



SOCIAL MEDIA ON NOTICE AS PUBLIC CALLS OUT INSUFFICIENT REGULATION

Less than a quarter of the UK population now trust social media, Edelman study finds

7 in 10 say social media firms aren't doing enough to address extremism and cyberbullying

64% back tougher regulation of social media companies

Social media companies have lost the trust of the public, according to the findings of the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, the world's largest and longest-running global study of trust.

Social media is now trusted by less than a quarter of the UK population (24%), and the public is now demanding tougher regulation.

The results from a special UK supplement to Edelman's global Trust Barometer survey, come after a year of controversies in which tech giants were accused of aiding extremism, ignoring threats to child safety, and spreading fake news.

Low trust in social media is driven by a sense of inaction around important issues. Some 70% of Britons believe that social media companies do not do enough to prevent illegal or unethical behaviours on their platforms. A further 70% agree these companies do not do enough to prevent the sharing of extremist content, and 69% agree they don't do enough to combat cyberbullying.

The promise of social media companies to make the world more open and connected rings hollow for many. Over a third of Britons believe that social media is not good for society, and even more (57%) believe the companies take advantage of people's loneliness. A large proportion of Britons believe that social media companies are not sufficiently regulated (64%), lack transparency (63%), and are selling people's data without their knowledge (62%).

The reputation of social media companies has also been hit by the problem of fake news. Over half of Britons (53%) worry about being exposed to fake news on social media, and 64% cannot distinguish between proper journalism and fake news. The fear of fake news may also explain the fact that a large proportion of the UK (42%) say they only skim headlines on social media, but do not click on the content.

When asked about the pace of change in a variety of aspects of modern life, social media was singled out as the only sector where the majority (53%) felt that change was too fast. Even 16 to 18-year-olds agreed (53%). The younger group, meanwhile,



are the first cohort to vote with their feet, with 1 in 10 reporting they had quit Facebook altogether over the past year.

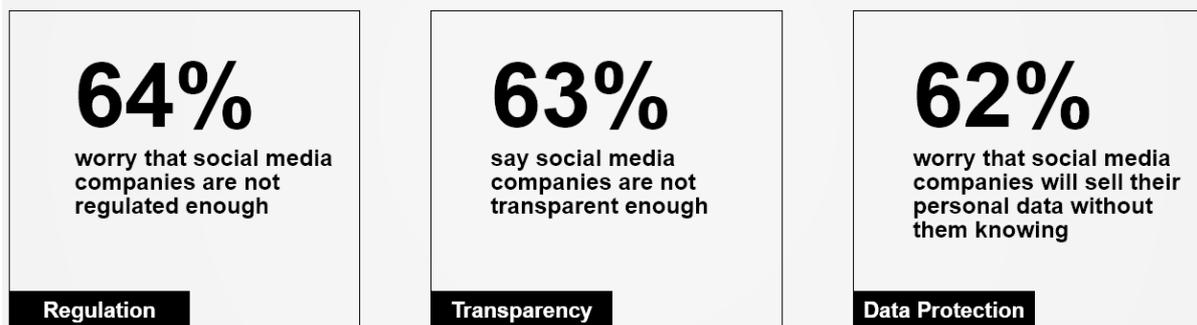
Ed Williams, CEO of Edelman UK, said: "After a flood of negative headlines in 2017, it's time these companies sat up and listened. The public want action on key issues related to online protection, and to see their concerns addressed through better regulation. Failure on their part to act risks further erosion of trust and therefore public support."

Social Media Companies Not Fulfilling Their Civic Duty

Percent agreement with each statement



Public Concerns Represent Potential Threat to Social Media Companies



Trust Rebounds for Traditional Media, but Many Are Rejecting the News

It is striking that, as trust in social media has declined, more established news media have enjoyed a very significant increase in public support. Traditional media, defined as broadcasters and publishers, saw a 13-point increase in this year's findings to 61%, reaching levels not seen since 2012.



The only other media source to see year-on-year increases is online-only media, a category which includes digital native news providers such as BuzzFeed and Huffington Post, which enjoyed a five-point boost to 45%.

However, it is not all good news for traditional media. Trust in media in general is flat at 32%, and this year's findings highlight both declining consumption patterns of the news media and outright news avoidance. A third of the total population admit to consuming less news than they used to, and 1 in 5 say they are avoiding the news completely.

Those most likely to be news rejecters are highly educated professionals, over the age of 40, with children, and living in London. They come from across the political spectrum and are evenly split male/female.

News rejecters cite a range of reasons for switching off. The three most cited are, that the news agenda is too depressing (40%), that the news is too biased (33%), and that the news itself is controlled by "hidden agendas" (27%).

The dramatic extent to which the most educated and highly-paid group within British society are shunning information is visible in one stunning statistic from the 2018 Trust Barometer. The proportion of the total population who describe themselves as "informed", i.e. people who read business and political news "several times a week or more", has never dipped lower than 11%. This year it has fallen to 6%. These are university graduates in the top quartile of income.

Ed Williams added: "We are clearly seeing significant changes in people's news consumption habits. The breadth of information available on the internet is not resulting in the same depth we once saw. As we look at some of the big problems we face in the 21st century, it should be of significant concern to us all that we are becoming a nation of news-skimmers and news-avoiders. It's frightening that the professional classes, the people we rely on to take an interest in social affairs and to hold politicians to account, are the most pronounced news avoiders."

