



# The politics of persuasion

New research reveals what influences voters

Commissioned by  
MRS Delphi Group



# MRS Delphi Group research reveals what sways voters

The *MRS Delphi Group*, the think tank set up by the Market Research Society (MRS), has collaborated with TNS to conduct bespoke research into several of the factors that affect democratic engagement in the UK. The research released today (15 September 2015) to mark the UN International Day of Democracy concludes the project entitled 'From Baked Beans to the Ballot Box', which saw leading industry figures share their ideas for improving democratic engagement through a series of personal articles.

The research reveals that despite the increased use of social media by political campaigns, the general public still turn primarily to traditional media sources to inform themselves about political issues. Nearly three quarters of us (73%) use TV to stay informed, while 54% cite newspapers and 52% online news outlets to shape their political views. In contrast less than a third (27%) use Facebook while 18% use YouTube and 15% Twitter. This means that despite increased focus on social media channels, traditional media still dominates when it comes to influencing people's political opinions, with 81% of us using some form of traditional media (TV, newspapers, online news and radio) and only 34% relying on social media (Facebook, YouTube or Twitter).

The MRS Delphi Group also interviewed members of R-Net, its network of young researchers, and recorded their responses verbatim. In many cases rather than making a choice between consumption of traditional or social media, different sources are often considered together to give the entire picture: cross-referencing has become the norm. One respondent noted that: "What happens now is that I have primary and secondary sources. So whilst I may get the initial "traditional" political story through the BBC, a newspaper or on the radio it doesn't end there. Because of the erosion of trust in the British media establishment I now also supplement the journalistic opinion with secondary softer sources such as Facebook, LinkedIn,

The Huffington Post, BuzzFeed etc. Through a combination of these ... I arrive at an opinion."

Jane Frost CBE, MRS' Chief Executive and founder of the MRS Delphi Group, said: "What's striking is how the perception of trust varies – some participants trusted traditional journalism and discounted social media as too opinion-based, whilst others felt recent events had actually left trust in the mainstream media establishment severely undermined.



Jane Frost CBE

The result is that voters are no longer taking any one source at face value. We live in a world where we are constantly bombarded with information, which has enabled us to become smarter about how we consume material. This can only be positive – it ensures that those who are instrumental in helping to inform political opinion remain accountable."

The research also revealed that national and local issues, rather than European or global ones are what matters when it comes to influencing our vote. 46% of us are influenced 'a lot' by UK issues when we vote, falling to 22% who are influenced significantly by European issues and only 17% by global ones. Tim Britton, former UK CEO at YouGov, explains: "Localism also definitely has a part to play here, particularly in northern England and Scotland where around a third of participants said local and regional issues were very influential. Elsewhere, it's around 25% of us that give local issues such precedence."

Jane Frost continues: "The questions we've asked here really just scratch the surface, but that's the beauty of such a broad topic. What we hope to do is spark curiosity around political engagement, and set in motion meaningful conversations within the market research sector and beyond."

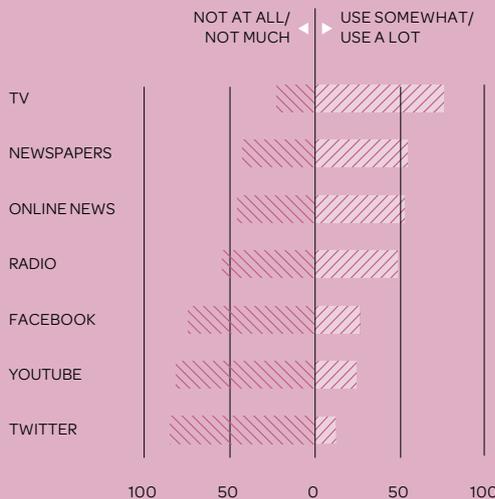
# For the moment it's still news, not social, media that counts when it comes to politics.



