

The influence of news media, politicians, and experts as information sources on COVID-19 attitudes and beliefs: A US–UK comparison

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quello center
MEDIA & INFORMATION POLICY



Study purpose

Comparative perspective

Theorizing:

- Features of media and political systems >> public messages
- Comparative system-level polarization and centralization/fragmentation

Analyzing:

- Role of media and elite sources within systems
- Relationship to public attitudes & beliefs about COVID-19

US and UK political/media systems



Federalized system

More politically polarized

Fragmented healthcare

Deregulated commercial press

Fragmented and polarized media

Less concentrated audiences



More unitary system

Less politically polarized

Centralized healthcare (NHS)

Regulated broadcast media

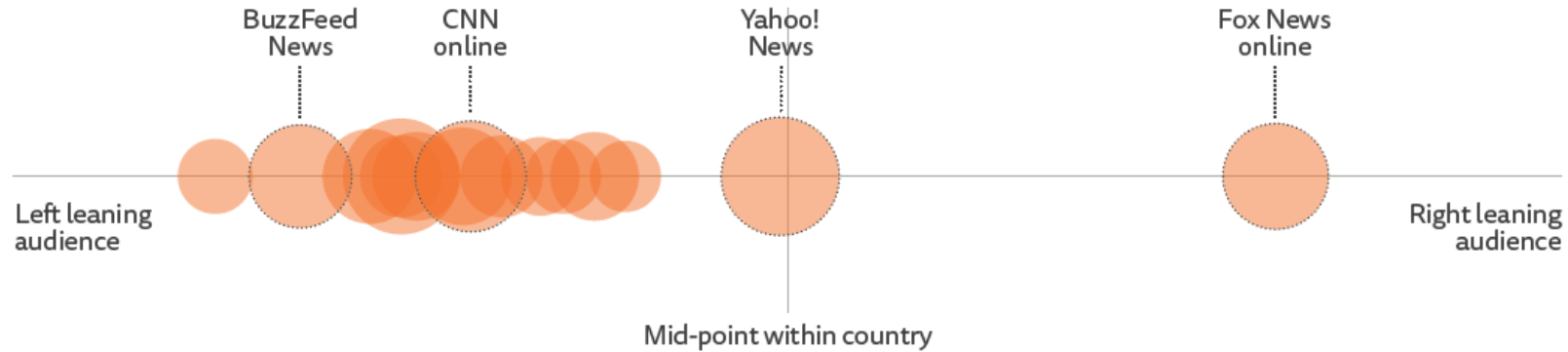
Strong public service media (BBC)