Distrust in Government Is Now the Default

The mood of Britain itself remains subdued with trust in government stuck at very low levels (36%), the same rate as in 2017. Almost half of people believe that government is the most broken of the four main institutions. It is also seen as the most corrupt, and 40% believe it abuses its power more than any other pillar of society.



However, the public draw a distinction between government and party leaders. Both the Prime Minister, Theresa May, and the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn, have experienced rising levels of trust over the year. Mr Corbyn improved the most, with a 13-point bounce (23% to 36%) to Mrs May's more modest 4-points (35% to 39%).

Both Mrs May and Mr Corbyn are significantly trusted by their respective bases. Mrs May scores 78% trust and Mr Corbyn 68% among Conservative and Labour supporters respectively.

We continue to see a dislocation of the public from politics in this year's data. Almost 60% of people feel that their views are not represented in British politics today. This is not a uniquely "out of London" phenomenon – over half of Londoners also feel that their views are not reflected.

The top three current concerns are the extent to which the NHS can care for an aging population (79%), the risks of rising political and religious extremism (72%), and growing economic uncertainty (67%).

Asked about their anxieties for the future of the nation, more Britons (46%) cited the rise of intolerance in society over any other factor, followed by increasing inequality (40%), the country's trading relationship with Europe and the rest of the world (39%) and the loss of traditional British values (37%).

Will Walden, head of government relations at Edelman UK, said: "We forget we are at the tail end of a decade that began with the financial crisis and ended with the division over Brexit. Distrust is now the default position. Politics doesn't matter to people in the way it once did. What matters is a sense of accountability and follow-through, delivering on policy promises that help ordinary people, and communicating honestly and transparently. This is true of both Remainers and Brexiteers."

Divided and Dispirited Britain

This year's research also lays bare continued polarisation on issues like Brexit. In all, 39% are in favour, 43% are opposed, and 12% chose to report themselves as not caring one way or another. Support amongst 16-18-year olds for remaining in the EU is pronounced, with 58% supporting remain, 14% for leave and the same number are apathetic. In both cases, the remainder of those surveyed said they simply did not know.

The country is also split on whether the future will deliver better economic prospects. Over a third (36%) believe their standard of living will get worse in 2018,



while only 20% think it will get better. Pessimism is clearly on the rise, as two years ago only a quarter of people said that they thought their standard of living would get worse over the next year. Londoners are most optimistic about future prospects, while the Northern Irish, Welsh and those living in Yorkshire & the Humber are most pessimistic.

Louise Turner, managing director at Edelman Intelligence, said: "Britain remains a place that is divided on many of the most pressing issues, and pessimistic about its prospects. The Brexit decision is a case in point. Whether you voted to remain or leave, the growing sense is that you will be disappointed. Worse still, more than 10% seem to have 'lost the will to live' when asked about Brexit. A cohort of people prepared to write off the most significant and consequential political decision in a generation should be worrying to all of us."

Turnaround in the Fortunes of the "Expert"

Business has reason to be optimistic about its relationship with the British public. Trust in business (43%) is markedly higher than trust in government (36%), though it is still badly affected by concerns around executive pay and tax issues. Most notably, credibility of CEOs (+14 pts) and boards (+10 pts) is up significantly this year, typical of a turnaround in the fortunes of the "expert".

Two years after Michael Gove famously remarked during the Brexit campaign that "people in this country have had enough of experts", the Edelman Trust Barometer 2018 reveals that experts are back in favour with Britons.

Journalists have also been given an opportunity to regain much of their credibility. Faith in journalists mirrored the increasing levels of trust in traditional media, leaping 13 percentage points from a low base of 19% to 32%. Similarly, credibility in financial experts and government officials rose by 8 and 7 percentage points respectively.

Renewed optimism about the credibility of leaders is a positive sign for business, and coincides with an expectation that CEOs lead on change rather than wait for regulators to impose it (60%). All of this is tempered by persistent trust problems facing the business world. Overall, trust levels for business as an institution are down by 2 points, and there are indications that the same obstacles to regaining trust persist.

The most commonly cited barriers to trusting business are overpaid executives (58%); a failure to pay the appropriate levels of corporation and personal tax (56%); and dishonesty and a lack of transparency in business dealings (45%).



While on the face of it there is little room for optimism in the 18th annual Trust Barometer results, the pendulum is swinging back in favour of experts and expertise. The most immediate opportunity is for credible voices within the business community to address society's demands.

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Notes to editors

About the Edelman Trust Barometer

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 18th annual trust and credibility survey. The survey was powered by research firm Edelman Intelligence and consisted of 30-minute online interviews conducted from October 28th – November 20th, 2017. The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer online survey sampled more than 33,000 respondents, which includes 6,200 informed public respondents across 28 markets. All informed public respondents met the following criteria: aged 25-64, college-educated; household income in the top quartile for their age in their country; read or watch business/news media at least several times a week; follow public policy issues in the news at least several times a week.

About the UK Trust Barometer Supplement

The 2018 UK supplementary survey was done by research firm Edelman Intelligence and consisted of 25-minute online interviews conducted between 19 December 2017 and 6 January 2018. The 2018 UK Supplement online survey sampled more than 3,000 respondents consisting of 2,000 general population respondents aged 18 and over, and more than 1,000 young adults aged 16-18 in the UK. The general population sample is nationally representative of the UK population with regard to gender, age and region, and the young adults sample is nationally representative in terms of gender and region. The overall margin of error for the general population sample is $\pm 2.2\%$.

You can find the full summary of the UK Trust Barometer Supplementary findings [here](#).