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NEW STUDY EXPLORES WHAT MAKES AMERICANS TRUST AND RELY ON NEWS

Trust and reliability in news can be broken down into key factors that publishers can put into action and consumers can recognize.

Chicago, IL, April 17, 2016—Consumers say that accuracy is the main reason they trust and rely on news sources, according to a new comprehensive study, conducted by [The Media Insight Project](#), a collaboration between the [American Press Institute](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). The study also found that in social media, consumers are fairly skeptical of content and want cues of trustworthiness such as clear identification of the original reporting source.

“The traditional understanding of why people trust has been fairly general—ideas like fairness and balance—and hard for publishers to put into practice,” said Tom Rosenstiel, executive director of the American Press Institute. “This new work identifies much more concrete things publishers can do. It also identifies serious challenges for publishers. As screens get smaller, it is critical to consumers that ads complement rather than get in the way of news, and factors like load times are as fundamental as grammar and spelling.”

Some of the key findings of the study include:

- Accuracy is the paramount principle of trust. Eighty-five percent of Americans rate it as extremely or very important that news organizations get the facts right, higher than any other general principle. In particular, getting the facts right is the most valued factor related to trust—across all topics.
- The second-most valued factor related to trust is timeliness—more important to consumers, the research suggests, in the digital age than before. Three-quarters of adults (76 percent) say it is critical to them that a news report be up-to-date with the latest news and information.
- 72 percent say it is extremely or very important to them that a news report be concise and get to the point.
- For online news, people cite three specific factors as most important; factors that had not surfaced before in traditional research on trust. Nearly two thirds of Americans said it was critical to them that ads not interfere with the news (63 percent); the same number cited the need for a site or app to load fast (63 percent); and also that the content works well on mobile phones (60 percent). In contrast, only 1 in 3 say it is very important that digital sources allow people to comment on news.

- Another new discovery in this study is that the reasons people trust and rely on a news source vary by topic. For example, people are significantly more likely to say that expert sources and data are an important reason they turn to a source for news about domestic issues than they are about lifestyle news (76 percent vs. 48 percent). People are far more likely to want their source to be concise and get to the point for national politics (80 percent) than for sports (61 percent). Similarly, people care more that their sources for sports and lifestyle present the news in a way that is entertaining (54 percent and 53 percent) than say the same about political news (30 percent).
- Even how people rank specific elements of digital presentation varies by topic. Close followers of traffic and weather, for instance, care more that such content presents well on their mobile phones (72 percent say that is very important) than do consumers of national political news (55 percent).
- People who rely on social media heavily for news are highly skeptical of the news they encounter in those networks. Just 12 percent of those who get news on Facebook, for instance, say they trust it a lot or a great deal. At the high end, just 23 percent say they have a lot or a great deal of trust in news they encounter on LinkedIn.

“People have sophisticated filters for determining who to trust when consuming news. Accuracy, timeliness, and clarity are the most important factors,” said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. “And in the digital age there are new factors that publishers need to worry about. If ads interfere with a consumer getting their news, that could erode trust in the source.”

About the Survey

The nationally representative survey was conducted from February 18 through March 6, 2016, and funded by The American Press Institute (API). Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press (AP) collaborated on all aspects of the study. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 2,014 completed the survey. Respondents without internet access and those who prefer to complete surveys by phone were interviewed by trained NORC interviewers. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

The qualitative research was conducted from February 24 through March 2, 2016. Insight Strategy Group LLC conducted the research in collaboration with staff at API, NORC, and AP. The qualitative research featured a combination of ethnographic activities and focus groups. First, 36 news consumers participated in a series of online activities designed to examine their news behaviors and attitudes. Then, 18 of these news consumers participated in news forum discussions on March 2, 2016, in the Philadelphia area. Each news forum lasted about two hours and included six participants with similar news behaviors.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey and the qualitative group interviews can be found at the end of the report.



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The proper description of the survey's authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [American Press Institute](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

About the Media Insight Project

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration between the American Press Institute and The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with the objective of conducting high-quality, innovative research meant to inform the news industry and the public about various important issues facing journalism and the news business. The Media Insight Project brings together the expertise of both organizations and their respective partners, and involves collaborations among key staff at the American Press Institute, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press.

<http://www.mediainsight.org/>

About the American Press Institute

Founded in 1946, the American Press Institute conducts research, training, convenes thought leaders, and creates tools to help chart a path ahead for journalism in the 21st century. The American Press Institute is an educational non-advocacy 501(c)3 nonprofit organization affiliated with the Newspaper Association of America. It aims to help the news media, especially local publishers and newspaper media, advance in the digital age.

<http://www.pressinstitute.org>

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

www.apnorc.org

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct,



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analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

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