

# Supporting media plurality in the UK

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# How plurality regulation currently operates in the UK

Ofcom has **regulatory responsibilities to secure media plurality** in the UK, but our **tools are focused on 'traditional media'**.

1

**The UK treats plurality as a means to an end** – what matters is the ability for people to become active participants in the political process, rather than any particular benchmark or standard.

2

**Our rules focus on control of traditional media** – regulation is intended to limit ownership of newspapers and broadcasters from becoming too concentrated, to protect the ability of people to access a range of viewpoints.

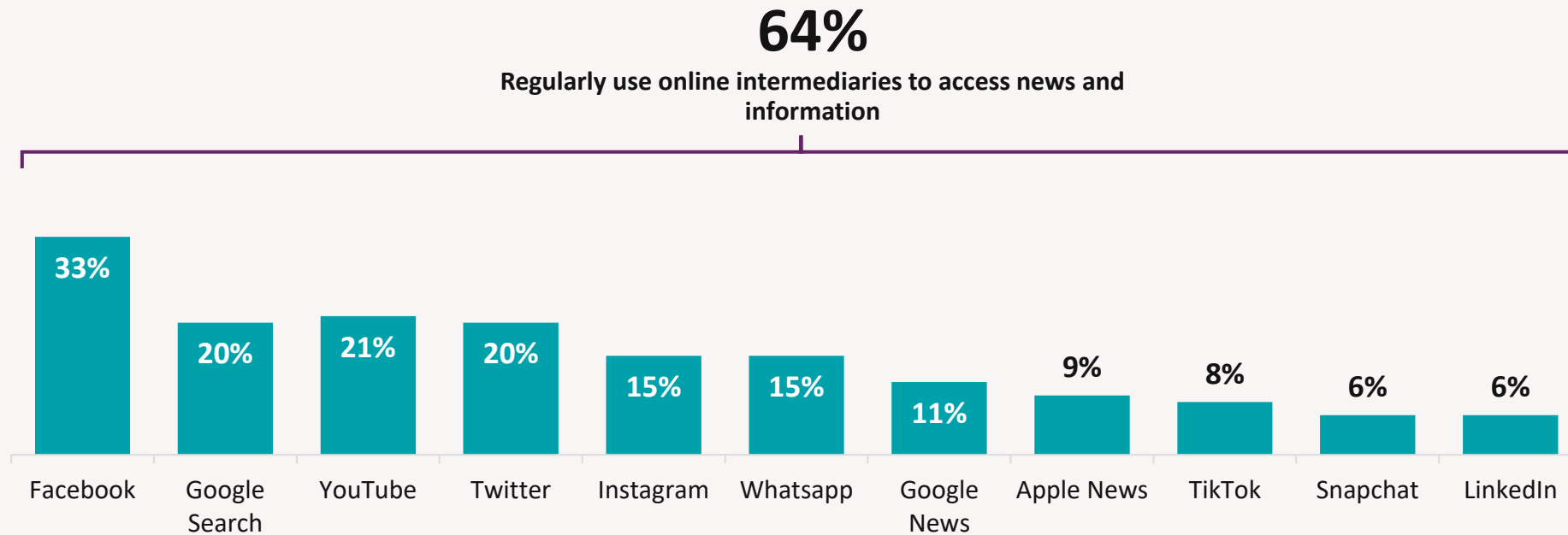
3

**... and say little about online intermediaries** – Our rules never anticipated that online platforms could have an impact on the sustainability of journalism or the news that people see.

**Structural changes to the news  
ecosystem are now firmly  
embedded**

# News consumption has changed in the past decade...

More people use a wider range of search, aggregator and social platforms than ever before.

