%
Forums, online discussion groups e.g. Reddit	15%	16%	13%	7%	6%	1%
Blogs; online commentary, e.g. Substack writers	7%	8%	12%	5%	5%	7%
Live Streaming Platforms e.g. Twitch, Kick, Rumble	8%	6%	7%	5%	6%	2%
Magazines (printed versions)	0%	3%	7%	1%	7%	6%
Total n	109	154	178	149	151	209

Q: Where do you get your news from regularly?

Base: NOT rarely or ever view or listen to news from any source n=951

Table 1.6 Sources used most often by age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
News Websites e.g., NZ Herald Online, BBC News, Stuff, The Spinoff	17%	30%	34%	34%	38%	31%
Television	11%	8%	14%	26%	25%	34%
Social media and / or video sharing platforms e.g. Facebook, X, Instagram, WeChat, YouTube, TikTok	56%	39%	28%	15%	11%	7%
Radio	6%	6%	8%	12%	16%	15%
News compilation websites e.g. Google News, MSN, Yahoo, Ground News	3%	3%	6%	5%	7%	2%
Newspapers (printed versions)	2%	1%	2%	1%	0%	9%
Email Newsletters	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Podcasts	2%	5%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Forums, online discussion groups e.g. Reddit	2%	4%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Blogs; online commentary, e.g. Substack writers	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Live Streaming Platforms e.g. Twitch, Kick, Rumble	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%
Magazines (printed versions)	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Total n	108	153	177	149	151	208

Q: And which one of these would you get your news from most often?

Base: Get news from at least one source regularly n=947

Figure 1.5: Thematic Map of News Media Engagement by Age Group

Source: Panel Members

18-24	25-34	35-54	55+
Traditional Media Occasional Use Low Structure	Traditional Media Moderate Use Routine	Traditional Media Routine Trust	Traditional Media Structured Routine High Trust
Digital News Websites Convenience Relevance	Digital News Websites Convenience Trust	Digital News Websites Trust Relevance	Digital News Websites Credibility Routine
Social Media High Convenience Entertainment Navigation Skills	Social Media Convenience Entertainment	Social Media Supplemental Use	Social Media Low Use
Curated Sources Personal Relevance Ease of Access	Curated Sources Personal Relevance Preferred Providers	Curated Sources Personal Relevance Selective Engagement	Curated Sources Selective Engagement Familiarity

Traditional Media = TV, Radio, Newspapers;
Social Media = Facebook, TikTok, YouTube;

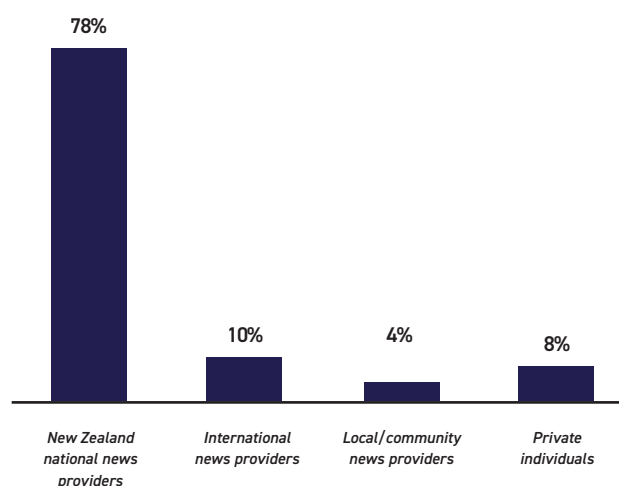
Digital News Websites = e.g. NZ Herald, Stuff, BBC
Curated Sources = Aggregators, Newsletters

TYPES OF NEWS PROVIDERS USED

The types of news providers used most often are:

- New Zealand national news providers (78%) (Figure 1.6)
- Publicly funded and owned, rather than privately funded and owned providers (65% vs 35%) (Figure 1.7)
- Providers delivering news predominantly in the English language (93% most often) (Figure 1.8)

Figure 1.6: Types of providers used to get news



Q: And do you get your news most often from....?

Base: Get news from at least one source most often
n=945

Figure 1.7: Public or privately funded or owned news providers

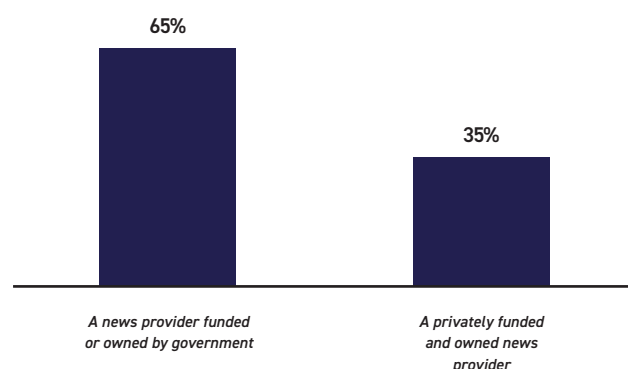
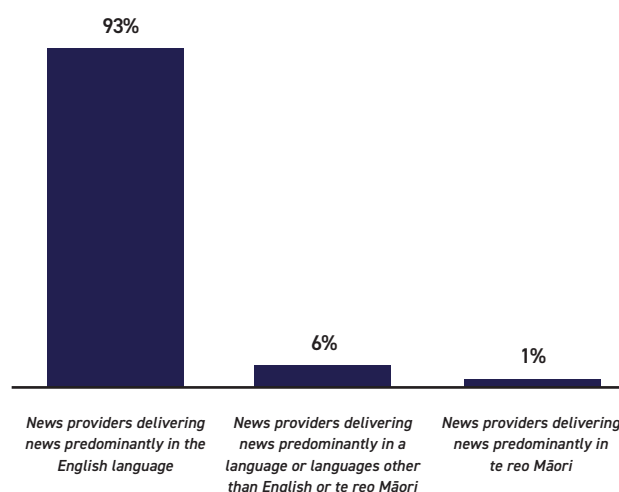


Figure 1.8: English-language providers or providers using languages other than English



Q: And do you get your news most often from....? Base: Get news from at least one source most often n=945

In the qualitative discussions, panel members were asked to explain their usage of news providers. They stated a preference for New Zealand-based providers because of cultural familiarity, relevance of the news content, and a level of trust with domestic journalism.

They also stated a preference for publicly funded or owned providers because they would like to believe that the smaller commercial focus of publicly funded or owned providers means they are more neutral and trustworthy.

Participants' predominant use of English language news media was more related to English being their primary language than to English language channels being more trusted than others.

- 2 -

**A broad consumer
view of news and
information today**

“ I want fact based and I want the news stories clearly separated from opinion, I still need to be entertained with the presentation of it, otherwise I will lose interest. I still want some personality and storytelling on show ”

The Evolving Role of News in People's Lives

WHAT CONSTITUTES 'NEWS'?

The definition of 'news' has become increasingly fluid, shaped by a media landscape where boundaries between factual reporting, entertainment, opinion, and gossip are often indistinct. While some audiences prioritise accuracy and relevance, others are drawn to a mix that includes commentary, personality-driven content, and emotionally engaging stories.

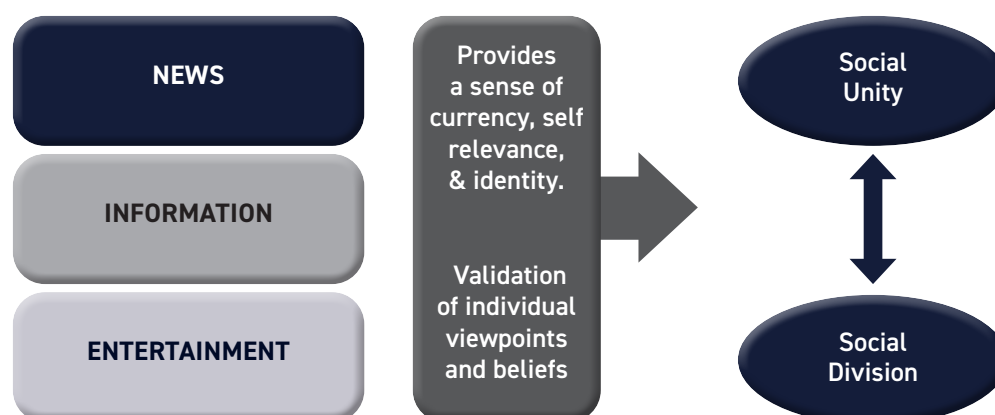
"If you watch something like Breakfast there is often a mix of serious news, lifestyle segments, celebrity interviews, celebrating good guys etc. That is all news of a kind, it's just different news."

Across the spectrum of viewer/listener choices, there remains a shared desire for news that feels balanced, meaningful, and engaging—yet the line between information and entertainment is now more porous than ever, challenging traditional notions of what qualifies as 'news'.

News and information have an impact on self-identity and affiliation and can bring people together or drive them apart

There was some discussion about how in the past, news brought people together with shared knowledge and a sense of purpose. This is understandable given the much narrower range of news sources available to people, and it was seen as potentially socially cohesive. News had a stronger inherent value.

Figure 2.1: News Media impact on Self



But in the current climate, many talked about the risk of news polarising and causing division with conflicting versions and viewpoints. It is difficult to align the narrative in a way that feels inclusive and trusted by everyone.

Disbelief

We spoke with some panelists who held strong ideological or political beliefs. Distrust was often mentioned - but typically because news organisations discuss points of view different from their personal beliefs. Citing distrust feels like a more rational reason for rejecting them, rather than confronting the belief and self-identity issues surrounding their opposition to the message.

"I could not watch the news during COVID. It was all vaccines and isolation and propaganda. No one else had a voice at that time: it was a way of controlling people."

TRUST IS ANCHORED IN FACTUAL, HARD NEWS

Consumers still associate trustworthiness with factual, hard news, including politics, current affairs, and global activities and developments. However, this type of news is seen as declining in visibility and appeal. The decline in appeal is more related to emotional fatigue, overload of negative stories, and a powerlessness to do anything about them, than it is to an erosion of trust.

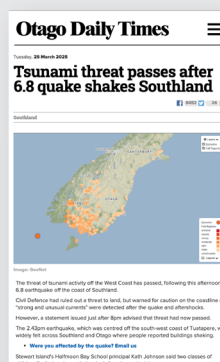
"World news can be quite shocking with a lot of the focus seeming to be on Gaza and Ukraine."

