

Truth in public discourse

What can we do about fake news?

QUG, Woodbrooke, 14-15 April 2018

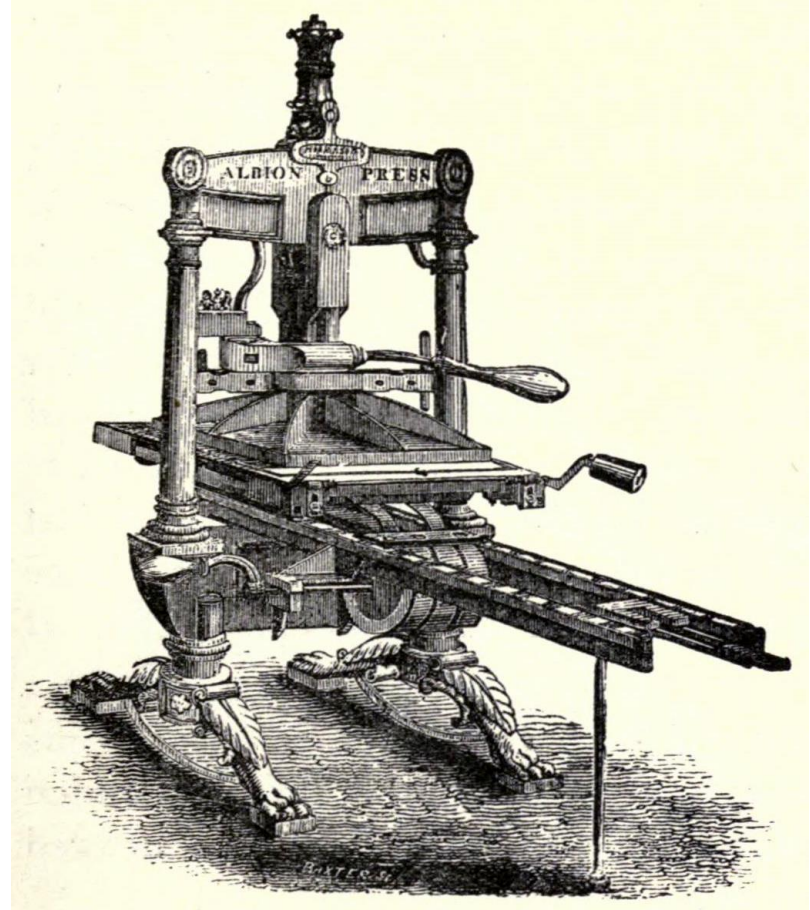
Stephen Cox

Fake news is not new

- Ramesses II dealt with the bloody stalemate of the Battle of Kadesh, where he failed to defeat the Hittites, by simply announcing that he had won on every temple wall.
- 1903 Russia: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a vile anti-Semitic slur still causing problems today
- 1924 Daily Mail tried to smear the Labour Party as Bolshevik through the forged Zinoviev Letter
- Iraq. Did the government lie or simply be indifferent to the truth?



Dangerous disruptive communications
technology should be banned



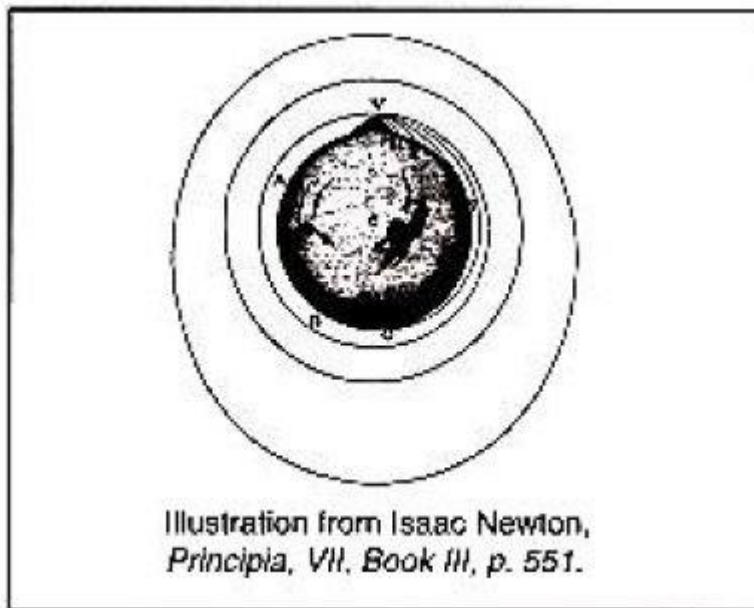


Illustration from Isaac Newton,
Principia, VII, Book III, p. 551.