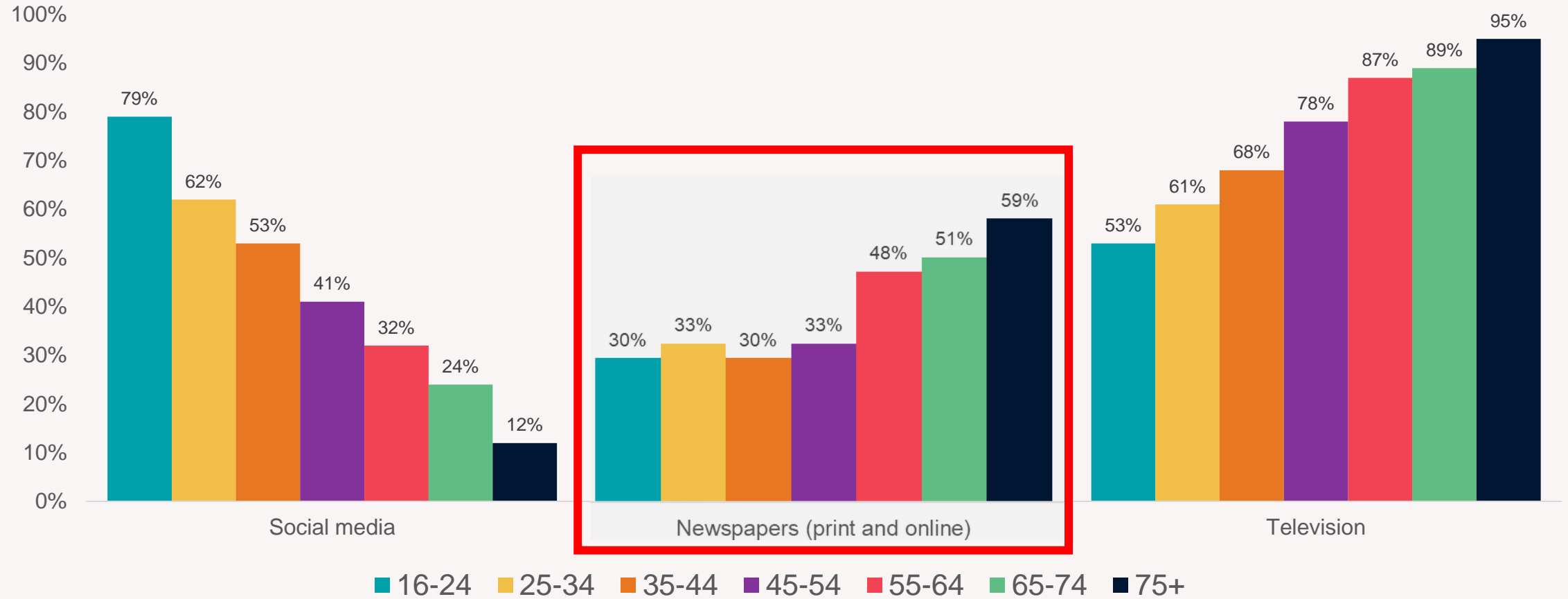


Source: Ipsos UK/Ofcom

*SOCIALMEDIA1. Thinking specifically about social media (on any device), which, if any, of the following do you use to access news nowadays? INTERNET\_4. Which, if any, of the following news aggregators do you use nowadays? ONLINESOURCES1. Thinking specifically about other internet sources (including apps), on any device, which, if any, of the following do you use for news nowadays? Base: all participants (2,557)*