The demand for trustworthy analysis and reporting in this category is higher than for any other category, and people expect rigorous standards to be applied when delivering hard news.

"Hard news is being watered down now... It can be difficult and depressing, and I'm not sure that we have the appetite for it in New Zealand."

"To me, this is still the mainstay of news and what I look for, and this is the area where trust is most important."

Figure 2.2:
Examples of fact-led content



TRUST IS BUILT THROUGH CLEAR DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The most trusted news providers are those that clearly differentiate 'hard news' from 'lite news' of entertainment and celebrity. News outlets are increasingly featuring opinion columns, analysis pieces and commentary, which are appreciated so long as this content is clearly flagged as such. Consumers perceive that this has been achieved most successfully by publicly funded or owned media sources.

Figure 2.3: Example of blurring the lines between news and entertainment



Some regional providers were put forward as good examples of outlets that clearly differentiate hard from lite news. They have a reputation for straightforward, local reporting and avoiding sensationalism. Another feature of the positive reputation of some regional newspapers is their adherence to a traditional news structure, which appeals to older audiences.

While news websites offer a mix of content, their dedicated news sections are generally trusted more when separated from lifestyle and entertainment, leading to higher levels of engagement. For these news websites, however, trust varies depending on how well they signpost the factual reporting versus opinion pieces or sponsored content.

When opinion-based reporting dominates, the results can be socially divisive.

NEWS HAS TO ENGAGE

While people want hard news to be clearly differentiated, it is also important that news delivery is engaging and interesting. Panellists preferred news that is creatively presented and brings stories to life, but not overly opinionated or sensationalised.

"Having said that I want fact based and I want the news stories clearly separated from opinion, I still need to be entertained with the presentation of it, otherwise I will lose interest. I still want some personality and storytelling on show."

"For sports and local news, I'm generally curious about what's going on. I will feel more engaged and focused if it is a story about a local event or people around my age."

Trust and Curated News Sources

Consumers are actively curating their news sources based on perceived credibility, neutrality and relevance.

- **Trusted news sources** include public funded or owned outlets, and New Zealand based providers. They also claim to trust English language news, but this is more likely to be related to accessibility than genuine trust.
- **Sources avoided for news** include those that are perceived as biased, those that are perceived to have different values to that of the consumer, tabloids and celebrity gossip, and news sources that require a paid subscription or personal registration to access.

Figure 2.4 Examples of engaging lite news content, using local connections

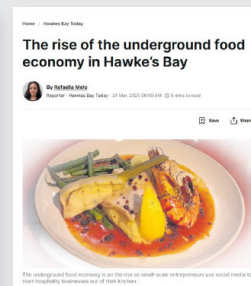
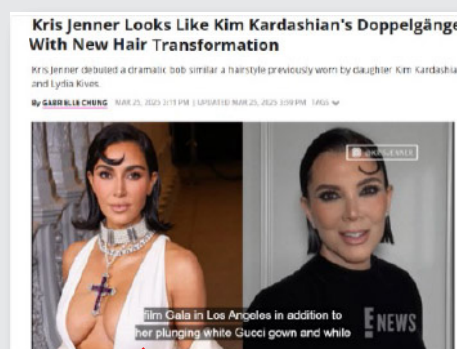


Figure 2.5 Examples of items not considered news



Articles that focus on celebrity gossip are often viewed and perceived as entertaining, but do not fall into consumers' definition of "news". They are fun, interesting and have a place in consumers media consumption, but are not considered "news".

Articles that are very 'local' to an area and to a specific topic, are often described as too parochial to be considered hard news. As with the celebrity gossip piece, they are interesting (to some) and are an important feature of local news but are not broadly relevant enough to be considered "hard news".

Emotional and Cognitive Trust Filters

Trust is not just about accuracy; it is also about psychological safety. People tend to avoid news that makes them feel overwhelmed, powerless or manipulated. This leads to self-protective disengagement, especially from hard political or international news.

*“It’s not that I don’t care – it is that I am powerless
to do anything about it.”*

While exposure to news that is emotionally threatening leads to disengagement rather than distrust, for some, too-frequent bombardment of news that makes them feel emotionally threatened can be a stepping stone to distrust.

TRUST IS A PASSIVE CONCERN

It is important to say that many consumers don’t consciously think about trust in news until they are prompted. This suggests a need for public dialogue and education to raise awareness and encourage critical media consumption, especially among the younger generation.

It is also important to note that people apply different trust standards depending on the type of news they are consuming. For hard news they apply high trust standards, whereas for lite news, such as sports, entertainment and lifestyle content, they apply lower expectations, reflecting a layered trust model, where not all news is held to the same standards.

Trust Challengers

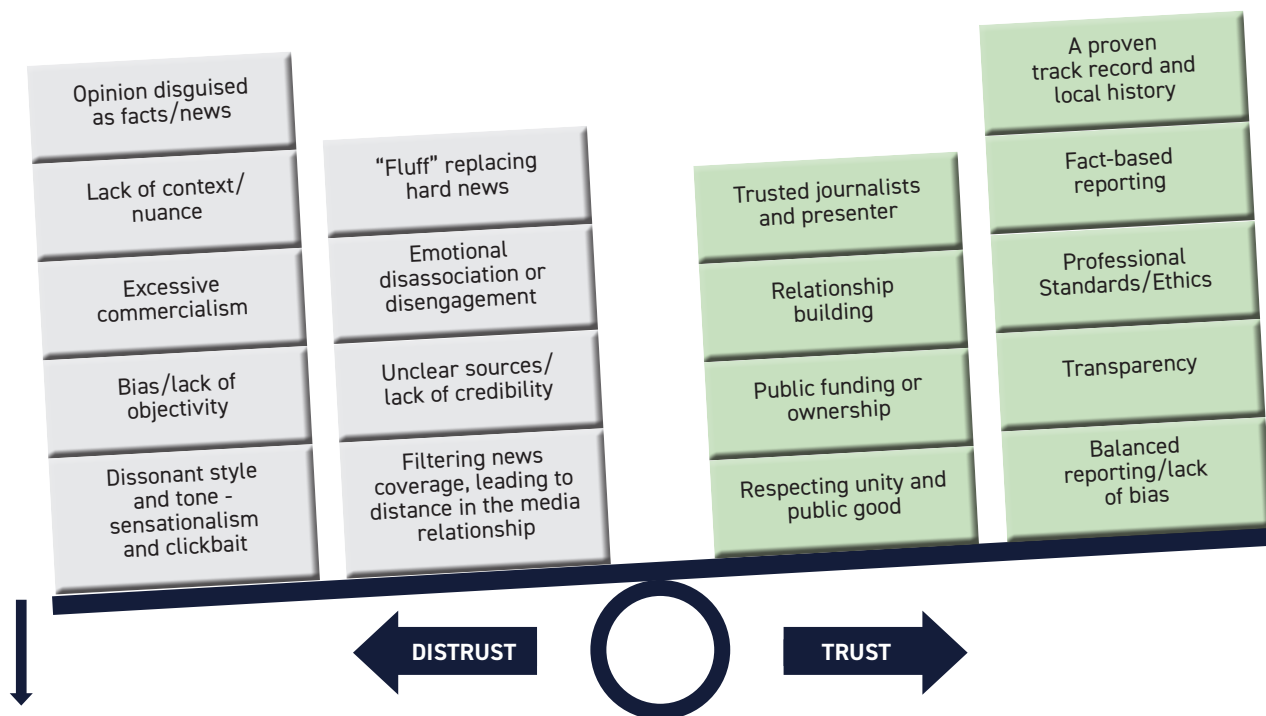
Clickbait and sensationalism

Emotionally manipulative content, untrue or misleading headlines, and sensationalism are major trust breakers for people. They feel used, misled, disappointed that content does not support the headline, and that their precious time has been wasted.

*“I’m used to seeing clickbait-type headlines and then reading the article to find
it was just that, ‘click baiting’, to pull me into the story, which I resent and feel
irritated by. I do not trust organisations that do this.”*

Trust is a complex issue to discuss with clarity. People view trust through a lens that incorporates rational measures, emotional responses, experience, and beliefs. One thing we found in these discussions was that consumers become confused with what is association, engagement, belief and trust.

Figure 2.6: Trust Dynamics



- 3 -

**What are the factors
promoting trust in
news media?**

“New Zealand providers
[are] seen to have a high
standard of journalistic
integrity and media
neutrality which is an
established part of our
functioning democracy”

Factors that promote trust in news

INCONSISTENCY IN THE ASSESSMENT OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Discussions with panellists revealed that people did not always apply consistent criteria when assessing the trustworthiness of news articles. While some common factors are considered, such as the credibility of the source and the level of supporting evidence, evaluations seem to vary depending on personal perspectives, news consumption habits, and the specific content and characteristics of each story.

Some key factors emerged in discussions that can influence how people assess the trustworthiness of a particular news story, even if the source and evidence are similar across a range of different articles:

1. The individual's regular news consumption habits and familiarity with the topic
2. Their personal biases and perspectives on certain subjects (e.g. scepticism towards political figures or topics)
3. The presentation and framing of the article (e.g. tone, website design, even the degree of advertising surrounding it).

"I probably question the news more than most people I know. I've been around for a long time and don't take things at face value these days, certainly when it comes to PR political pieces."

"I do not trust or engage in this type of celebrity gossip as it appears to be written as clickbait to get the reader to see the advertising."

TRUST IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEWS MEDIA PROVIDERS

The locale and scope of a news provider is the strongest differentiator in the degree to which different types of providers are trusted, with only 22% of participants not differentiating trust for providers on this factor, compared to 38% in the way a provider is funded.

