

# State of the nation

Consumer insights for 2026



# Introduction

Newsworks' annual 'State of the nation' study explores **how Britons feel about the future** and the **role of news brands and trusted journalism**.

**Newsworks polled 4,000 people** across two surveys in October and November 2025 with research agency OnePoll.

The study can reveal that **nine in 10 consumers believe 'journalism matters more than ever'**, up by 20% on last year's poll.

# Consumers' mood in 2026

2026 will see greater division in society, unease and volatility.  
2026 is predicted to be a **chaotic** and **unsafe** year for the UK.

But there is also **hope**. Could 2026 be the year of solutions rather than challenges? Could it be the year when the best of humanity shines?

This optimism may be cautious, but it exists.

## Expectations for 2026 – top three words

<b>Chaotic</b>	41%
<b>Unsafe</b>	27%
<b>Hopeful</b>	24%

# Consumers' hopes for society in 2026



Stand up for what you believe in and never be afraid to speak your mind. We should not be offended by each other's words, but instead learn from each other and find a way to compromise and live alongside each other.

To slow down, think critically and treat each other with more respect. I think society could be more empathetic, patient, and responsible, both in how we handle information and how we interact with each other.

With everything going on in the world, from the rising cost of living to social and political divides, we could all benefit from a bit more empathy and genuine connection. It's time we focus less on differences and more on building stronger, supportive communities across the UK.

# Quality journalism will play an important role in 2026

1. Journalists **act as anchors** in a chaotic world
2. News brands **inspire action**
3. **Authentic** journalistic voices in an AI world
4. Journalists act as **truth defenders**
5. Consumers recognise **advertising's role** in supporting journalism

## 1. Journalists act as anchors in a chaotic world

'Chaotic' was the word that best reflects the nations' feelings for 2026.

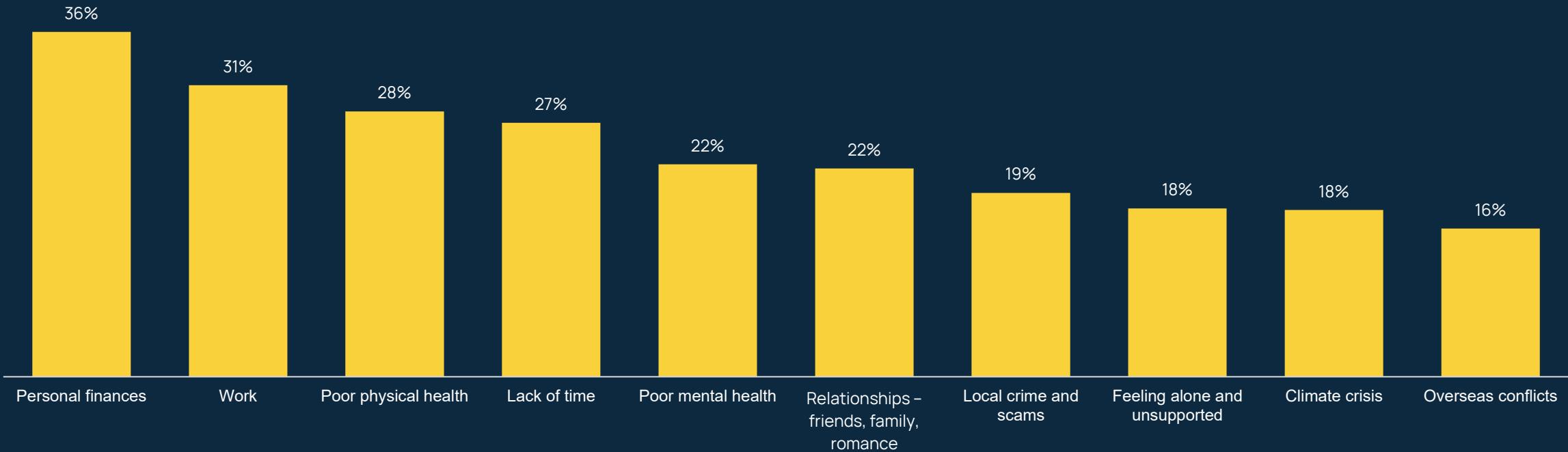
Turbulence in global politics, plus instability in the economy and in workplace environments are the constant buzz in the backdrop of our lives.