Less fragmented and polarized media

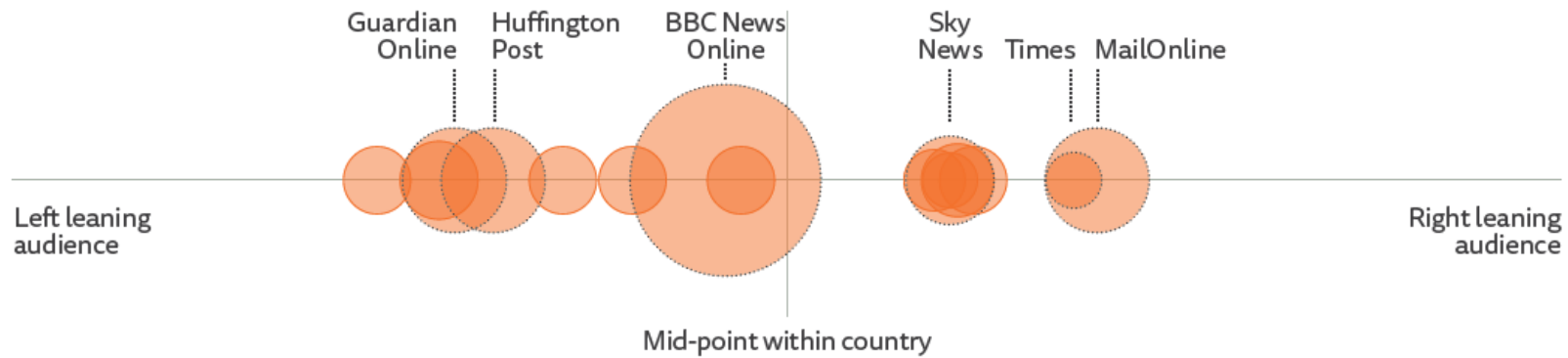
More concentrated audiences

US and UK audience polarization

AUDIENCE MAP FOR THE TOP ONLINE NEWS BRANDS – US



AUDIENCE MAP FOR THE TOP ONLINE NEWS BRANDS – UK*

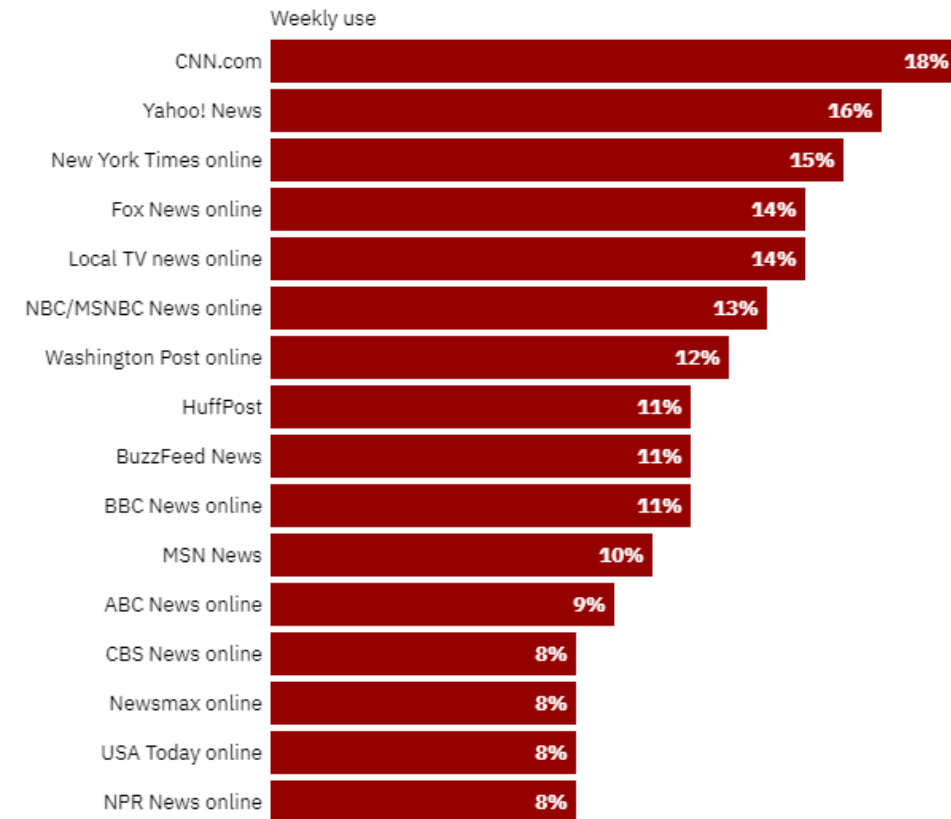


US and UK audience concentration

Weekly reach - online

ONLINE

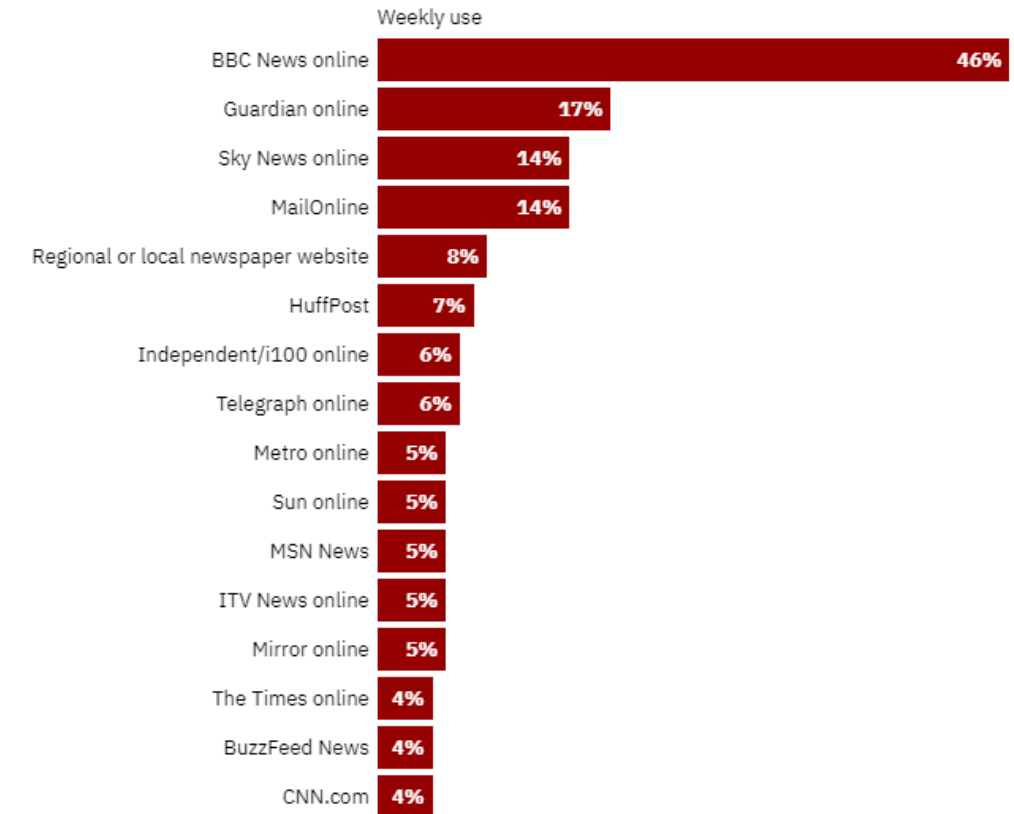
United States of America

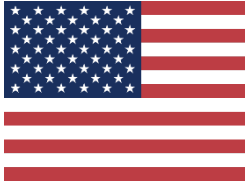


Weekly reach - online

ONLINE

United Kingdom





CNN



'It's going to disappear': A timeline of Trump's claims that Covid-19 will vanish

By Daniel Wolfe and Daniel Dale, CNN

Last updated October 31, 2020

In his first speech after his hospitalization for Covid-19, President Donald Trump stood on a White House balcony on October 10 and made a grand declaration about the coronavirus: "[It's going to disappear. It is disappearing.](#)"

Sean Hannity defends Fox News against claims of coronavirus misinformation: 'I never called it a hoax'

Hannity responds to open letter signed by 74 journalism professors and leading journalists claiming Fox News spread false statements

- [Coronavirus - live US updates](#)
- [Live global updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

Victoria Bekiempis *in New York*

Sat 4 Apr 2020 15.37 BST



Fox News host Sean Hannity has hit back against intense criticism of the conservative network's coronavirus coverage, even claiming in a new [interview](#) he was ahead of most media in [taking Covid-19 seriously](#).



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PM: 'Stay at home, this is a national emergency'

- Johnson drastically restricts movement to combat coronavirus
- Gatherings of more than two people in public to be prohibited
- Police given powers to disperse groups and enforce lockdown

Healthcare

Stewart
Brexiters Missed

Boris Johnson will order police to enforce a strict coronavirus lockdown, with a ban on gatherings of more than two people and strict limits on exercise, as he told the British public, "you must stay at home."



Inside

Raah tells Britons abroad to return to the UK immediately **Page 2**
NHS plans to run ExCel centre in London into field hospital **Page 3**
Headteacher and Holocaust survivor among UK dead **Page 6**
Trump's pivot in strategy could clash with virus experts **Page 16**
"The 2008 crisis didn't change the world, but this one could" **Page 17**
"And I know that as they have to be the part to many times, the people of