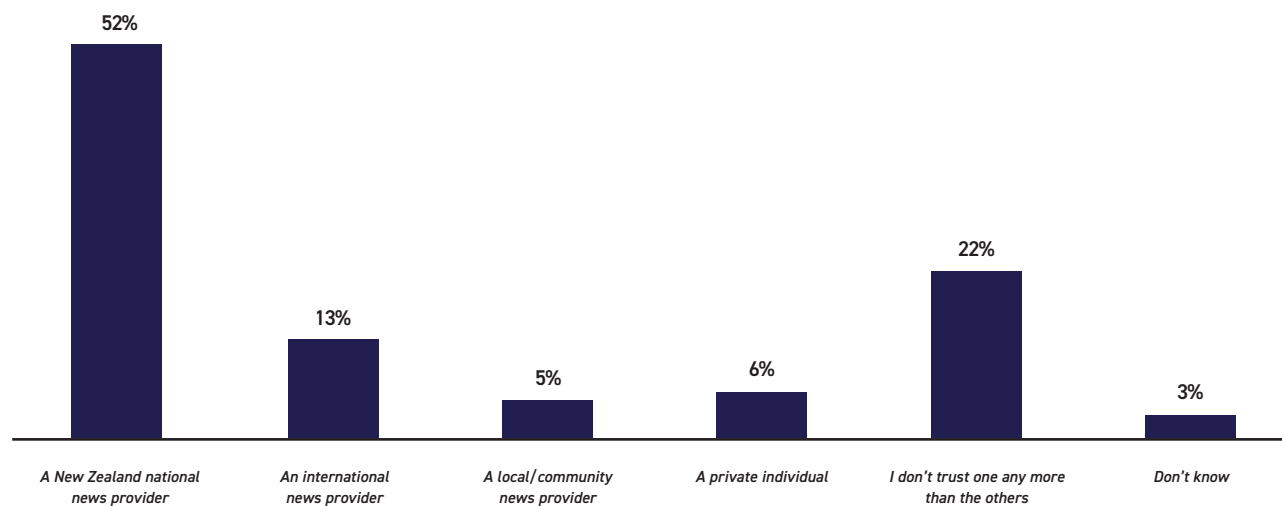
The types of providers that are stated to be most trusted (and used most often) are:

- New Zealand national news providers
- News providers funded or owned by government

Those who trust international news providers more, are more likely to have higher levels of formal education. For instance, among those who hold a Masters' degree or higher, 25% have most trust in international providers compared to 13% of the general population.

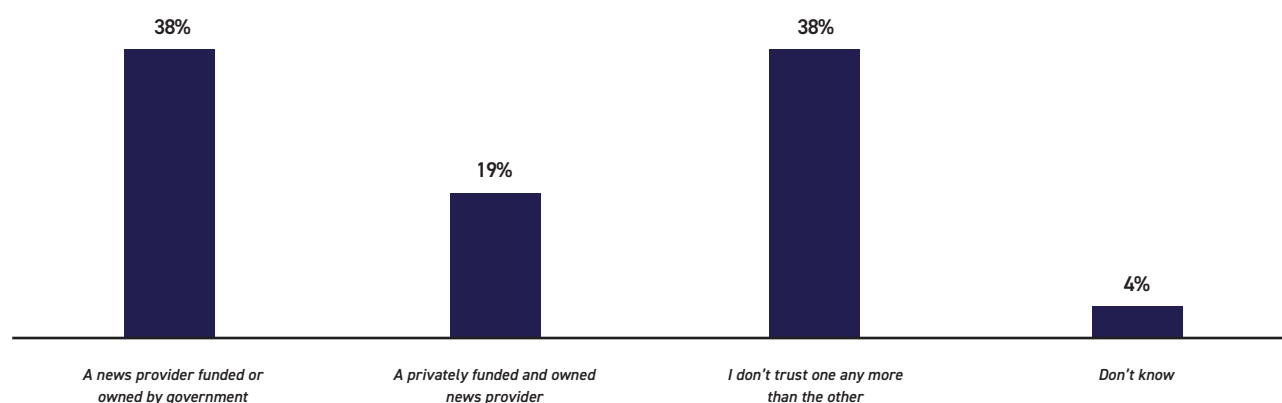
Whilst over a third of participants (38%) do not trust a publicly funded or owned provider any more or less than a privately funded or owned provider, those aged 18-24 are more likely to trust one over the other, with just 17% of this group not expressing trust in one type of provider over another.

Figure 3.1 Most trusted news providers



Q: Which one of these types of news providers would you have most trust in (SINGLE CODE)?
Base: Total sample n=1,008

Figure 3.2 Most trusted news providers



Q: And which one of these types of news providers would you have most trust in (SINGLE CODE)?
Base: Total sample n=1,008

REASONS WHY PEOPLE HAVE MOST TRUST IN NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL NEWS PROVIDERS

The key theme why people have most trust in a New Zealand national news provider stems from a perceived sense of greater integrity and cultural understanding from local providers, than international providers. Where credibility was attributed to specific factors, most mentioned was journalistic standards, a perceived lack of bias and the ability to verify information.

*"It's more reliable because it's national and the facts can be verified.
International news providers have too many grey areas."*

*"Because of the New Zealand high standard of journalistic integrity and media
neutrality which is an established part of our functioning democracy."*

A New Zealand news provider (whether national or regional) was also seen to be better placed to cover the issues of importance for the country. There is a belief that local/community news providers are more accountable to their communities, and the relatability and familiarity of these providers gives people some comfort in their ability to trust them.

*"As it is being broadcast at a national level, it is more likely to deliver news
that is somewhat true, and if not, can be fact checked by the public."*

"I have grown up with these media outlets and have an inherent trust in them."

New Zealand providers are perceived to be independent, to cover news without bias, and to have a greater degree of accountability both through the standards that are in place and the easier ability to fact-check.

*"New Zealand sources seem like they would be more independent
from corruption or political agendas."*

*"I think the bigger mainstream news providers have strict regulations
to keep news honest and fact checked."*

Table 3.1 Factors why New Zealand news providers are more trustworthy

Key themes
1. Trustworthiness and credibility
2. Local relevance and familiarity
3. Independence and accountability

Q: What makes this type of news provider more trustworthy for you than the others?

Base: has most trust in a New Zealand national news provider n=526

OUR QUALITATIVE DISCUSSIONS REINFORCE THE FINDINGS FROM QUANTITATIVE DATA

'Mainstream' national providers are familiar and established. High profile outlets like Stuff, NZ Herald, TVNZ, RNZ, and Newstalk ZB are widely used, and their presenters and journalists are familiar and have built trust over a long period of time. While trusted by many, there is still some criticism regarding bias and lack of depth in reporting.

For many respondents, local/community news feels more personal and credible. Proximity builds trust; people feel more connected to stories from their own communities and that they can relate to. Familiarity is important at the national level, too.

"When it's local or regional, it has more personal ties...you might know someone in the story, and it is easy to verify."

Other outlets (such as Newsroom, The Spinoff, Scoop, and Salient) offer a different perspective to 'mainstream' sources, and can be valued by younger audiences, for specialised coverage and accessing diverse viewpoints. Generally, these providers are used as a counterbalance to the broader perspective and mainstream media.

Some trust platforms (such as The Platform or Groundswell) because they reflect their personal values.

"I would 100% trust this one, more than government funded news I see elsewhere."

Social media tends not to be a trusted single source for serious/hard news. People are aware of the algorithm-led influence on what they see and the bias that brings to the news shared. If they do see serious/hard news stories on social media, they will generally sense check them with a more reliable source before taking them seriously.

REASONS WHY PEOPLE HAVE MOST TRUST IN A NEWS PROVIDER FUNDED OR OWNED BY GOVERNMENT

For many, government funding implies stricter standards and greater accountability. A perceived lack of commercial pressure is seen to positively contribute to greater objectivity.

"Owned by the government who have a responsibility to give out country credible news."

"It is government funded; individual ones could possibly be biased towards specific political viewpoints."

"They're not in it to make money, therefore they are less likely to broadcast fake news just to get people listening / watching, because they are non-commercial."

Government funded or owned providers also tap into the rationale people have for trust of New Zealand national providers: their familiarity with and appreciation for 'local' news.

"Have a better understanding of the issues that matter to New Zealanders and are able to provide news content that is relevant to the lives of local people."

Table 3.2 Reasons why providers funded or owned by government are considered more trustworthy

Key themes
1. Greater objectivity
2. Accountability
3. Familiarity
4. Preference for local news

Q: What makes this type of news provider more trustworthy for you than the others?

Base: has most trust in a news provider funded or owned by government n=387

TRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS DELIVERING NEWS PREDOMINANTLY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

Due to the profile of the sample interviewed and the predominance of English as the primary language spoken, there is not strong evidence to suggest trust is influenced by language. The preference for English-language providers is more likely to be driven by accessibility.

"For most people, trust in this type of provider is driven by accessibility – the ability to comprehend and access news in their first language."

"English is my first language and the only one I speak fluently, so I would not understand (and therefore not trust) news in any other language."

REASONS FOR TRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS

A small minority of respondents (11%) found all news providers untrustworthy and hence were unable to talk about what made a provider feel trustworthy. For the 72% of respondents who commented, the key reason for trust in a news provider was that the provider was free from bias.⁵

Table 3.3: What makes a news provider feel trustworthy

Key themes	
1. Impartiality / free from bias	<i>"I want both sides of the story. No biases, no slants. News should be news".</i>
2. Credibility of the source	<i>"They are open to being questioned about their information and where it came from, and happy to correct it if wrong."</i>
3. Accuracy and fact checking	<i>"[F]ocus on the facts, high standards of reporting"</i>
4. Style of presentation	<i>"Penetrating questions, ... calm but firm. I don't want the opinion of the news presenters to come through in their tone or comments"</i>
5. Timeliness and depth	<i>"Relevant, well researched, in-depth, and informative..."</i>

Q: What would make you feel a news provider was trustworthy? (OPEN)