Social media has raised expectations of how we should behave and what we should achieve. The volume of information at our fingertips can be overwhelming, leading some to 'ping minimalism', a trend where people intentionally minimise the number of notifications they receive, according to WGSN's "Future Consumer 2027".

**Amid much noise and confusion, news brand journalism delivers much needed clarity.**

# Money remains consumers' biggest source of personal stress

Over a third of the population expect personal finances to be key source of stress next year.



Source: Newworks/ OnePoll November 2025: 'Thinking ahead to 2026, which, if any, of the following areas do you expect might contribute to personal stress for you?' N=2000 nat rep

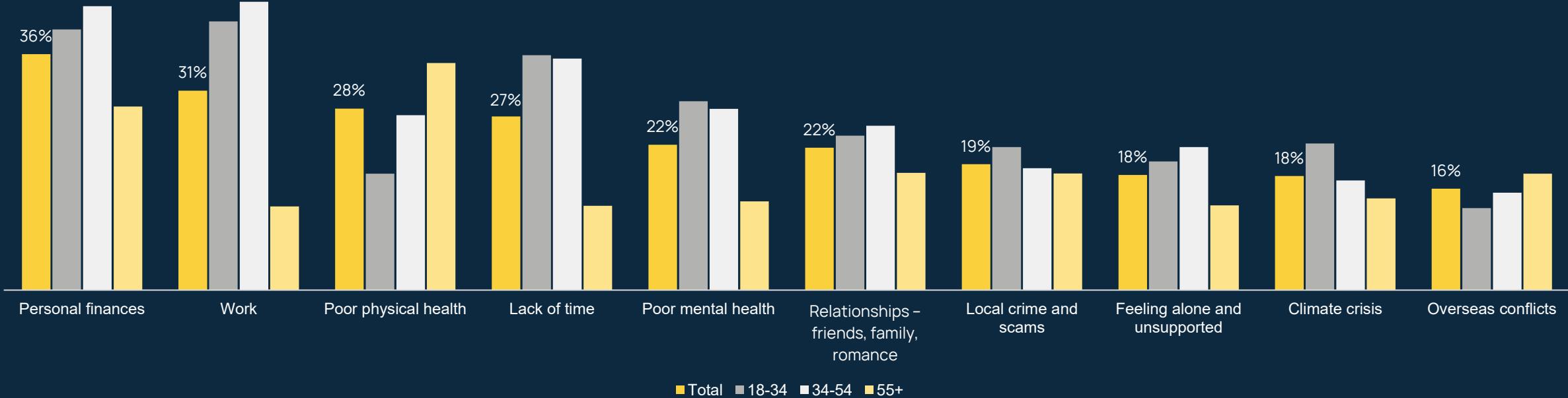
# Stress is nuanced, focussed in different areas for different groups of consumers

34-54s are the most stressed age group, being very concerned with **work and money**

Over 55s are most likely to state **poor physical health** as their top source of stress

**Lack of time** and **mental health** is a problem for youngest cohorts

**The climate crisis** is at the lower end of the stress spectrum, but is highest for young cohorts



Source: Newsworks/ OnePoll November 2025: 'Thinking ahead to 2026, which, if any, of the following areas do you expect might contribute to personal stress for you?' N=2000 nat rep

# Media that reduces the noise helps consumers feel grounded and lightens the mental load



- **70%** feel nostalgic for simpler times in life, with the most stressed age demographic of 35-54s leading at **75%**
- **75%** believe journalism helps make sense of the volume of information online
- When overwhelmed...
  - 2 in 3** (66%) watch TV shows or movies
  - 1 in 4** (25%) listen to podcasts or audiobooks
  - 1 in 5** (20%) read physical media like newspapers or magazines to de-stress

Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October and November 2025: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I often feel nostalgic for a simpler time in life"?", "Which, if any, of the following media-related activities help you feel less stressed, or mentally lighter? [Please select all that apply]", "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Journalism helps people make sense of the volume of information online"?" N=4000 nat rep

## News brand environments provide important moments of clarity and calm

**77% of consumers agree that reading news brands help ease the mental load.**

## Of these consumers:

- **45%** read for engaging stories or features
- **39%** play puzzles and games
- **38%** are after a sense of connection to the wider world



**Source:** Newsworks/OnePoll November 2025: "In what ways could reading newspapers—whether in print or online—help you relax, reduce stress, or lighten your mental load? [Please select all that apply]" N=2000 nat rep

# The advertiser opportunity: provide moments to slow down

## Champion long-form media

Sponsored podcasts, printed newspapers, documentaries among other long-form moments that offer a sanctuary from scrolling.