Womens Speaking

Justified, Proved and Allowed of by
the SCRIPTURES,

All such as speak by the Spirit and Power
of the Lord JESUS.

And how WOMEN were the first
that preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of
JESUS, and were sent by CHRIST'S
OWN Command, before He ascended
to the Father, John 20.17.

*And it shall come to pass, in the last dayes, saith the Lord, I will pour out
of my Spirit upon all Flesh; your Sons and Daughters shall Prophecie.
Acts 2. 27. Joel 2. 28.*

*It is written in the Prophets, They shall be all taught of God, saith Christ,
John 6. 45.*

*And all thy Children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the
Peace of thy Children. Isa. 54. 13.*

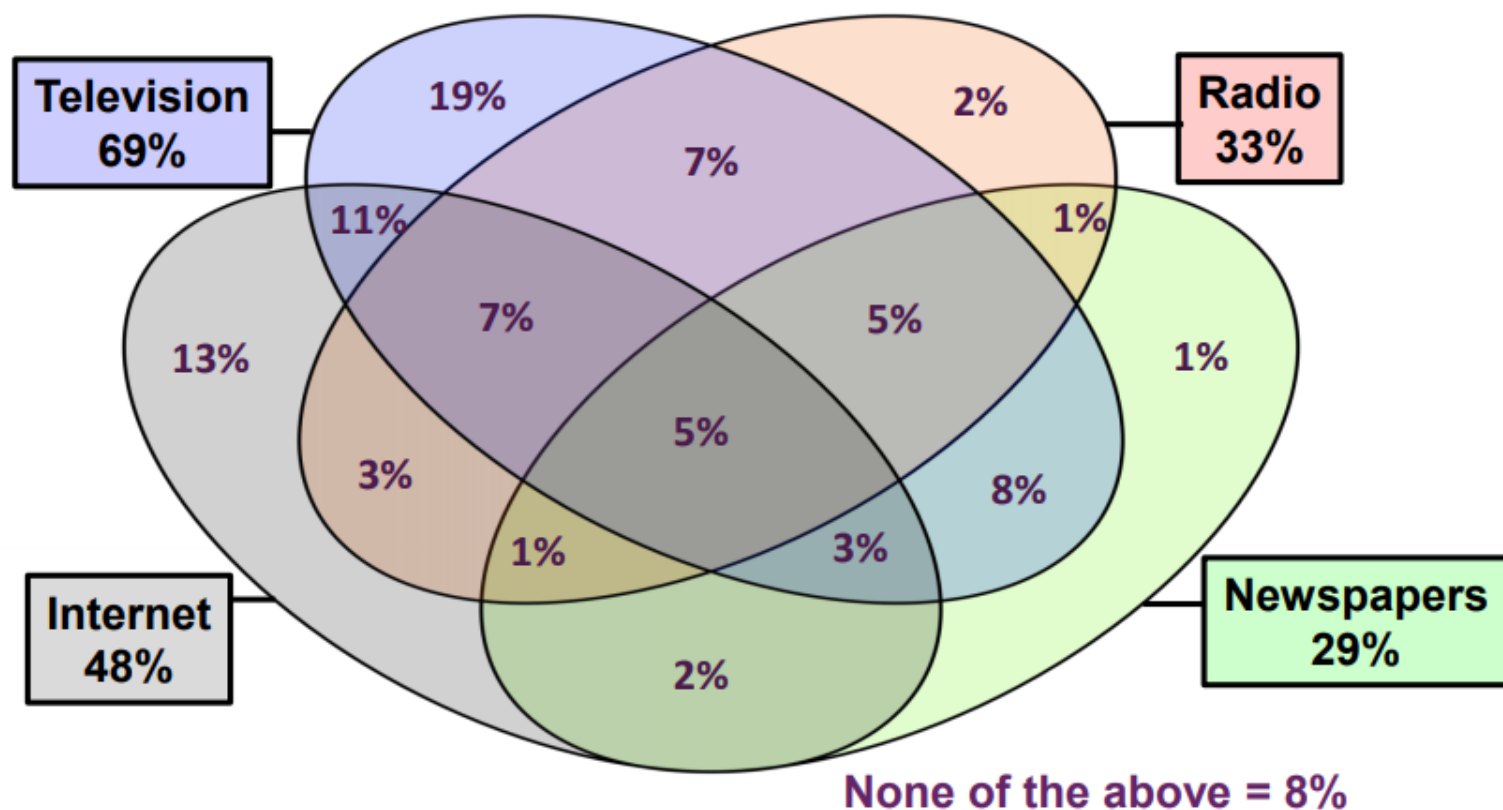
*And they shall teach no more every man his Neighbour, and every man his
Brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the
least to the greatest of them, saith the Lord. Jer. 31. 34.*

London, Printed in the Year, 1666.