The decision follows Friday's announcement that all pubs, restaurants and gyms should shut down. It came as after commuters packed on to the tube yesterday and into over-crowded metro cars over the weekend. After weeks of reluctance to copy draconian measures seen elsewhere in Europe, Johnson announced the new plan after coming under pressure from his own cabinet and Tory backbenchers as well as Labour.

"In this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly affected. Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together, to halt the spread of this disease. To protect our NHS and to save many, many thousands of lives," he said.

"And I know that as they have to be the part to many times, the people of this country will rise to that challenge. And we will come through stronger than ever."

It is understood that Johnson himself had until now been holding out against a lockdown, with senior advisers such as Dominic Cummings having pushed for tougher measures in the last week, after initially lacking a more relaxed approach.

In the past few days, there had been concern about announcing a lockdown before police have the proper powers to enforce one - which will only come into law with the emergency coronavirus legislation later in the week.

However, Johnson has been prepared to announce the rules before his own party and MPs, despite the UK's death toll from coronavirus as following the same pattern as Italy, with a two-week lag. The total confirmed death toll rose to 335 yesterday - a third of the way on this time last week.

The measure would be reviewed in three weeks, the prime minister said. There are England-only but were agreed at Cobra meetings, as did the other UK nations as expected to follow suit, with Nicola Sturgeon echoing them on after Johnson's address.

"Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will be no chance of a return to normal service in the world that we all want, because there won't be enough ventilators, enough

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Scotland's former leader cleared of sex charges **News, pages 20-21**

'You must stay at home'

● PM declares national emergency ● Meetings of more than two banned ● Fines for flouting new curbs

Francis Elliott Political Editor
Steven Swinford Deputy Political Editor

Boris Johnson declared a "moment of national emergency" last night as he finally imposed a near full lockdown of Britain to protect against the spread of coronavirus.