# A structural shift is occurring...

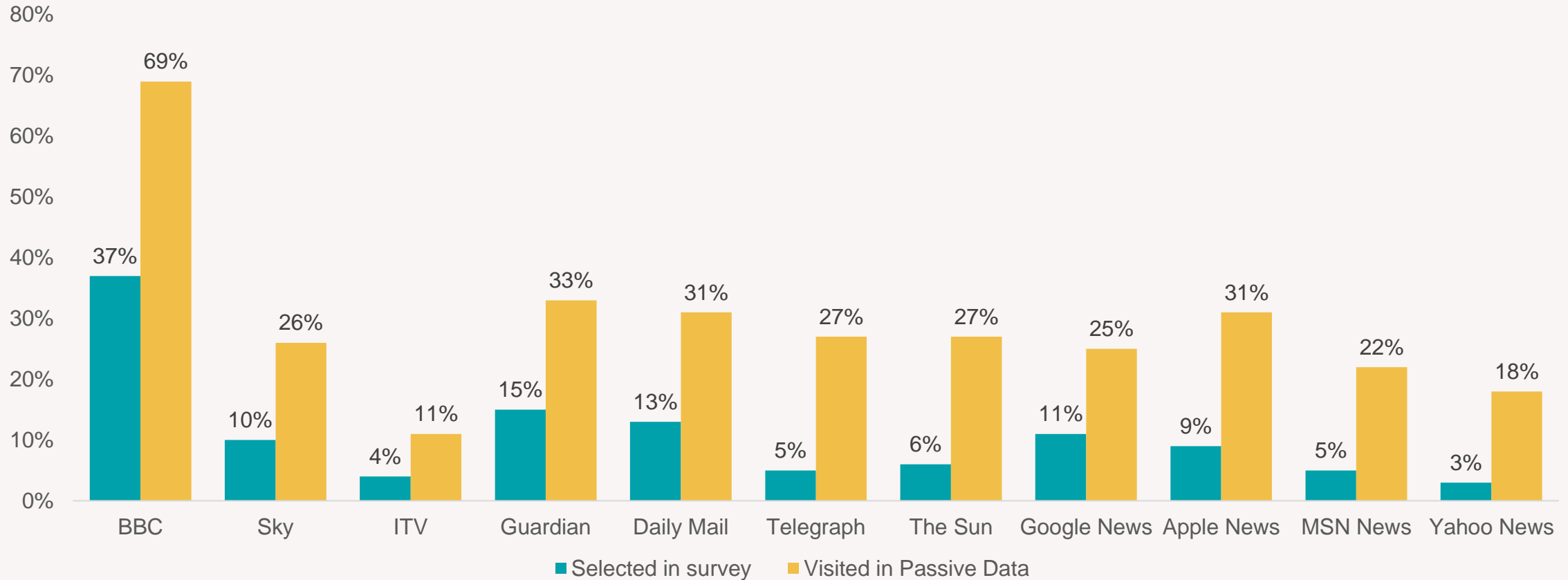
But the headline figures hide some interesting trends below the surface.



Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2022. Question: C1. Which of the following platforms do you use for news nowadays.

# People don't always know what they've used...

Because a lot of news is consumed quickly and passively, people consistently underestimate what they use.



• Base: 1,074 IPSOS Iris Panel Members who also participated in an online survey in July 2022. Online passive data captures all app and website visits across multiple devices in the month of July 2022.

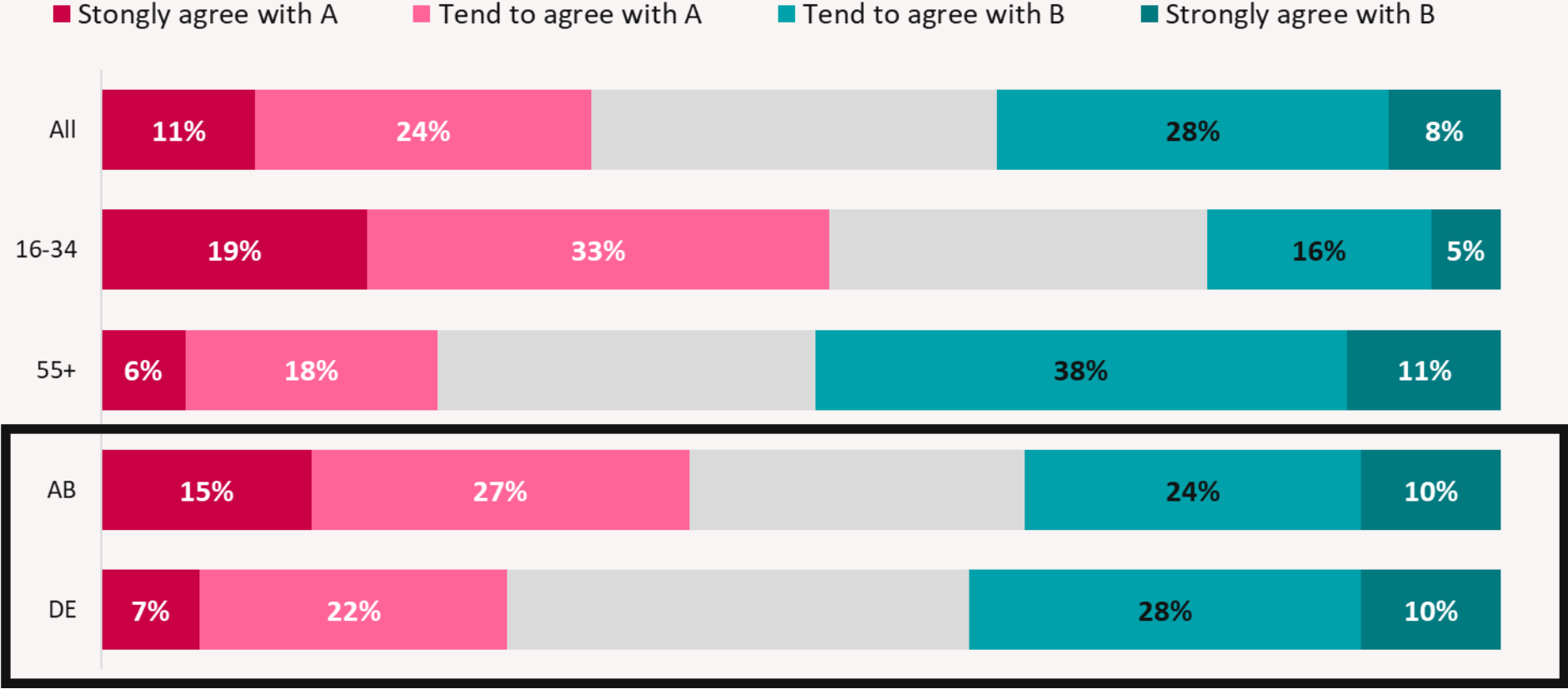
People have different levels of understanding about intermediary influence