Checking in on 'the Quaker bit'

- Quakers were up for using the most technically advanced methods of comms available
- Personal and political integrity linked – be patterns, be examples
- Notorious controversialists
- The campaign against the slave trade invented NGO campaigning
- Believed in objective truth and their interpretation was it.

Figure 1.3 Extent of news consumption across the four main platforms



Q3a) Which of the following do you use for news nowadays?
Base: All adults 16+ (2894)

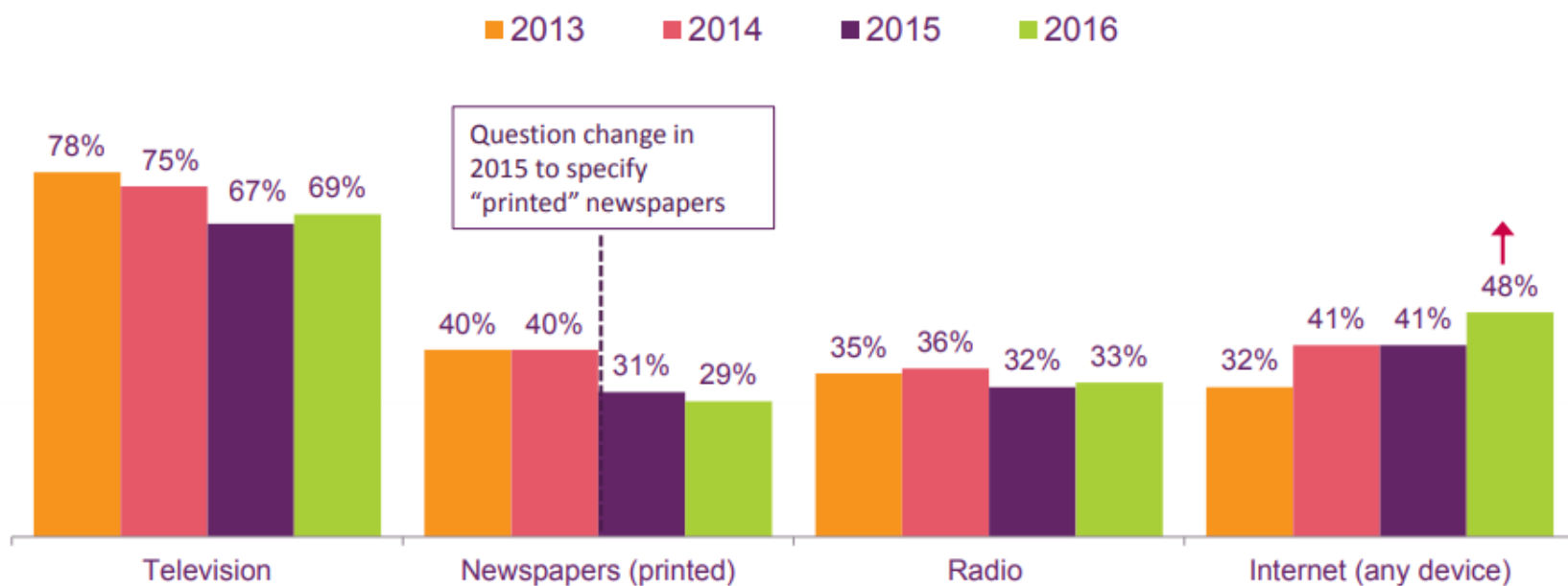


Summary

- Across all platforms, an average of 3.8 individual sources are used for news, comparable to 2015 (3.5).
- Among users of TV for news and among newspaper users, 2.0 individual sources are used. For internet users, 2.3 news sources are used.
- Nearly six in ten (58%) of radio news users only use one radio source for news; 40% of TV news users only use one source; 38% of internet users only use one source and 31% of newspaper news users use only newspapers for news.