Base: Total sample n=1,008

THE EXTENT TO WHICH DIFFERENT FACTORS INFLUENCE TRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS

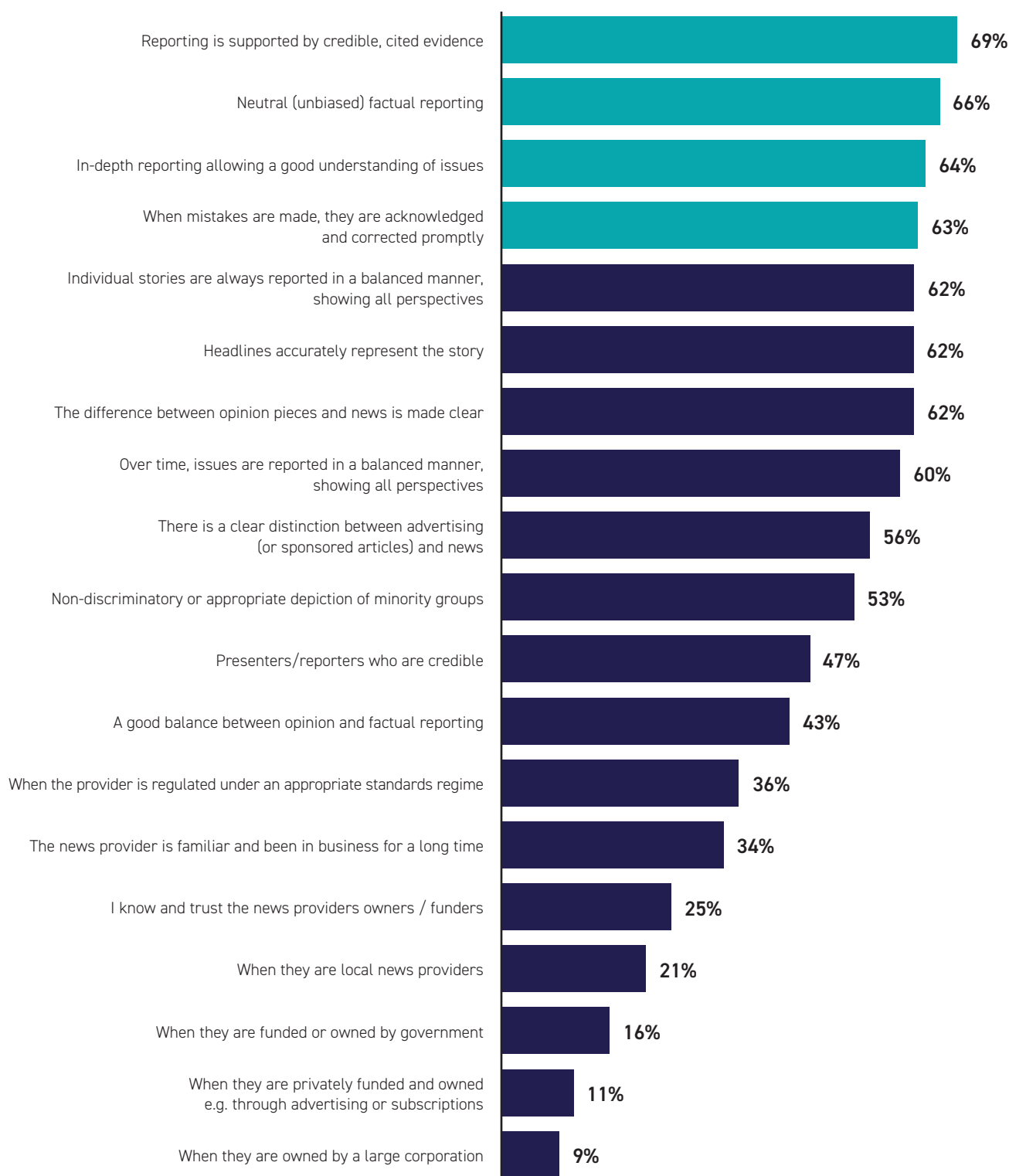
When prompted, the top four factors claimed to influence trust in news media to the greatest extent are:

- Reporting supported by credible, cited evidence (69%)
- Neutral (unbiased) reporting (66%)
- In-depth reporting allowing a good understanding of issues (64%)
- Mistakes acknowledged and corrected promptly (63%)

These are closely followed by individual stories being reported in a balanced manner, headlines accurately representing the story, and opinion and news being clearly differentiated (all at 62%).

5. 17% had no comments to make, making up the rest of the respondents.

Figure 3.3: Factors that make a news provider trustworthy (Percentage “to a great extent”)



Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider trustworthy?

Base: total sample n=1,008

Those aged 65+ are particularly strongly influenced by the factors above but aside from this, there is little demographic variance, suggesting these factors are universally relevant and influential across different sectors of society (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Importance of factors for driving trustworthiness by over 65's (Percentage "to a great extent")

	Aged 65+	Total
Reporting is supported by credible, cited evidence	77%	69%
Neutral (unbiased) factual reporting	73%	66%
In-depth reporting allowing a good understanding of issues	71%	64%
When mistakes are made, they are acknowledged and corrected promptly	74%	63%
Individual stories are always reported in a balanced manner, showing all perspectives	72%	62%
Headlines accurately represent the story	64%	62%
The difference between opinion pieces and news is made clear	71%	62%
Total	n=216	n=1,008

Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider trustworthy?

These factors also translate as equally important among users of social media and more traditional media, indicating that the public are assessing their trust in different media channels against a consistent set of expectations (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Importance of factors for driving trustworthiness by media channel (Percentage "to a great extent")

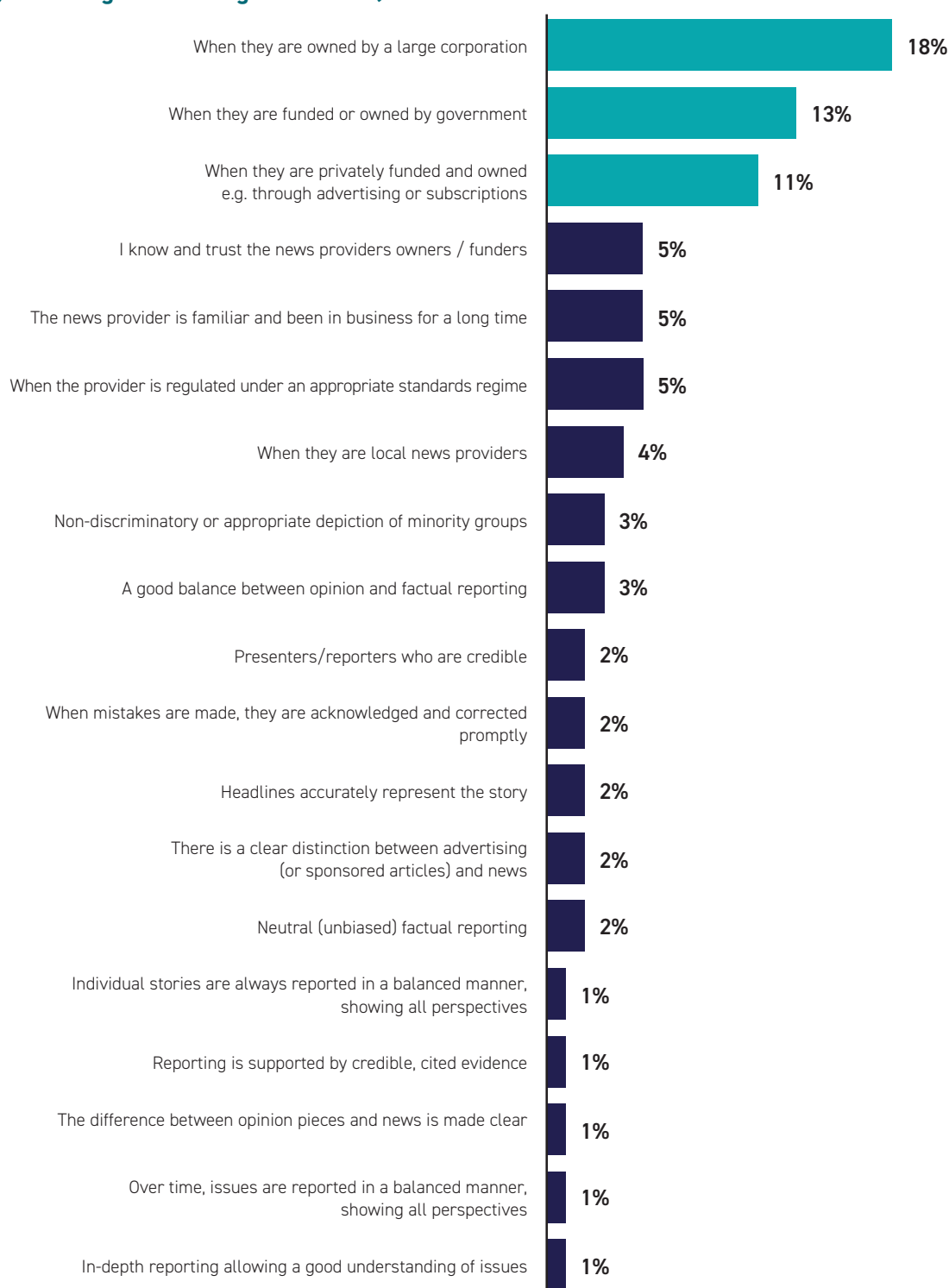
	Social media	TV	Radio
Reporting is supported by credible, cited evidence	69%	65%	70%
Neutral (unbiased) factual reporting	62%	69%	67%
In-depth reporting allowing a good understanding of issues	60%	64%	69%
When mistakes are made, they are acknowledged and corrected promptly	65%	60%	63%
Individual stories are always reported in a balanced manner, showing all perspectives	59%	64%	63%
Headlines accurately represent the story	60%	62%	68%
The difference between opinion pieces and news is made clear	56%	59%	67%
Total	n=224	n=97	n=104

Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider trustworthy?

Base: Source used most often for news

The different ways in which a news provider is funded has the lowest claimed influence on trust. All other factors impact on trustworthiness to a greater extent (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Importance of factors for driving trustworthiness
(Percentage answering “not at all”)



Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider trustworthy?

Base: total sample n=1,008

The level of interest an individual has in news and current affairs impacts the factors seen to influence trust – the more engaged a person is with the news, the more likely they are to be influenced by whether a provider:

- Has reporting supported by credible, cited evidence
- Clearly differentiates between opinion pieces and news
- Makes a clear distinction between advertising (or sponsored articles) and news
- Has owners who are known and trusted
- Is a local news provider
- Is funded or owned by government.

These results indicate this group is likely to hold a provider to greater account on a wider range of factors than the population at large (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Importance of factors for driving trustworthiness for those extremely interested (Percentage “to a great extent”)

	Extremely interested in news and current affairs	Total
Reporting is supported by credible, cited evidence	78%	69%
Neutral (unbiased) factual reporting	73%	66%
The difference between opinion pieces and news is made clear	72%	62%
In-depth reporting allowing a good understanding of issues	71%	64%
There is a clear distinction between advertising (or sponsored articles) and news	70%	56%
When mistakes are made, they are acknowledged and corrected promptly	69%	63%
Over time, issues are reported in a balanced manner, showing all perspectives	68%	60%
Individual stories are always reported in a balanced manner, showing all perspectives	68%	62%
Headlines accurately represent the story	67%	62%
Non-discriminatory or appropriate depiction of minority groups	59%	53%
Presenters/reporters who are credible	53%	47%
A good balance between opinion and factual reporting	52%	43%
When the provider is regulated under an appropriate standards regime	38%	36%
I know and trust the news providers owners / funders	34%	25%
The news provider is familiar and been in business for a long time	33%	34%
When they are local news providers	31%	21%
When they are funded or owned by government	26%	16%
When they are privately funded and owned e.g. through advertising or subscriptions	16%	11%
Total	n=157	n=1,008

Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider trustworthy?
 Base: Extremely interested in news and current affairs

Our qualitative participants identified several key factors that influenced their level of trust with the news media. The key influencing factor was whether they perceived that the news outlet was following the expected professional standards of accuracy, truth, lack of bias and accountability. There was acknowledgement that their measurement of how well a news provider performed on these factors was influenced by their own political proclivity and opinions.