# People aren't clear about the extent to which news is personalised online

**A:** The news or information people see online **is tailored** to them personally

**B:** The news or information people see online **is not tailored** to them personally





# People are divided on the extent to which personalisation of news – and intermediaries in general - good or bad

“ They have the ability to split the nation in half. They use fear, they use emotion, they use any and every tool to join us or split us apart.”

“ It makes things very divisive. Back in the day people would buy a couple of newspapers, you could get a different side of the story... [Now] you can't meet in the middle... It creates a divisive thing, it becomes an echo chamber.”

“ I prefer to get it presented to me as opposed to hunting for news”

“ I only want to read and watch the news I am interested in.”

“ It's very important to have a range of news outlets.

“ I appreciate they can have a value if you use them intelligently... but I think there's a chunk of society that aren't interrogating that enough.”

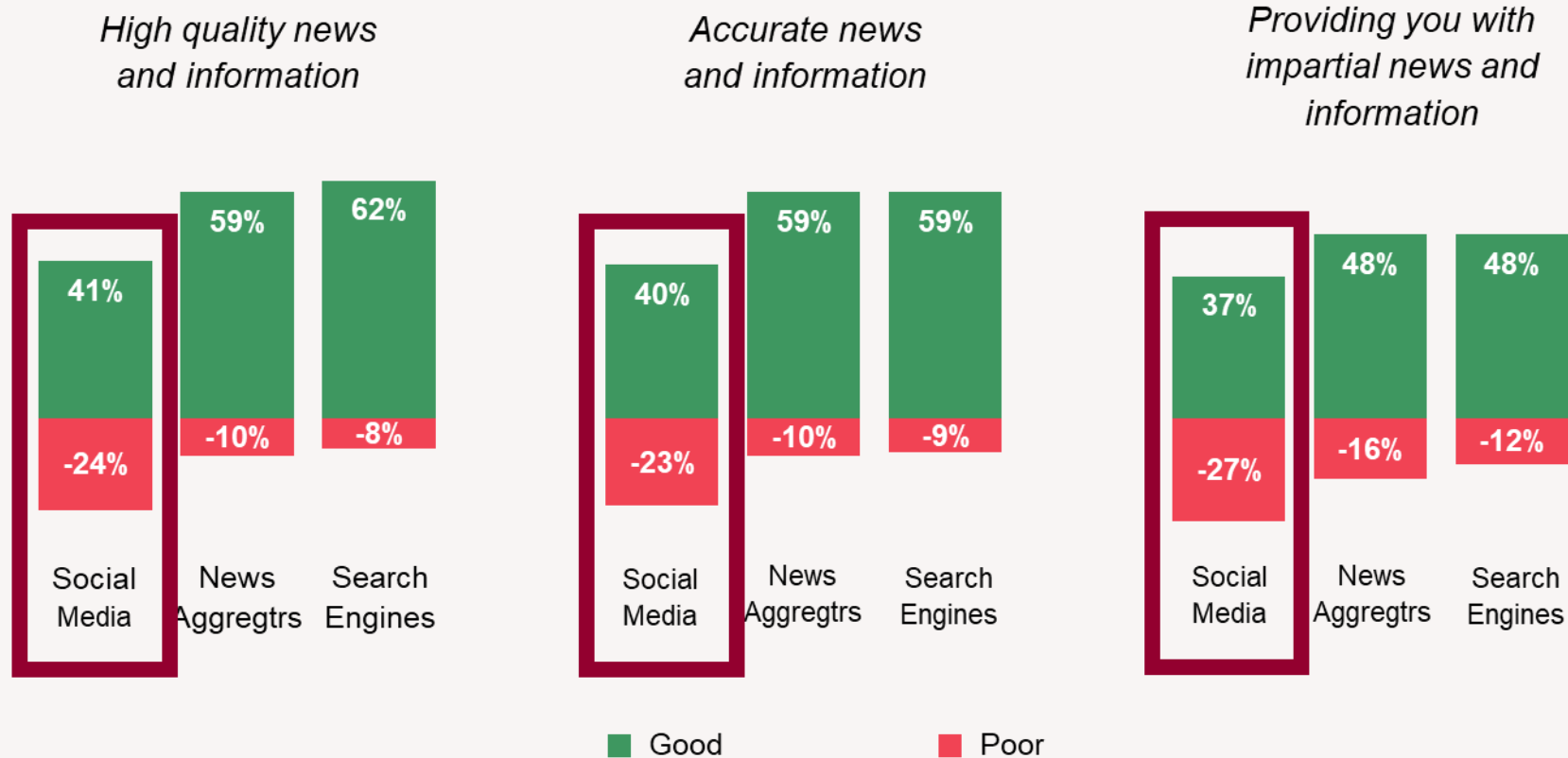
“ I think it's positive because they give you a much wider variety of news than traditional stuff could give you.”