## The right message at the right time

Give overwhelmed audiences a faster route to feeling up to date and informed. Create concisely and meet their needs where their minds are.

## Tap into audience passions

Lifestyle journalism, entertainment news, even puzzles and games provide lighter moments of cognitive relief during busy days.

# In 2026, news brands' multi-platform solutions reach audiences where they are



“What’s unique about journalism is that fundamentally, you’re expert storytellers, and good stories can be told in all manners of communication platforms....What is exciting and what is rare is that we have multi-generational reach across our product sets. Social, video and podcast creation for our youth audiences, as well as our printed products for our older audiences means we really can deliver mass reach for clients.”

Ryan Uhl, **Mail Metro Media**



“The ‘reach out’ to ‘lean back’ to our platforms is important. News brands are full multiplatform solutions, not just the two or three platforms that we were a few years ago.”

Karen Eccles, formerly  
**The Telegraph**

For more info listen to the Newsworks Webinar: [Actions speak louder than words](#)

## 2. News brands inspire action

Society is becoming more fragmented, meaning consumers are defining themselves increasingly through beliefs, values and lifestyle identities.

This divide is emotional and economic. When more than half of people globally, according to Ipsos's global trends, feel their government doesn't prioritise "people like me," it intensifies distrust in institutions and amplifies identity-driven decision-making. This isn't the behaviour of just a subset of conscious consumers – it spans the entire political spectrum.

**In essence, consumers are searching for inspiration to act according to their values, which news brand journalism can deliver.**

# Against a backdrop of chaos, personal actions increasingly matter



- **77%** agree they feel concerned about extremism in the UK and **three in four** (75%) feel the art of respectful debate is being lost
- **76%** acted in the last year to reflect or reinforce their personal beliefs, including voting, donating and signing petitions
- **58%** agree that journalists represent diverse communities and marginalised voices, increasing to **two in three** (66%) 18-34s

Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October and November 2025: "In the past year, have you taken any of the following actions to reflect your personal beliefs or values? [Please select all that apply]", "How concerned are you about extremism in the UK, compared to previous years?", "How well do you think journalists represent diverse communities and marginalized voices?" N=4000 nat rep

# News brand content raises issues and offers ideas of how people can act

66% of consumers agree that news brands support their personal values, with their leading reasons including:

- Making informed decisions about issues that matter to them (59%)
- Representing diverse voices and perspectives (35%)
- Supporting journalism and media ethics they believe in (33%)



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll November 2025: "Thinking about your main news title, in what ways does it support your personal values? [Please select all that apply]" N=2000 nat rep

# The advertiser opportunity: influence consumer decisions by being beside trusted news content

## Engage with passionate audiences

Partner with social journalists, creator collaborations and digital news exclusives that encourage curiosity over conflict.

## Utilise first-party data

News brands know their audiences deeply, so make use of all their available tools to best understand and reach your target audience.

## Lean into trusted news

Take advantage of trusted news brands to build trust in products and brands through editorial features and content partnerships.

# In 2026, news brand platforms are evolving to help consumers take action



“Commerce content is going to be an integrated part of our website. This will enable advertisers to do high impact branding with not only normal formats, but also product level performance.”

Ryan Uhl, **Mail Metro Media**



“At our core is building trusted, culturally influential environments where people are inspired to act and brands can truly thrive.”