Police will enforce new quarantine rules under which people will be allowed to leave their homes only for essential supplies, one form of daily exercise, medical care or "absolutely necessary" work.

The prime minister closed all shops selling "non-essential goods", playgrounds, libraries and churches. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that the coronavirus pandemic is accelerating around the globe.

He said that police would have the power to enforce the rules, which include a ban on public gatherings of more than two people. Anyone caught flouting the measures faces a fine of between £30 and £1,000 from Thursday, when a bill containing new legislation to deal with coronavirus is expected to become law.



The regulations, which bring Britain largely into line with most big European nations, will last at least three weeks and could be renewed, or even toughened, depending on the progress of the disease.

He spoke on a matter of life and death

Quentin Letts
Political Sketch

Most, most, most. The imperative shot like a knife through the prime minister's evening address to the nation. "From this evening," said Boris Johnson, clenching his fists, wringing the air with his urgency, "I must give the British people a very simple instruction — you must stay at home."

A flurry of sentences began "you should not", "should not meet friends. Should not shop, save for essentials. We were consigned to a common cause and we must — that would again — stop this invisible killer."

He spoke wittily, without the sort of gannymousse one always imagined this sort of crisis might require. How comprehensively imagination's worst excesses have been superseded by the real world, just a single Union Jack behind him, but this was modern democratic authority dispensing as to the colours.

DAILY EXPRESS

WE'RE BACKING NHS HEROES express.co.uk TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2020 **70p**

PM'S HISTORIC ADDRESS TO THE NATION



- Gatherings of more than two people banned
- Drastic action needed to save lives and help NHS
- Shops selling non-essential goods shut down

FULL REPORTS: PAGES 2 TO 11 PLUS 18&19



Theoretical expectations



More fragmented and polarized system

More fragmented and polarized messaging

Divisive role of media and elite sources – especially Trump/conservative media

COVID-19 attitudes/beliefs/intentions less aligned with scientific consensus



Less fragmented and polarized system

More aligned or consensual messaging

Centralizing role of media and elite sources – especially BBC/NHS

COVID-19 attitudes/beliefs/intentions more aligned with scientific consensus

Data and methods

Web-based representative surveys: US (N=2,280) and UK (N=2,000)
October–November, 2020

Independent variables

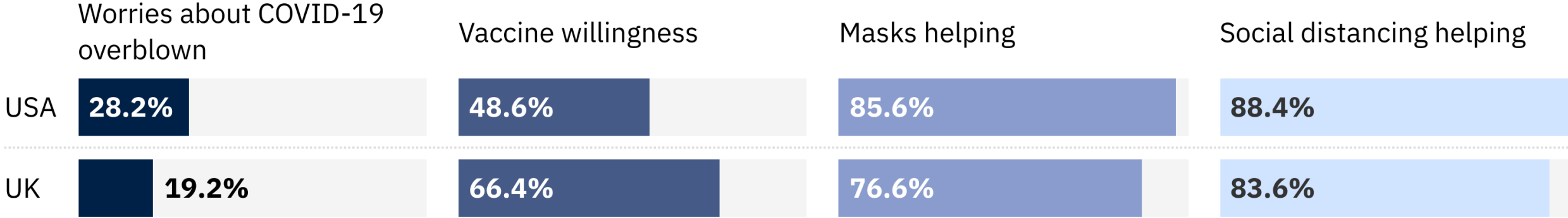
- Demographic controls
- Health- and coronavirus-related controls
- Internet use
- Political leaning
- Media and elite source trust
- Use of media & elite sources: specific news media, politicians, CDC/NHS, doctors/experts

Dependent variables

- Worries about coronavirus
- Vaccine willingness
- Masks helping to slow spread
- Social distancing helping to slow spread

Ordinal logistic regression analyses

Aggregate-level



% agreement with questions/statements

Individual-level results



- Users of Fox News and conservative media = coronavirus worries overblown, less positive about masks
- Opposite findings for users of CNN/MSNBC and CBS/ABC/NBC
- Paying attention to Trump = coronavirus worries overblown
- Opposite findings for state governments



- Users of NHS = high vaccine willingness, coronavirus not overblown, positive about masks
- Same strong findings for BBC
- Users of conservative media = coronavirus worries overblown

Conclusions



- More decentralized and polarized system
- Role of divisive media and political figures: splitting public on COVID-19
- Also, key role of trust



- More centralized system
- Strong role of public institutions – NHS and BBC aligning public on COVID-19
- Also, key role of public trust in media and institutions
- Some indication of role of conservative media