They also placed greater trust on media providers who focused on hard news (factual, evidence-based geopolitical national and international news) than on those whose leading content was considered 'lite' and fluffy (entertainment, celebrity, gossip and, for some, sport).

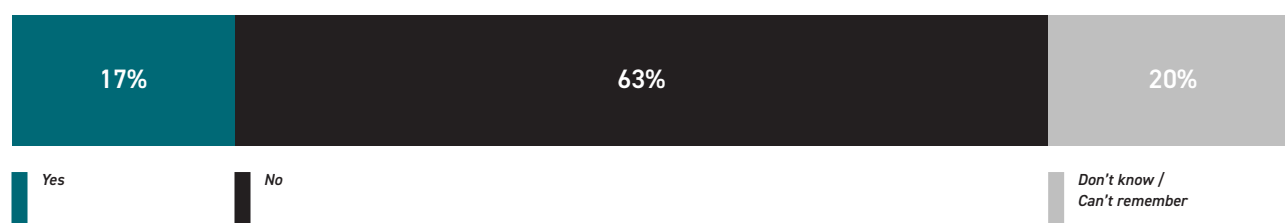
Finally, participants expressed growing concerns over the reliability of news content. The rise in misinformation and disinformation across a wide array of platforms and channels, from traditional media to news websites and social media, has eroded trust. This explosion of news sources has left many feeling overwhelmed and unsure about which providers to

believe. As confidence in the ability to distinguish fact from fiction wanes, some individuals have chosen to withdraw from news altogether, whereas others have limited their consumption to the provider they feel most comfortable with. This, combined with the constant stream of negative global news, paired with a sense of helplessness in influencing outcomes, has led people to reduce both how much news they consume and which sources they engage with.

STRENGTHENING TRUST

Reporting is more likely to influence trust negatively than positively. Fewer than one in five people (17%) can report an event that caused trust to strengthen (Figure 3.5) – compared to over a third (39%) who can pinpoint an event that caused a drop in their trust of news media (Figure 4.2). However, there is potential for 'negativity bias' to be at play here i.e. the tendency for people to have greater recollection of negative events or place greater weight on them than positive events.

Figure 3.5: Percentage who have experienced a positive trust rating due to a reporting event



Q: Has there been any particular event or period in time where reporting caused your trust in news media in general to strengthen? *Base: Total sample n=1,008*

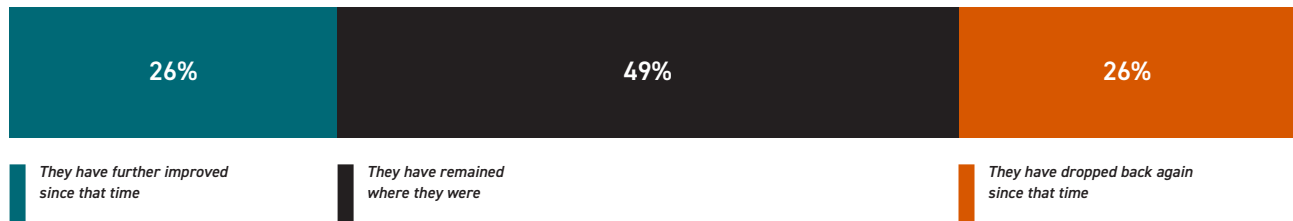
The key events indicated as times when trust was strengthened by reporting in news media were:

- COVID-19 era – providing accurate, regular and reliable information during the pandemic.
- Election coverage – when coverage is seen to be balanced and representative of different viewpoints for elections in both New Zealand and the United States.
- Major New Zealand natural disasters and events – extensive and on-the-ground coverage of events such as the Christchurch earthquakes and flooding events, as well as the Christchurch Mosque terrorist attack.
- Major global conflicts – when coverage of events such as the Israel-Hamas conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war is felt to be presented in an unbiased manner.

Q: Please describe that event or period of time (OPEN) *Base: Have experienced a particular event or period of time where reporting caused trust in news media to strengthen n=168*

Although relatively fewer people experienced reporting of an event that strengthened trust, there are indications that once trust has been strengthened, there is a good opportunity to maintain that trust. Of those for whom trust has been strengthened, half (49%) claim that these levels of trust have been maintained longer term, and for around a quarter (26%) their levels of trust have improved further (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Long-term effect on trust of experiencing an event



Q: Since that event or period in time, how have your levels of trust in the news media been affected in the long term?
Base: Have experienced a particular event or period of time where reporting caused trust in news media to strengthen n=168

To strengthen trust for our qualitative participants, outlets needed to deliver on the drivers of trust mentioned earlier in this section. In particular:

1. Professional transparency to help audiences understand the motivations behind reporting and reduce suspicion. This would entail disclosing funding sources, sponsorships and any conflicts of interest, clearly labelling sponsored content, and providing links to the original sources.
2. Balanced and inclusive reporting, fostering a culture of fairness and representation. This can be demonstrated by presenting multiple viewpoints and engaging diverse voices.
3. Accountability and correction; outlets should show a commitment to integrity and responsiveness. This requires the outlet to establish and provide clear pathways for correcting errors or addressing bias.
4. Consistency in tone, style and factual reporting to build long-term trust.

Participants also supported encouragement of media literacy through public education and dialogue about trust in news. Many of our participants claimed that they had not thought critically about trust in news until they took part in this project and had found it beneficial. They felt others would benefit from being encouraged to think more critically about the news, but they were unsure who should be responsible for providing the education.

- 4 -

**What factors
drive distrust in
news media?**

“Just tell the news as
it is with no opinions
or embellishments”

The factors that drive distrust in news media

Our panellists revealed that there are several drivers of distrust. Not surprisingly, these often mirror the drivers of trust. The diagram below shows the drivers of distrust, how they present themselves to the public, and their effect on trust levels.

Distrust Factors		Implications of the drivers on trust
Inconsistency		Uncertainty, lack of confidence, begin to question source material
Blurring Fact & Opinion		Perceived to be presenting opinion as fact, undermines trust
Sensationalism & Attack Journalism		Attention seeking, not reporting. Reduces credibility
Lack of Transparency		Hidden sponsorships, undisclosed conflict of interests, erode trust
Excessive Advertising		It's about the money, not the news. Diminish trustworthiness
Unfamiliar Sources & Lack of Context		Unknown, or undisclosed sources, missing background, erode reputation and trust
Bias		Ideological or personal slant on interviews; lose credibility
Lack of Error Correction		Failure to transparently correct mistakes undermines integrity

LACK OF TRUST DOES NOT ALWAYS RESULT IN A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT

Another interesting contrast appears here. Not everyone will dismiss untrustworthy sources for all occasions. They are happy to engage with an untrustworthy source, provided they **know it is untrustworthy**. They will treat the results with caution.

This discernment is consistent with the fact that many users want to see something interesting or entertaining in their news and can suspend trust in the process.

"I don't think my perceived trustworthiness in a story impacts my actual engagement with different types of news, If it's interesting I'll still read it, but it just allows me to act more cautiously with it."

But others will reject sources that they find to be untrustworthy. This comes, in part, from an awareness that they don't want to 'waste their time' on unworthy stories.

"Sometimes it feels like I have only so much time and attention. I don't want to waste this on substandard news. It's hard enough to filter what's out there."

REASONS FOR DISTRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS

Nine per cent of people don't find any news provider untrustworthy and therefore are unable to articulate what makes news providers feel untrustworthy. For those who are able to articulate spontaneously what engenders distrust, factors identified tend to mirror the key factors that promote trust, ie perceptions that a provider: has a bias (particularly political); is disseminating inaccurate information or misrepresenting the facts; takes a sensationalist approach through its use of headlines, language or content; and that it is reporting based on assumption with claims that have not been checked or verified. Funding sources also feature as a driver for distrust – the relationship with the funder, whether this is public or private, can be seen to open reporting up to the risks of bias.

Table 4.1: Factors driving feelings of distrust in news providers

Key themes
1. Biased / not impartial
2. Spreading of misinformation
3. Sensationalism
4. Lack of fact checking
5. Funding sources