Dan Locke,  
**The Standard**

Listen to the full interview in Newsworks' webinar [Actions speak louder than words](#)

### **3. Authentic journalistic voices in an AI world**

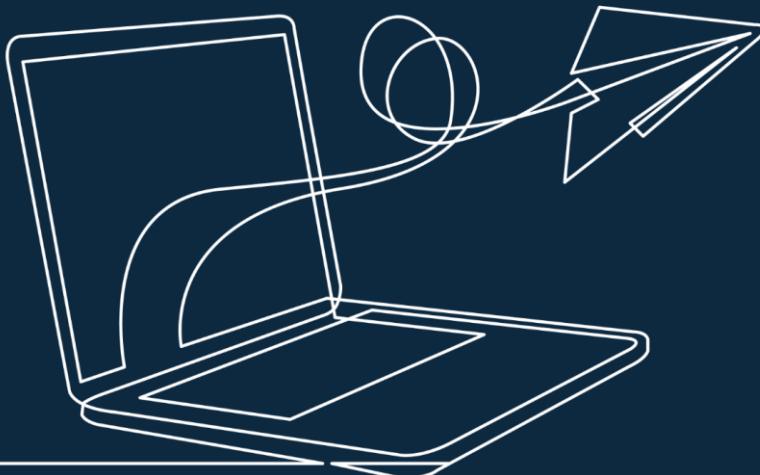
AI is the defining technology of our time, and as with all innovation it has sparked cultural unease, particularly focussed on whether an overreliance will make future generations less intellectually capable.

While acknowledging the benefits, awareness of AI continues to spark a greater appreciation for the human perspective. According to the Foresight Factory's 'The Adaption Advantage', almost half of consumers globally (47%) agree that they would be willing to pay a premium for expertise. This is certainly true in acknowledging the skill and authenticity of human journalists in the field.

**The future should not be AI vs. humans. Rather it must be AI + human intelligence.**

# Consumers are seeking human intelligence in the age of automation

- **79%** feel it's becoming harder to tell the difference between professional journalists and independent news commentators
- **86%** agree it's important to them that the news they consume is created by professionally trained journalists compared to social media influencers
- **84%** agree that human editorial judgment is more important as AI becomes more common in news production



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October and November 2025: "In the past year, have you taken any of the following actions to reflect your personal beliefs or values? [Please select all that apply]", "How concerned are you about extremism in the UK, compared to previous years?", "How well do you think journalists represent diverse communities and marginalized voices?" N=4000 nat rep

# Consumers are equally excited and cautious about the future of AI

While opinion is divided, consumers are more positive about the short-term impacts of AI than the long-term.