Figure 1.1 Use of four main platforms for news nowadays

% of adults in UK

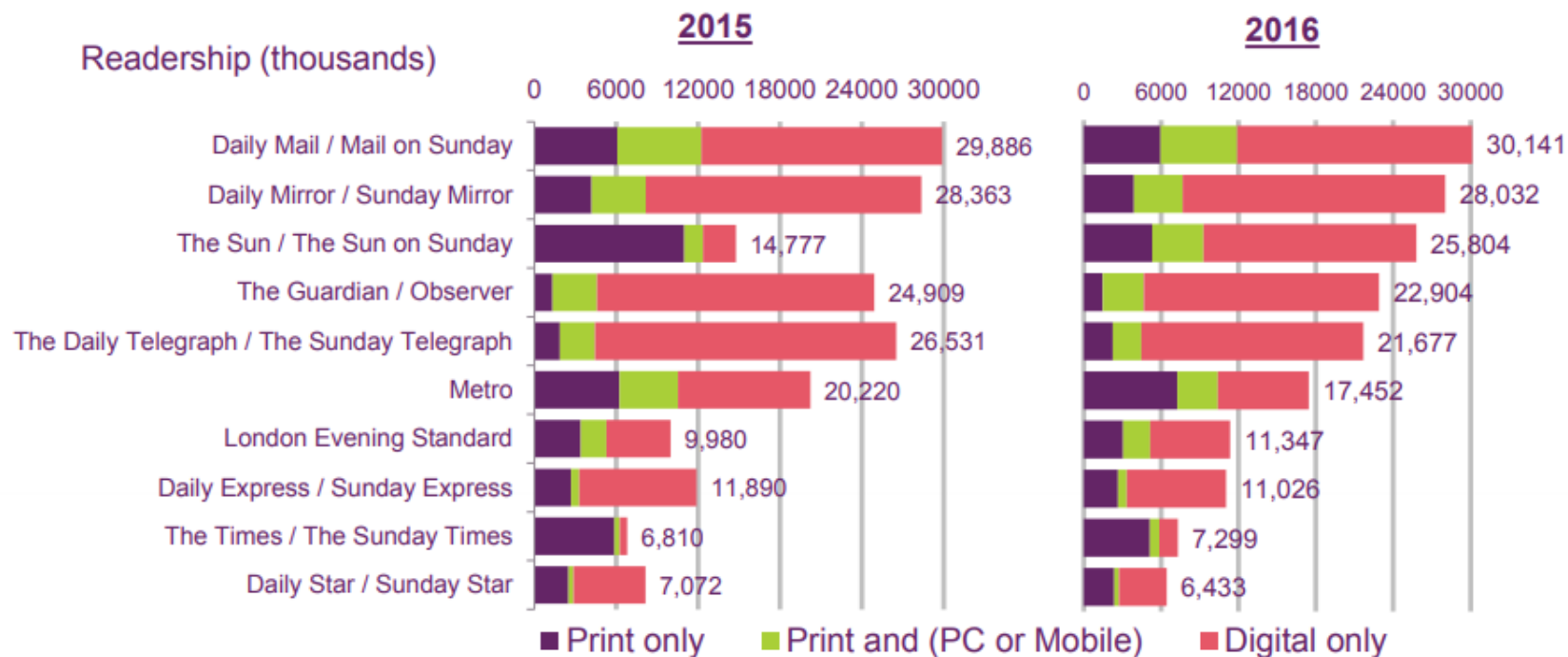


Q3a/Q3aa Which of the following do you use for news nowadays?

Base: All adults 16+ (2016: 2894), (2015: 2921), (2014: 2731), (2013: 2862). Arrows in red indicate differences of statistical significance between 2015 and 2016.



Figure 4.3 Combined print and digital monthly readership of newspapers, 2015 - 2016



Source: NRS PADD Digital / Kantar Media analysis, Jan-Dec average monthly readership.
Based on average monthly readership in 2016

% 'Reach' – all channels (2016)

• BBC*	77
• ITV*	34
• Sky*+News International	35
• Daily Mail	17
• *C4	10
• Facebook (FB), Google, Twitter	32

* Regulated by OFCOM

Media revolution

- 24-7 news coverage = tighter deadlines and more space to fill
- Remote control/attention span
- More channels+streaming
- Online advertising crippling business model for many national and local papers
- Social and online sharing – headline and first para often only thing read
- Blogging, self-publishing
- ‘Curating’
- The data driven marketing revolution – targeting people for adverts
- Jeremy Corbyn’s hat. A video of Owen Jones attacking Newsnight over a piece of JC coverage, shared online, was seen by a million people – *twice those who saw it on TV.*

- Regulation
- BBC Charter – has been muzzled through funding cuts
- OFCOM
- Fake balance – giving Flat Earthers equal time?
- Libel
- Privacy
- Electoral law, contempt of court

- Levenson
- Self-regulation – IPSO, Impress
- Collapse of local papers
- Rise of ‘citizen journalism’

- Declining trust means people trust their friends – increases power of social media
- 20 top fake news stories more FB traction than top 20 real news stories
- Fake news spreads faster and gets more traction
- Aim of the tyrant? Sometimes just to destroy the narrative they don't like, demoralise and disrupt.