Tim Britton

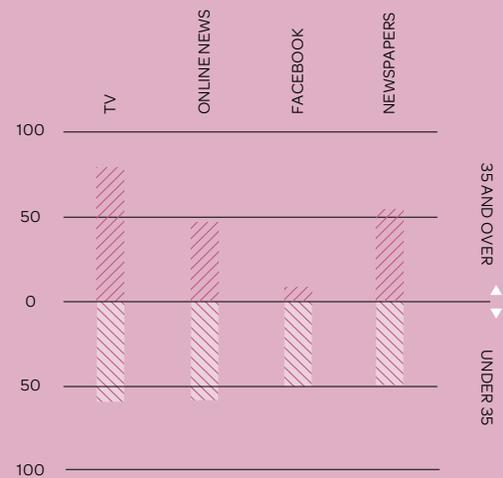
News media, albeit some of it digital, still dominates the public's mind when it comes to informing ourselves about politics, shows research conducted by TNS on behalf of the MRS' Delphi Group think tank. Around three quarters of us (74%) say that we use TV to inform ourselves about politics, 54% cite newspapers and 52% online news, whereas only 27% of us say we use Facebook, 18% YouTube and 15% Twitter. Overall, 81% of us say that we use some form of traditional media to inform ourselves about politics compared to only 34% who say we use social media.

The graph below shows how much we rely on the different on and offline sources:



But the world is changing. Amongst people under the age of 35 TV is still the main source with 66% saying they use it to inform themselves about politics, but online news is a close second (64%) and Facebook (50%) is just as important as newspapers (49%).

The graph below shows the different information habits of the under 35 vs. 35 and older group.



And, perhaps unfortunately for the party faithful who do all of the leg work, the good old leaflet still has a role to play, a quarter of us (23%) say that it is a source of political information.

We are truly in a multi-channel world.

*This research was conducted among a representative sample of 1218 adults (aged 18+) across the UK by TNS' online omnibus service between 18th and 20th August 2015.*

*In addition, MRS interviewed a small number of selected members of its young researchers group, R-Net.*

This research is part of a wider initiative to mark the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. The MRS Delphi Group commissioned leading industry figures including Jeremy Bullmore, Deborah Mattinson and Sir Robert Worcester to contribute articles on the theme of improving democratic engagement.

The latest articles include:




---

**Will Goodhand, UK Board Director,  
TNS**

“Does knowhow from marketing the likes of baked beans transfer to the realm of the ballot box? Yes: in so many ways that it’s almost a case of Heinz’s 57 varieties...”




---

**Colin Strong, Managing Director,  
Verve Ventures**

“Brands are increasingly learning that success means understanding ways in which their products and services can support, rather than appropriate, our civic and cultural lives.”

**Read all the articles at [mrs.org.uk/democracy](https://mrs.org.uk/democracy)**

**Acknowledgments**

This paper has been compiled by the MRS Delphi Group. The Group would particularly like to thank Tim Britton and TNS for their contributions.

**About MRS Delphi Group**

The MRS Delphi Group is led by a collection of the most respected thinkers in the marketing and research sectors. Drawing on the intellectual capital created by the UK’s agencies, the Group delivers valuable insight across a range of important business, social and political issues, including most recently a report on privacy and the concerns of consumers called ‘Private Lives?’. Visit [mrs.org.uk/democracy](https://mrs.org.uk/democracy) and [mrs.org.uk/privacy](https://mrs.org.uk/privacy)

The Steering Group includes: Nick Baker, Managing Director, Quadrangle, Chair of the Delphi Group; Clare Fuller, Director, Promise Corporation; Caroline Plumb, CEO, Freshminds Research Ltd; Phil Sutcliffe, Director, TNS; Colin Strong, MD, Verve; Nick Bonney, Head of Insight, Camelot; Tim Britton; Cat Wiles, AMV:BBDO; Jane Frost, CEO of MRS.