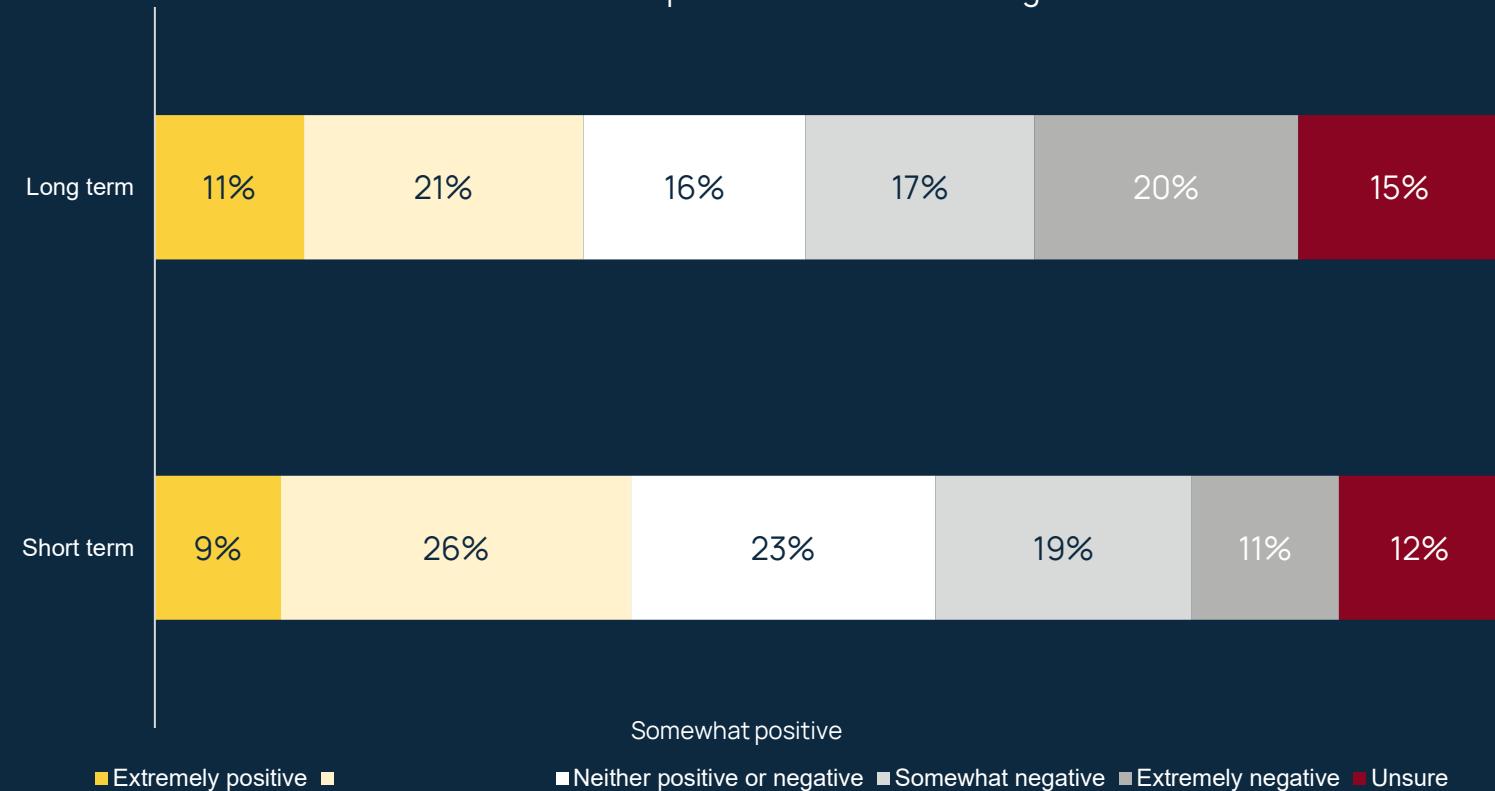
## Key concerns include:

- **37%** fear reduced human intelligence
- **32%** fear a rise in misinformation and false content

## Key hopes include:

- **25%** faster problem solving
- **21%** better efficiency

Consumer sentiment on the impact of AI in both the long- and short- term



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll November 2025: "What do you think will be the impact of the increased use of AI on society, over the following periods? - In the short term (next two years), in the long term (in 10 years)\*", "How do you feel AI is currently affecting you or society? [Please select the top three reasons]\* N=2000 nat rep

# Journalists provide a valuable human lens to the news agenda

Against the backdrop of AI and algorithms, personal touches from expert journalists are valued:

- Consumers enjoy listening to journalists debate or discuss an issue (32%)
- Consumers like journalists who use a personal or authentic style (31%)
- Consumers feel that there is a growing pressure to have an opinion online, even if they are uninformed (26%)



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll November 2025: "Which, if any, of the following statements best reflect(s) your opinions about journalists and news titles? [Please select all that apply]" N=2000 nat rep

# The advertiser opportunity: integrate AI to support humans

## Target people, not bots

Planning requires a human touch, and while technology can streamline the process, only humans can truly understand what audiences want.