Q: *What would make you feel a news provider was untrustworthy? (OPEN)*

Base: Total sample n=1,008

THE EXTENT TO WHICH DIFFERENT FACTORS INFLUENCE DISTRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS

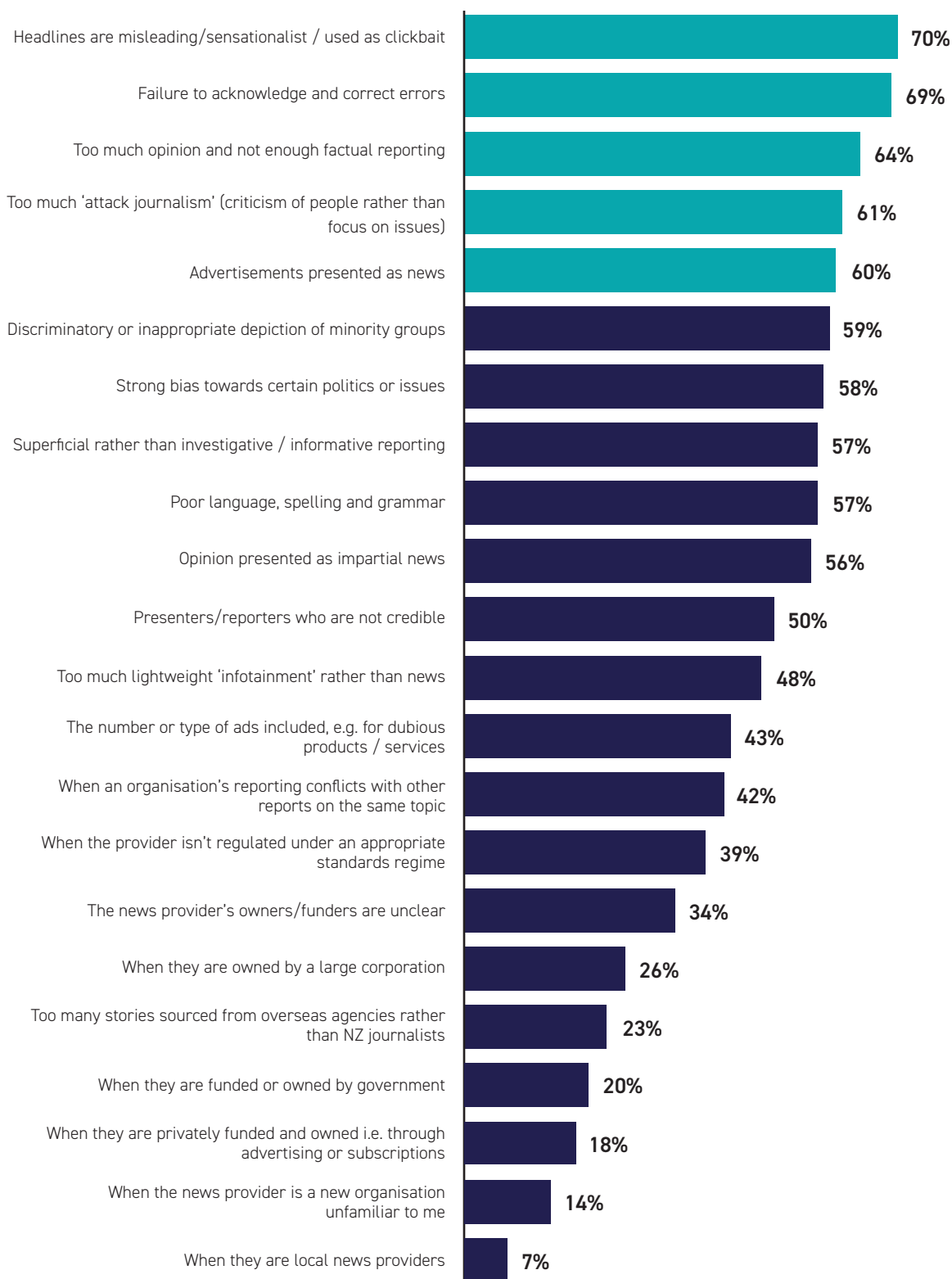
When prompted, the top five factors claimed to influence distrust to the greatest extent are:

- Misleading or sensationalist headlines / clickbait (70%)
- Failure to acknowledge and correct errors (69%)
- Too much opinion and not enough factual reporting (feeding into bias) (64%)
- Too much 'attack journalism' (feeding into bias) (61%)
- Advertisements presented as news (60%)

The only other factors raised in the qualitative discussion as "Trust Red Flags" in news media were the use of personal or institutional bias to influence the reporting or content.

For more detail about each of the drivers of distrust refer to Appendix 2, Section 5: Drivers of Distrust.

Figure 4.1: Considerations of distrust (Percentage “to a great extent”)



Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider untrustworthy?

Base: Total sample n=1,008

As with factors influencing trust, age also has a relationship with the extent to which factors influence distrust, with those aged 65+ influenced to a greater extent by more factors than the population at large. Conversely, those in the youngest age bracket (aged 18-24) are less likely to be influenced by:

- Attack journalism (48%)
- Superficial rather than investigative / informative reporting (45%)
- Lightweight "infotainment" rather than news (34%)
- An organisation's reporting conflicting with other reports on the same topic (30%)

Other age groups outside of the oldest and youngest age brackets are more closely aligned and outside of age, there are few notable demographic variances suggesting that, like trust, the factors influencing distrust share a great deal of commonality for New Zealanders.

Table 4.2: Considerations of distrust by age (Percentage "to a great extent")

	Age 18-24	Age 65+	Total
Headlines are misleading/sensationalist / used as clickbait	64%	77%	70%
Failure to acknowledge and correct errors	62%	75%	69%
Too much opinion and not enough factual reporting	59%	71%	64%
Too much 'attack journalism' (criticism of people rather than focus on issues)	48%	73%	61%
Advertisements presented as news	58%	71%	60%
Discriminatory or inappropriate depiction of minority groups	60%	62%	59%
Strong bias towards certain politics or issues	51%	63%	58%
Superficial rather than investigative / informative reporting	45%	62%	57%
Poor language, spelling and grammar	46%	64%	57%
Opinion presented as impartial news	48%	66%	56%
Presenters/reporters who are not credible	38%	63%	50%
Too much lightweight 'infotainment' rather than news	34%	58%	48%
The number or type of ads included, e.g. for dubious products / services	36%	51%	43%
When an organisation's reporting conflicts with other reports on the same topic	30%	55%	42%
When the provider isn't regulated under an appropriate standards regime	36%	43%	39%
The news provider's owners/funders are unclear	31%	34%	34%
When they are owned by a large corporation	20%	26%	26%
Too many stories sourced from overseas agencies rather than NZ journalists	17%	20%	23%
When they are funded or owned by government	23%	16%	20%
When they are privately funded and owned i.e. Through advertising or subscriptions	16%	22%	18%
When the news provider is a new organisation unfamiliar to me	14%	9%	14%
When they are local news providers	7%	6%	7%
Total	n=121	n=216	n=1,008

Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider untrustworthy?

Unlike the factors that influence trust, the relationship between interest in news and current affairs and distrust of providers isn't evident, indicating that a news provider will be assessed on a consistent set of criteria for distrust, regardless of how actively an individual engages with news media.

**Table 4.3: Considerations of distrust by interest in news and current affairs
(Percentage “to a great extent”)**

	Extremely Interested in news and current affairs	Total
Headlines are misleading/sensationalist / used as clickbait	73%	70%
Failure to acknowledge and correct errors	69%	69%
Too much opinion and not enough factual reporting	62%	64%
Too much ‘attack journalism’ (criticism of people rather than focus on issues)	60%	61%
Advertisements presented as news	67%	60%
Discriminatory or inappropriate depiction of minority groups	58%	59%
Strong bias towards certain politics or issues	63%	58%
Superficial rather than investigative / informative reporting	62%	57%
Poor language, spelling and grammar	59%	57%
Opinion presented as impartial news	66%	56%
Presenters/reporters who are not credible	61%	50%
Too much lightweight ‘infotainment’ rather than news	55%	48%
The number or type of ads included, e.g. for dubious products / services	43%	43%
When an organisation’s reporting conflicts with other reports on the same topic	49%	42%
When the provider isn’t regulated under an appropriate standards regime	36%	39%
The news provider’s owners/funders are unclear	41%	34%
When they are owned by a large corporation	31%	26%
Too many stories sourced from overseas agencies rather than NZ journalists	24%	23%
When they are funded or owned by government	22%	20%
When they are privately funded and owned i.e. Through advertising or subscriptions	20%	18%
When the news provider is a new organisation unfamiliar to me	14%	14%
When they are local news providers	9%	7%
Total	n=157	n=1,008

Q: To what extent do each of the following make you consider a news provider untrustworthy?

Base: Extremely interested in news and current affairs

Over a third of people (39%) report experiencing an event or period of time that caused their trust in news media to fall (Figure 4.2), which is significantly more than those who have experienced an event which strengthened trust (17%) (Figure 3.5). Interestingly, there is a notable overlap between the events that strengthened trust and those that weakened it, specifically the reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic and coverage of overseas conflicts and politics. This suggests that trust in news media is vulnerable to perceptions of an individual's stance on an issue.

Figure 4.2: Reporting event caused trust levels to drop



Q: *Has there been any particular event or period in time where reporting caused your trust in news media in general to drop?*

Base: total sample n=1,008

The key events indicated as times when reporting in news media caused trust in general to drop were:

- COVID-19 pandemic
- United States election and Trump presidency coverage
- Major global events and conflicts such as the events of 9/11, the Iraq war as well as the Israel-Hamas conflict
- New Zealand national and local events including coverage of NZ politics

Q: *Please describe that event or period of time (OPEN)*

Base: Have experienced a particular event or period of time where reporting caused trust in news media to drop n=393

- 5 -

Losing and regaining trust in news providers

“They need to be more transparent about their sources and be able to verify facts more carefully”

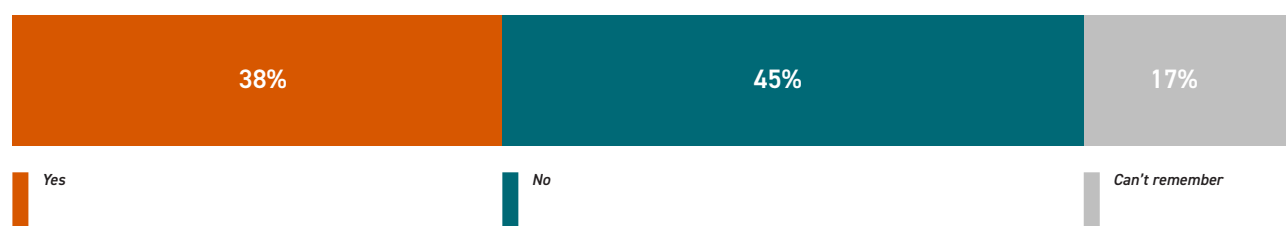
Losing and regaining trust in news

LOSING TRUST IN NEWS PROVIDERS

Over a third of people (38%) have stopped getting their news from a particular provider due to a loss of trust. This is more prevalent among:

- Males (42%) compared to 35% of females
- Those who are highly engaged with news and current affairs (56%) and follow news several times per day (44%)
- Current regular users of podcasts (63%), blogs (66%) and news compilation websites (46%)
- Those with a high level of formal education – those who hold a Masters' degree or higher (55%)

Figure 5.1 Stopped getting news from a provider due to a loss of trust



Q: Have you ever stopped getting your news from a particular provider due to a loss of trust?