“ "Don't have time for looking around..."

“ Good journalism is knowing both sides of the story so the reader can make up their minds about how they think about it.”

# They don't always trust what they use

Social media is of particular concern when it comes to the quality, accuracy and impartiality of news.



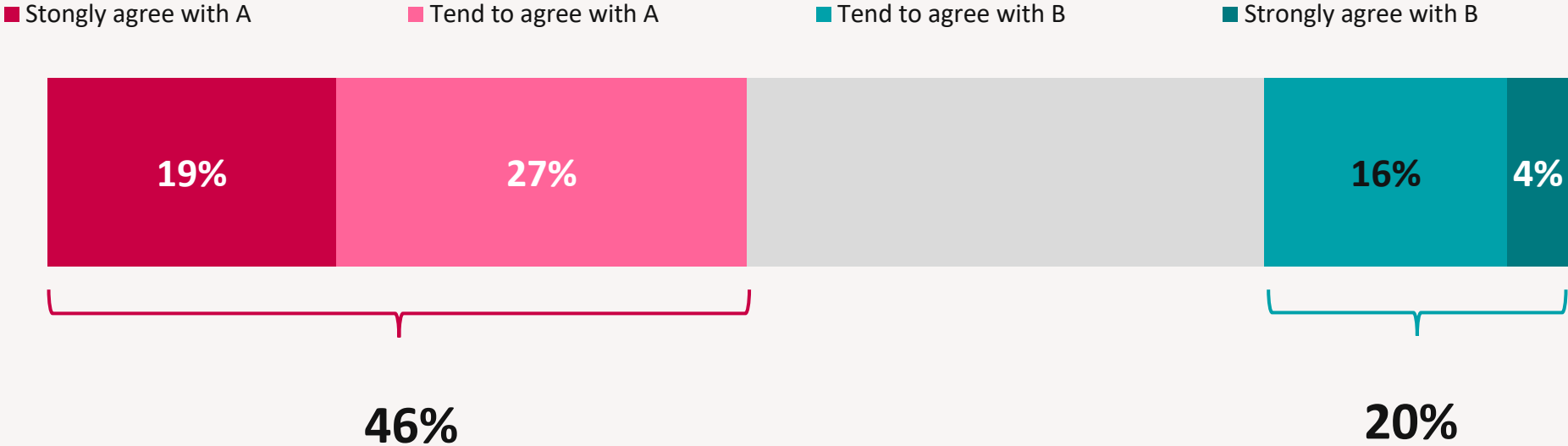
Source: Ipsos UK/Ofcom,

SEARCH\_ENGINE1. On balance how would you rate search engines on each of the following..? Base: all asked (1,072), NEWS\_AGGREGATOR1. On balance how would you rate news aggregators on each of the following..? Base: all asked (738), SOCIALMEDIAS2. On balance how would you rate social media on each of the following..? Base: all asked (1,502)