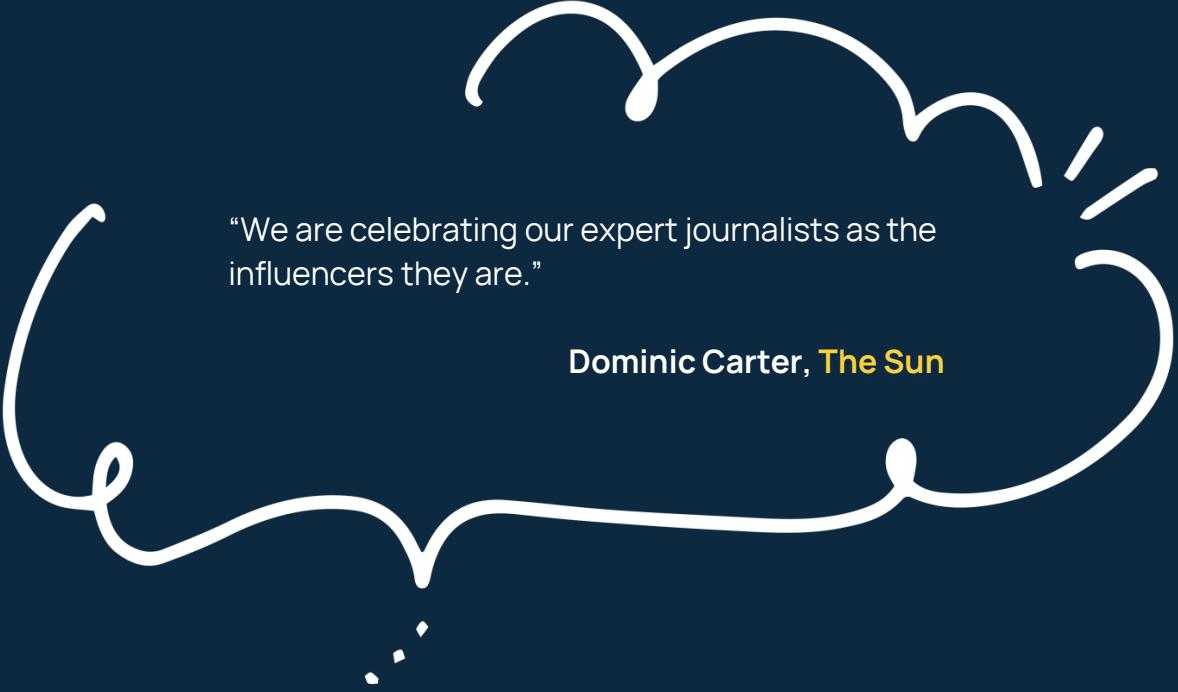
## Elevate human expertise

Editors and subject specialists are trusted guides in storytelling whose lived knowledge outweighs automated summaries.

## Blend tech and transparency

Use AI to enhance recommendations or navigation while keeping the humans behind journalism in the foreground.

# In 2026, news brands will celebrate their world-expert journalists



“We are celebrating our expert journalists as the influencers they are.”

**Dominic Carter, The Sun**



“At the Guardian we are going to lean into our humanity. What is going to make us stand out from the AI slop out there.”

**Imogen Fox, The Guardian**

For more from news brands listen to: [Actions speak louder than words](#)

## 4. Journalists act as truth defenders

Influential forces have never had more tools to distort reality. As fears of 'fake news' deepen and algorithm manipulation pushes consumers into echo chambers and knowledge silos, journalists stand on the front line as the defenders of truth.

Fact-checked, accountable reporting from the ground has never been more essential. But this comes at a human cost. It is the most dangerous era to be a journalist, with 2024 marking the deadliest year on record according to the United Nations.

**Supporting news brands as they hold power to account is now invaluable, not only for delivering high-quality journalism, but for protecting wider society.**

# Universal respect for the role journalism plays in society



- **90%** say that journalism is important in today's digital era, exposing corruption and verifying facts
- **80%** agree that journalism strengthens democracy by holding leaders accountable
- **55%** agree that they trust professional journalists more than information shared by influencers or everyday social media users

# News brands' ability to hold power to account matters more than ever

**88%** agree the role of journalists in helping to fight misinformation and fake news on social media is important (**54%** agree it is very important).

Journalists stand at the front line because we can trust them. Journalism is valued because:

- **57%** agree it provides balanced and fact-checked reporting
- **65%** follows professional ethics and standards
- **53%** is transparent about sources and corrections



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October 2025: "How important is the role of journalists in helping to fight misinformation and fake news on social media?", "What do you think contributes most to public trust in journalism? [Select all that apply]" N=2000 nat rep

# The advertiser opportunity: align with authentic, verified journalism

## Back verified reporting

News brands will continue to deliver on quality journalism, and as they pioneer culture, advertisers should move with them.

## Lean into brand safe content

News brands are brand safe. Regulated and fact-checked, real journalism is trusted by readers and a safe place for advertisers.

## Benefit from the halo effect

Advertising around hard news signals seriousness, reliability and authenticity, traits consumers increasingly expect from advertisers.