The crisis of truth

- Post-Enlightenment thinking – post-modernism.
- Decline in trust, the argument from authority, ‘enough of experts’.
- Individualism, consumerism, narcissism.
- Rapid economic and social change – austerity, anxiety, longevity, globalisation



President 45

- ‘...biggest inaugural crowd ever’
- ‘...millions of fraudulent voters’
- ‘...landslide victory’
- ‘...Post Office loses billions serving Amazon’
- ‘...I didn’t know my lawyer used campaign funds to pay a sex worker I never had sex with \$130,000 to keep quiet about something’
- ‘fake news’ – true news I disagree with

Brexit

- 'Take back control'
- 'We hold all the cards'
- 'It will be easy to negotiate new trade deals'
- 'We can just walk away'

Data marketing – legal and widespread

- ‘I want to promote my book’
- I can use Facebook to find FB users who say they read novels in the UK. FB accumulates MASSES of data from your likes, messages, groups, friends.
- I can pay FB to advertise, targeted at those people
- Bigger companies cross reference FB data with their own customer data to find FB contacts for their own customers.
- Companies might look for characteristics their known customers share, and thus find new target audiences
- People who like bikes, solar power, and organic food might like a book on green issues.
- Legal, harmless?

Trump

- Searched Messenger (often used as part of FB) to see who used a vile racist epithet in personal conversations !
 - Looked to see what correlated with support for Trump
 - Owning gun, being unemployed and white, racist, buying American car
 - Experiment with different racist, misogynist, violent, xenophic messages to see what works
 - Negative and outrageous gets shared more
- The Advertising Bias
 - FB wants people to post exciting material.
 - FB prices ads *less* the more they get shared
 - Trump paid as little a tenth as much to advertise each time as Clinton
 - (Also, he was targeting rural voters who are cheaper to reach because fewer big brands want to try to reach them.)

Cambridge Analytica

- Illegal/ Illegalish
- Kompromat
- sting operations (depends on country)
- Legal
- Data driven marketing – not designed to sell soap but the very worst human emotions, hatred, violence, fear



Russian interference in 2016 US election

- Fake personalities
- Bots and disinformation factories
- Experiment and practice
- Events
- Hacking voting machines
- Suppressing voter turnout pro Clinton groups
- Promoting Stein and Saunders
- Promoting grievances about process
- FAKE NEWS SPREADS FASTER
- Some of this illegal under US law

It is going to get worse

- More big data
- Artificial Intelligence – it will get easier to identify people's weak spots and make bots harder to spot
- Film editing – it will get easier to forge moving film of people saying terrible things



Quakers need to be optimistic

- Quaker virtues of waiting, reflecting and discerning are needed.
- Personal integrity matters but is not enough

Ideals for the media

Clear, intelligent, well-researched
(Can be popular, and entertaining)
Ethical and principled
Separates fact and opinion
Doesn't pander
Diverse in ownership, opinion
Truth-focused/ open to correction
Solutions-orientated

Courageous
Responsible - acts understanding consequences
Understands public interest \neq public prurience
Financially secure to investigate well and be robust against the powerful
Punches up

Schools

- Friends were quick to suggest a solution lay in better education
- Up to a point. I support a rigorous, broad civics curriculum
- In my limited experience, my daughter's education includes more about sources, bias, framing than mine did!
- Remember mockery of Media Studies?
- This is not a problem of or generated by the young.

Personal boycotts did not end slavery

- Diverse 'newsfeed' and check original sources
- Engage calmly, share wisely
- Informed consent using social media – discernment
- Check what data they hold on you
- Consider whether your use is excessive or negative
- Regulate/reform media?
- Make multinationals comply with UK data laws
- Stronger electoral laws
- Reform Lobbying Act which gags charities

Quaker Wisdom

- I found the following Advices and Queries might offer us some leads
- 32,33,34
- 37. 38, 39, 40, 41
- It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, *the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*
- A Tale of Two Cities

Pause for reflection

How does the truth prosper
among us, Friends?