# ....and they are divided on the extent to which they would like more control.

**A:** I would like total control over how my news and information online is tailored to me through use of my personal internet data

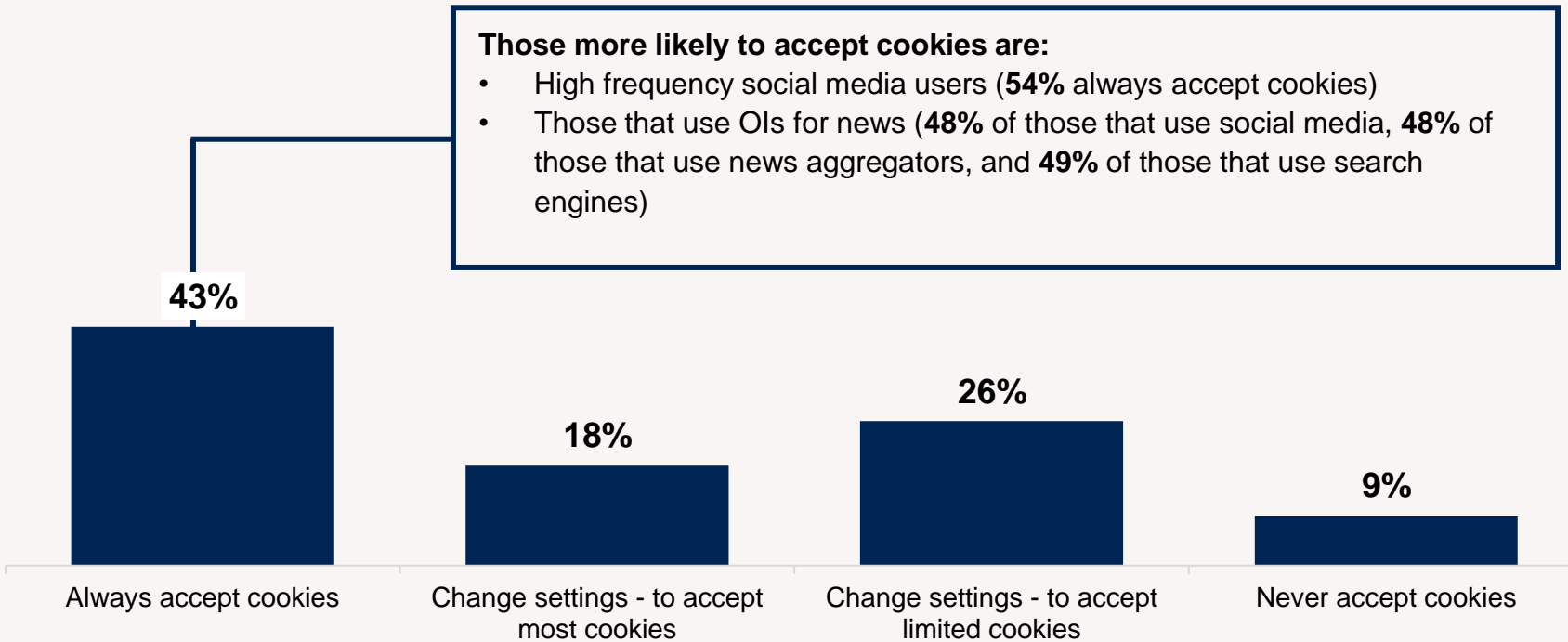
**B:** I would rather news and information online was tailored to me as apps/websites see fit, without needing my involvement



Source: Ipsos UK/Ofcom, O15. For each of the following pairs of statements, please say which one is closest to your views. Base: All who use online intermediaries (social media, news aggregators and search engines) for news nowadays (1,777).

# However the evidence suggest that people won't necessarily use controls if they have them.

Proportion that accept cookies, change settings, or never accept cookies when visiting a news website or application.