# In 2026, news brand platforms will allow both consumers and advertisers to be present at the moments that matter in the national conversation



“We will continue to invest in our journalism and brilliant storytelling. We will continue to hold people to account. We will just do it through more diverse platforms, so we are investing and making sure we have the best digital platforms to serve our content.”

**Dominic Carter, The Sun, News UK**



“We continue to invest in outstanding editorial output whilst also leading the way in contextual brand safety through innovations like Mantis. That means brands can stay fully present in the heart of national conversation, confidently aligned with verified, trusted news at the moments that truly define our society.”

**Charlotte Wells, Reach**

Listen to the full interview in Newsworks' webinar [Actions speak louder than words](#)

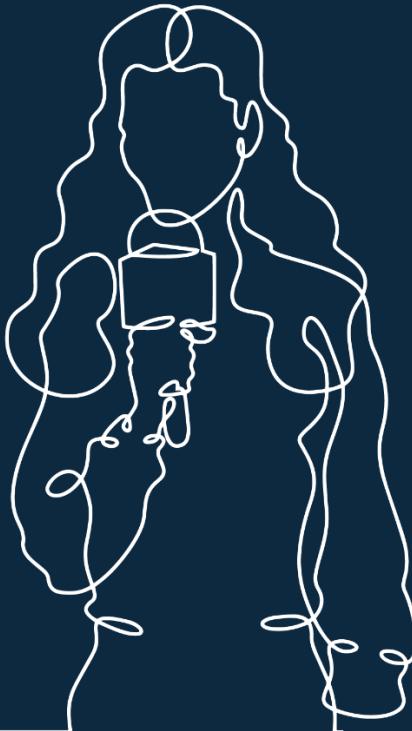
## 5. Consumers recognise advertising's role in supporting journalism

News brands are evolving different business models to meet the challenges of funding the newsrooms of the future. But ultimately, quality journalism requires funding and shrinking investment into news risks a decline in civic literacy and defence against misinformation. Advertising therefore plays a crucial role.

Every campaign run with a news brand supports the newsroom and what journalists can achieve.

**As journalism becomes more valued, consumers are increasingly aware of the importance advertising plays.**

# In a world where quality content must be funded, the public believe advertising plays a valuable role



- Nine in 10 agree that journalism is important to society today – this has increased from 75% last year
- Yet one in two (49%) feel that the rise in social media has made it harder to access trustworthy information
- 76% agree advertisers should support independent journalism and newsrooms

Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October and November 2025: "How important is journalism to society today?", "How important is it that advertisers support independent journalism and newsrooms – for example, through advertising in newspapers and on digital news websites?", "How has the rise of "consumer media" (user-generated content and influencers) affected your ability to access trustworthy information?" N=4000 nat rep

# News brands' ground-breaking content provides attention-grabbing environments for advertisers

**72%** believe journalism creates the first draft of history, which future generations look to for understanding what mattered and how people responded.

By advertising alongside quality news and journalism, brands can deepen their association with pioneering stories, investigative journalism, and even moments that live on in popular culture.



Source: Newsworks/OnePoll October 2025: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Journalism creates the first draft of history, which future generations look to for understanding what mattered and how people responded?" N=2000 nat rep

# The advertiser opportunity: support quality journalism

## Celebrate journalism

Boost brand reputation through contextual advertising next to quality journalism.

## Back don't block

Investing in trusted environments, even when the news is tough, builds trust in brands and delivers stronger business outcomes.

## Support industry learning

Promote continued learning about quality journalism through supporting industry recognised training initiatives like the Newsworks Academy.

# Advertisers, make 2026 the year to...

1. **Anchor consumers** to make sense of the world around them
2. **Inspire action** with purchases aligned with values
3. **Defend truth** in the fight in holding power to account
4. **Promote authentic voices** that work with (rather than against) AI
5. **Support journalism** sharing your challenges and briefs with news brands

# Because journalism matters

THE TIMES THE SUNDAY TIMES THE i PAPER **Sun** Daily Mail The Mail MailOnline **METRO** **STANDARD** **INDEPENDENT**  
The Guardian The Daily Telegraph The Sunday Telegraph **Mirror** **Mirror** DAILY EXPRESS SUNDAY EXPRESS **STAR** **STAR** SUNDAY PEOPLE