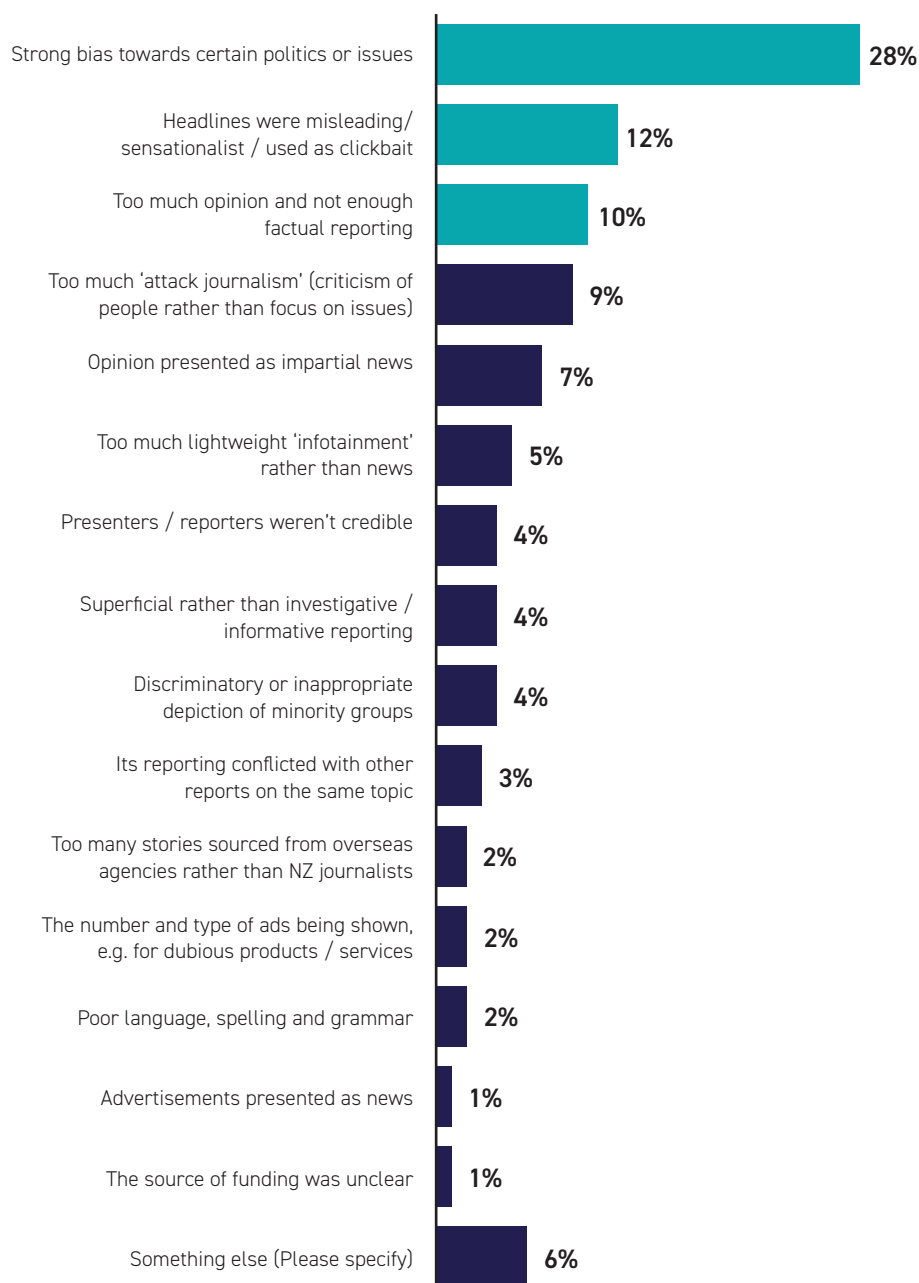
Base: Total sample n=1,008

The group who has stopped getting their news from a particular provider due to a loss of trust, show some distinct attitudinal and behavioural differences from the general population, namely that they are:

- More likely to trust international news providers (21% vs 13% total) and private individuals (11% vs 6% total).
- More likely to be influenced to a great extent by most of the factors influencing distrust of news media.
- Influenced to a greater extent by a clear difference being made between opinion and news in consideration of a provider as trustworthy (68% vs 62% total).
- Cognisant of a particular event or period of time where reporting caused their trust in news media to drop (65% vs 39% total).
- More likely to hold different expectations of a publicly funded or owned provider (45% vs 34% total).

The predominant reasons why people stopped using a particular provider mirror many of the key drivers people give for considering news providers generally as untrustworthy, namely a perceived strong bias towards certain politics or issues, misleading or sensationalist headlines and a weighting towards opinion pieces over factual reporting. However, perceived bias is the strongest driver of a loss of trust.

Figure 5.2: Reasons for losing trust in a news provider



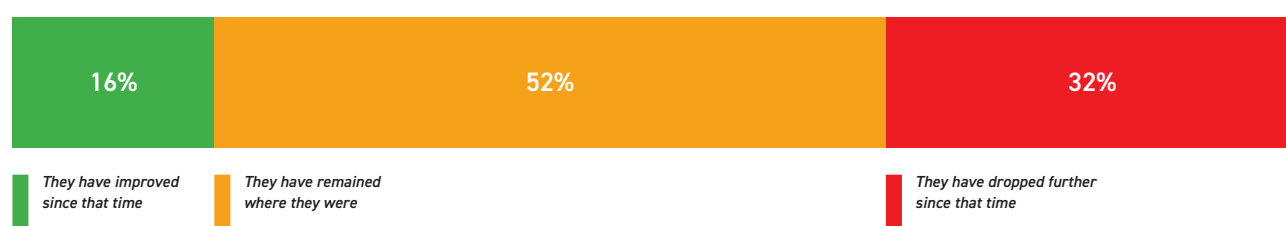
Q: Which of the following best describes the main reason why you lost trust in this/ these news providers?
SINGLE CODE

Base: Have stopped getting news from a particular provider due to loss of trust n=387

REGAINING TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA

The response from the general public suggests that it is harder to rebuild trust in news media once it has fallen than it is to maintain trust. Fewer than one in five (16%) who have experienced a drop in trust as a result of a particular event or period report an improvement in trust since that time. They are much more likely to maintain decreased levels of trust (52%), or indeed for their trust to fall even further (32%).

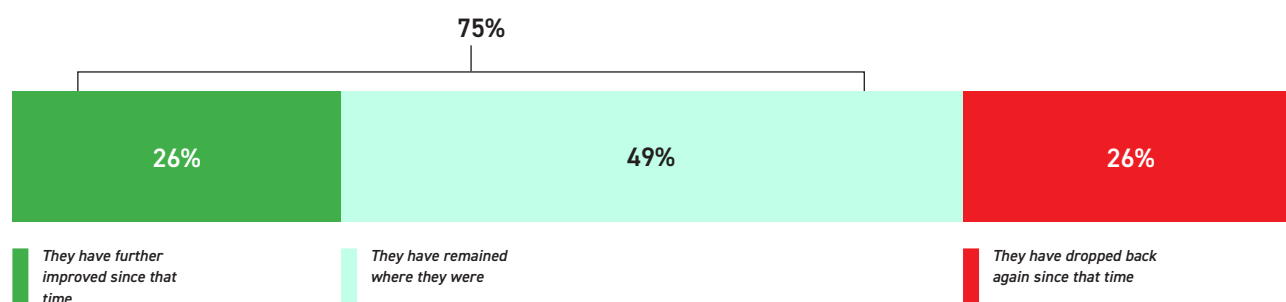
Figure 5.3: Long-term effect on trust following a loss of trust event.
Those who have experienced a loss of trust event.



Q: Since that event or period in time, how have your levels of trust in the news media been affected in the long term?
Base: Have experienced a particular event or period of time where reporting caused trust in news media in general to drop n=393

Conversely, those who have experienced an event which strengthened their trust, are more likely to maintain or further build on their increased levels of trust (75%) (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Long-term effect on trust following a strengthening of trust event.
Those who have experienced a strengthening of trust event.



Q: Since that event or period in time, how have your levels of trust in the news media been affected in the long term?
Base: Have experienced a particular event or period of time where reporting caused trust in news media in general to strengthen n=168

Once a person has stopped using a provider due to a loss of trust, for over a quarter (28%) there is nothing that the provider could do to rebuild that trust. However, although it is undoubtedly hard to gain trust back, it is not seen as impossible for the remaining 61%, who provided feedback on what a provider would have to do to regain their trust. The steps to rebuilding trust are demonstrating the foundations on which people assess the trustworthiness of news media.

The key themes to emerge as steps to rebuilding trust once lost are for providers to demonstrate:

Table 5.1 Key drivers to rebuild trust; those who stopped getting news from a provider due to trust

Key themes
1. Accuracy and factuality - deliver factual information <i>"Report the facts and detail the sources, giving the listener the information to make an informed decision."</i>
2. Impartiality and objectivity – maintain an objective stance, free from agenda <i>"Having both sides presented and hearing the full argument...That is balance. Only ever hearing one perspective soon becomes dull but also incredulous."</i> <i>"Reduce usage of clearly biased, inexperienced and naïve personnel in favour of experienced personnel with a proven track record of balanced reporting."</i>
3. Accountability – acknowledge errors <i>"Publicly report the causes of errors, corrective measures, accept public scrutiny and enhance the transparency of information."</i>
4. A move away from sensationalism and click bait tactics <i>"Don't be misleading with the 'advertising' of your news, if you have done your job and found good / helpful news to report then there shouldn't be a need to sensationalise the title."</i>

Q: What, if anything, is the one thing this / these news providers could do that would rebuild your trust in them?
Base: Have stopped getting news from a particular news provider due to a loss of trust n=387

- 6 -

Expectations of providers funded or owned by the government

“ I expect less clickbait headlines and more reporting on the big issues as opposed to fluff or infotainment pieces ”

Expectations of providers funded or owned by the government

DIFFERENCES IN EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLICLY FUNDED OR OWNED NEWS PROVIDERS

Held to a higher standard

Although not a critical factor across all groups, in the panellist discussions, the older age groups held a higher expectation from publicly funded or owned news organisations in demonstrating a stronger commitment to credibility, transparency, objectivity, and serving the broader public good, compared to privately owned media entities.

Upholding these standards seemed to be a part of a public broadcast mandate for some of our panellists. This is where some openly funded international news organisations such as the BBC, have gained their trust

in the past. However, panellists feel that this seems to be an idealistic view these days, given that they have seen publicly funded or owned broadcasters have come under fire in recent times.