“You don’t understand it, when you do look through it, what it means. I don’t even know what cookies are... **For quickness, I accept cookies and I agree and I shouldn’t really.**”

“It goes back to the talk on control, no matter what you pick, there’s likely to be a pattern each time and that’s going to start showing up more, so **what you’re exposed to is very curated.**”

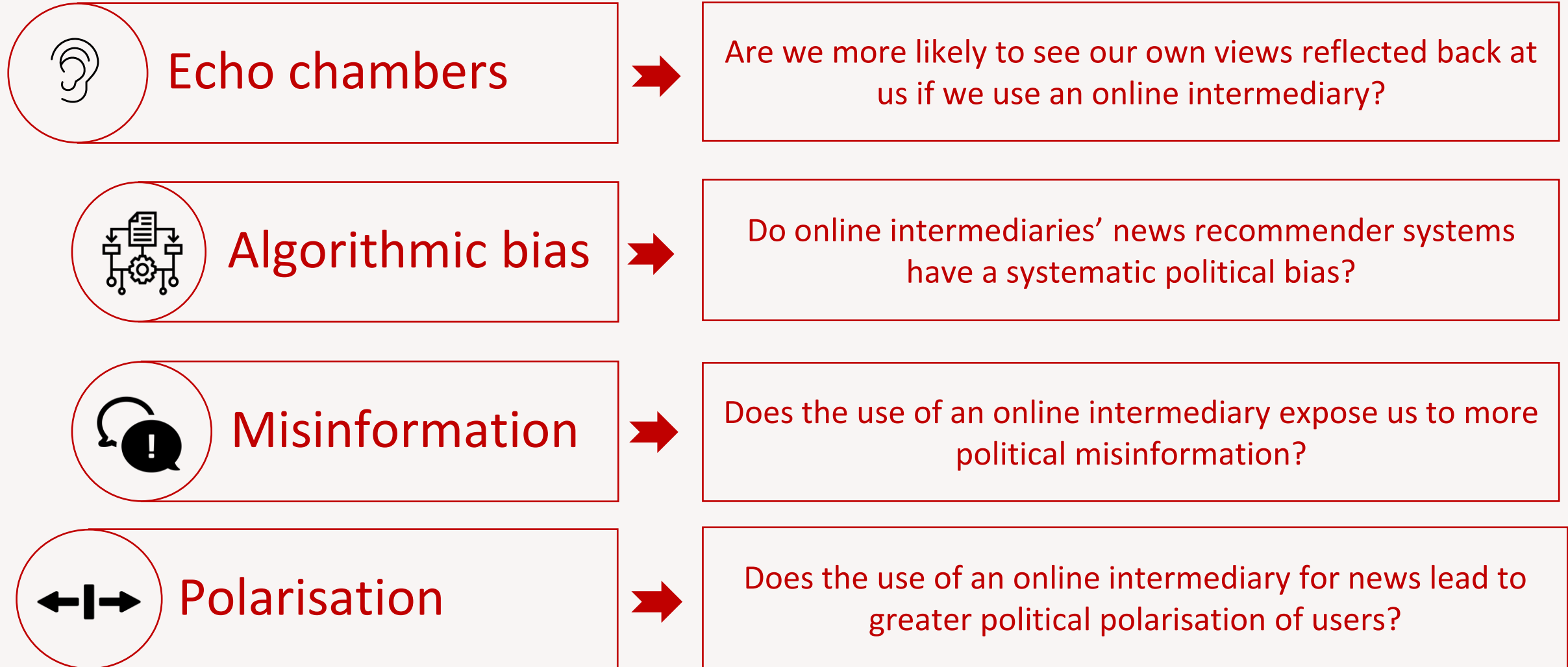
Source: Ipsos UK/Ofcom,

*COOKIES. In a typical month thinking about each visit to a new website or application, do you accept cookies, change settings, or never accept cookies?* Base: All participants (2557).



**New tools may be required to  
address the potential for harm to  
plurality**

# We have analysed the potential for intermediaries to cause harm in four main areas.



# Where do we go from here?

1

**Intermediaries are not just distributors:** they are increasingly the lens through which we see the news and so the choices that they make about what we see matter.

2

**We cannot afford to take risks with plurality:** Regulators are guarantors of plurality – requiring intermediaries to account for their actions and giving people meaningful choices.

3

**More knowledge, measurement tools and engagement will be necessary:** To be effective we must expand our knowledge base, but regulation will work best if industry is involved.