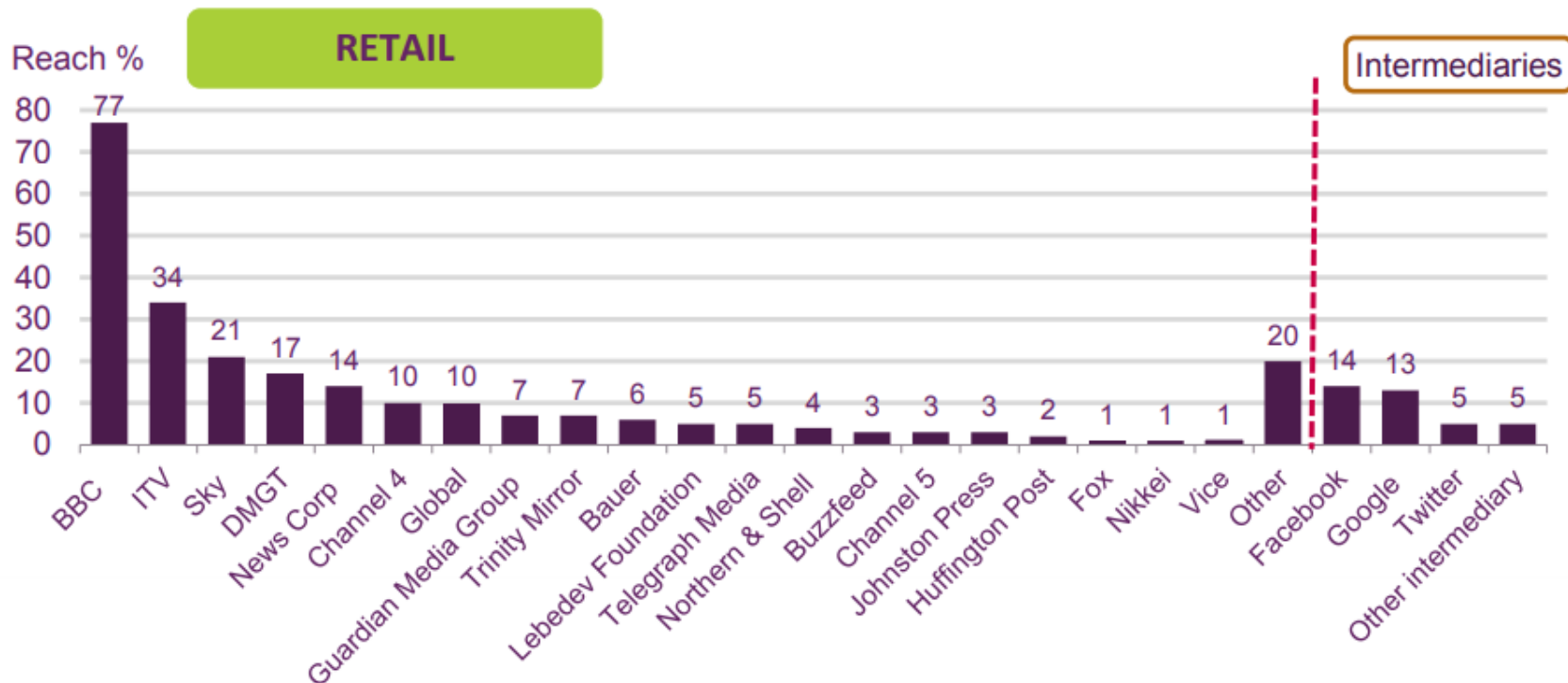
Have we neglected our traditional
concern for the truth over our
personal subjective theologies?



Stephen Cox

- I'm not starting a movement, I don't know where I am led with this yet.
- I'm never a fan of people telling me what I ought to do.
- I am on Stephen.cox.pr@gmail.com and follow me on @stephenwhq for Twitter
- Our Child of the Stars out from Jo Fletcher Books in Feb 2019. More information on www.stephencox.co.uk
- Thanks for listening



Figure 6.4**Cross-platform audience reach of retail providers used nowadays for news, 2016**

Q5a-f) Thinking specifically about <Source> which of the following do you use for news nowadays?

Base: All adults 16+ who use TV, Newspapers, Radio, Internet, or Magazines for news nowadays (2659)

Note: 'Google' contains all Google-named entities plus YouTube. 'Other intermediary' includes MSN, Yahoo, Feedly, Flipboard, News Now

Note: We distinguish between retail news provision - the individual title or brand of each news source that provides content to the user (e.g. ITV News) - and wholesale news provision - the supply and production of the news for a retail news source (e.g. ITN).