The main question concerning publicly funded or owned news media was editorial independence from government influence. News reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic was a polarising issue amongst our panel, with some seeing the profile of government announcements as positive, and others seeing it as propaganda.

“It is important to know who is paying/providing the news, as it is good information to have when assessing the biases of the organisation.”

“Yes we should be informed through some medium, the bias of the news through how they lean politically. The website www.allsides.com is good for checking this.”

The panel discussions on this point were not entirely reflected in our survey. 54% of respondents held no different expectations of a publicly funded or owned news provider as opposed to a privately funded or owned organisation although a third of the general public (34%) did (Figure 6.1).

This sentiment is more prevalent amongst:

- Males (38%)
- Those highly engaged with news (45%)
- Regular users of non-traditional media: email newsletters (47%), podcasts (51%), forums/discussion groups (52%), blogs (55%), and live streaming platforms (58%)
- Those getting news regularly from international news providers (44%)
- Those who have stopped getting news from a particular provider due to a loss of trust (45%)

Figure 6.1 Expectations of publicly and commercially funded or owned news providers



Q: Do you have different expectations of a news provider that is funded or owned by government vs an organisation that is privately funded and owned?
 Base: Total sample n=1,008

HOW EXPECTATIONS DIFFER

Publicly funded or owned broadcasters

Overall, the panel responses suggest a segment of the public may expect publicly funded or owned news organisations to demonstrate a stronger commitment to impartiality and objectivity, honesty and accountability, quality and style of journalism, and content and coverage that serves the broader public good. Upholding these standards may therefore be important for publicly funded or owned news outlets to build and maintain public trust.

"I'd expect publicly funded or owned providers to cover all aspects of an issue or news situation not just the angle that the government or whoever wants people to focus on. I'd expect unbiased reporting."

"Professional editorial team, strict audit process, to ensure that the news is accurate, objective, in-depth to provide authoritative information."

"I would expect publicly funded or owned providers to report facts as they see it and not their own thoughts of what is going on."

PRIVATELY FUNDED OR OWNED MEDIA ENTITIES

Private ownership/funding, whether from wealthy individuals, corporations, or other private entities, raises questions about potential conflicts of interest or biases. People can be skeptical of coverage that seems to align with the interests of the funders/owners.

Some participants believe that audience reach, and revenue generation are potentially more important to privately funded or owned media companies than authentic, unbiased, unsensational news reporting. They feel that these goals can lead to a filtering of the news, click baiting, and sensationalism to gain attention and interpretation of stories to drive engagement. This leads to a fundamental distrust of that "news" content.

*"There are certain commercial stations, that, because they are commercially funded,
I assume are going to be pressured into a particular viewpoint.
So, I don't trust them. I don't know how they do this, but for me to trust them,
I have to know that they have editorial independence. I just don't see how they can."*

*"I expect more clickbait headlines and more of a mix of big stories
and fluff or infotainment pieces."*

Subscription-based models

Where readers/viewers pay directly for the content, it can signal a commitment to and investment in quality journalism and independence from external influences. While many applaud and support this, others resent this monetising of information and feel that subscription models exclude them from quality news reporting.

For the third of people in the survey who do have different expectations, they hold publicly funded or owned providers to higher ideals around:

Table 6.1 Different expectations of publicly funded or owned news media

Key themes	
1.	Impartiality and objectivity – act in the public interest without agenda and be free from political influence <i>“That they are still impartial and unbiased as much as possible and don’t favour any particular political party.”</i>
2.	Accuracy and accountability – demonstrate a commitment to accuracy supported by vigorous fact checking and be held to account through regulation <i>“Professional editorial team, strict audit process, to ensure that the news is accurate... authoritative information.”</i>
3.	Quality and style of journalism – prioritising investigative journalism over entertainment/clickbait or opinion. <i>“I would expect publicly funded providers to report facts as they see it and not their own thoughts of what is going on.”</i> <i>“I expect less clickbait headlines and more reporting on the big issues as opposed to fluff or infotainment pieces.”</i>
4.	Content and coverage – balanced reporting with representation of diverse perspectives <i>“I would expect them to provide multiple perspectives and interviews from both sides.”</i>

Q: What is it you expect differently from publicly funded or owned news providers?

Base: Have different expectations of a news provider that is funded or owned by the government vs an organisation that is privately funded and owned n=344

- Appendix 1- **Respondent Profiles**

Appendix 1: Respondent Profiles

QUALITATIVE

Panel Member Profiles

ID	Gender & Age	Region	Urban/Rural	Education	Ethnicity	Frequency view news	Interest in Current Affairs	Trust in NZ Media
1	F 19	Gisborne	Small Urban	High School Diploma	Māori	Twice a Week	Moderately	4
2	F 20	Auckland	Large Urban	High School Diploma	Asian	Several per day	Very	4
3	F 20	Wellington	Large Urban	High School Diploma	NZ Euro	Daily	Very	3
4	M 22	Auckland	Large Urban	Trade / Vocational	NZ Euro	Twice a Week	Moderately	4
5	M 23	Bay of Plenty	Small Urban	Trade / Vocational	Māori	Twice a Week	Moderately	3
6	M 25	Nelson	Small Urban	Bachelor's Degree	NZ Euro	Several per day	Very	2
7	F 27	Canterbury	Small Urban	Post-graduate	NZ Euro	Twice a Week	Moderately	4
8	F 27	Waikato	Small Urban	Bachelor's Degree	Māori	Several per day	Moderately	3
9	M 29	Otago	Large Urban	Post-graduate	NZ Euro	Daily	Very	4
10	M 32	Wellington	Large Urban	Master's Degree	Asian	Daily	Moderately	3
11	M32	Canterbury	Rural	Trade / Vocational	Māori/Euro	Several per day	Extremely	2
12	F 34	Auckland	Large Urban/Rural	Bachelor's Degree	European	Several per day	Moderately	4
13	M 36	Wellington	Large Urban	Bachelor's Degree	NZ Euro	Several per day	Very	4
14	F 36	Taranaki	Small Urban	Bachelor's Degree	Pacific People	Daily	Moderately	3
15	F 37	Waikato	Rural	Bachelor's Degree	NZ Euro	Twice a Week	Moderately	3
16	F 45	Auckland	Large Urban	Bachelor's Degree	Latin American	Daily	Moderately	4
17	M 45	Hawke's Bay	Large Urban	Master's Degree	Latin American	Twice a Week	Moderately	2
18	F 48	Manawatu	Small Urban	No Formal Education	Māori	Daily	Very	3
19	F 49	Wellington	Large Urban	Trade / Vocational	Māori	Daily	Very	3
20	M 48	Southland	Rural	Post-graduate	NZ Euro	Daily	Very	2
21	M 48	Auckland	Large Urban	Trade / Vocational	Pacific People	Several per day	Extremely	5
22	F 48	West Coast	Rural	Trade / Vocational	NZ Euro	Twice a Week	Moderately	2
23	M 54	Auckland	Rural	No Formal Education	NZ Euro	Several per day	Very	1
24	F 55	Canterbury	Small Urban	Trade / Vocational	NZ Euro	Several per day	Moderately	2
25	M 55	Canterbury	Rural	High School Diploma	NZ Euro	Daily	Very	3
26	F 56	Wellington	Large Urban	High School Diploma	Pacific People	Daily	Very	2
27	M 58	Auckland	Large Urban	Post-graduate	Māori	Daily	Extremely	1
28	F 57	Tasman	Rural	High School Diploma	European	Daily	Moderately	4
29	F 58	Northland	Small Urban	High School Diploma	Māori	Daily	Very	3
30	F 60	Manawatu	Small Urban	Bachelor's Degree	NZ Euro	Daily	Very	4
31	M 63	Canterbury	Rural	Bachelor's Degree	European	Several per day	Extremely	4
32	F 62	Bay of Plenty	Small Urban	Trade / Vocational	NZ Euro	Several per day	Very	2
33	M 62	Northland	Rural	Post-graduate	Māori	Several per day	Moderately	3
34	M 63	Auckland	Large Urban	High School Diploma	Asian	Several per day	Very	2
35	M 68	Auckland	Large Urban	Bachelor's Degree	Māori	Daily	Very	3

Trust in NZ Media: 1 = Very Untrustworthy 2 = Somewhat Untrustworthy 3 = A bit of both 4 = Somewhat Trustworthy 5 = Very Trustworthy

Focus Group Profiles

GRP	Date	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Interest in Current Affairs	Trust in NZ Media	Frequency view news
1	2nd May	19-63 yrs	Mixed	Mixed	Moderate	2 - 4	Mixed
2	2nd May	20-63 yrs	Mixed	Mixed	Moderate to very	2 - 4	Mixed
3	2nd May	20-68 yrs	Mixed	Mixed	Moderate to very	2 - 3	Mixed
4	3rd May	54-62 yrs	Mixed	Māori & NZ Euro	Very +	1 - 3	Daily +
5	3rd May	25-60 yrs	Mixed	Māori & NZ Euro	Very +	2 - 4	Daily +
6	3rd May	27-55 yrs	Mixed	Mixed	Moderate to very	3-4	Daily +

QUANTITATIVE

Quota Targets vs achievement:

Gender	Achieved %	Achieved n	Target %
Male	50%	504	50%
Female	50%	500	50%
Gender diverse	0%	4	
Prefer not to say	0%	0	

Q: What gender do you identify with?

Base: total sample n=1,008

Age	Achieved %	Achieved n	Target %
18 - 24	12%	121	11%
25 - 34	17%	167	18%
35 - 44	19%	187	17%
45 - 54	16%	162	16%
55 - 64	15%	154	16%
65+	21%	216	22%
Prefer not to say	0%	1	

Q: Which age group do you belong to?

Base: total sample n=1,008

Region	Achieved %	Achieved n	Target %
Northland	4%	40	4%
Auckland	27%	271	27%
Waikato	8%	80	7%
Bay of Plenty	8%	76	7%
Gisborne	1%	12	3%
Hawke's Bay	4%	44	4%
Taranaki	4%	40	4%
Manawatu-Wanganui	7%	74	7%
Wellington	10%	97	9%
Tasman	2%	18	3%
Nelson	2%	19	3%
Marlborough	2%	21	3%
West Coast	1%	11	3%
Canterbury	10%	102	9%
Otago	8%	77	7%
Southland	3%	26	3%
Area outside region	0%	0	No quota defined

Q: Which of the following regions of New Zealand do you usually live in? Base: total sample n=1,008

