

Figure 2.5 – Ways of coming across news online – 2016

	UK	GER	FRA	FIN	GRE	POL
Direct entry	47%	27%	27%	62%	44%	27%
Search	20%	37%	35%	15%	54%	62%
Social Media	25%	21%	26%	24%	55%	38%
Aggregator	6%	6%	5%	9%	6%	8%
Email	7%	15%	22%	6%	21%	14%
Mobile Alerts	9%	8%	14%	5%	8%	7%

Data from the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016. Q10. Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) in the last week, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply. Total sample in each country.

The move towards distributed discovery has been going on for some time as first aggregators, then search engines, and later social media have become more and more important for how people find news online. The development is continuing with the rise of “distributed content”, where news is not only found via, but consumed on, platforms controlled by third-parties that do not produce their own content. The most important examples of this are the launch of Snapchat Discover (2015), Facebook Instant Articles (2015), and Apple News (2015), all initially open only to a few partners but gradually opened up to and embraced by more and more media organisations.

The rise of these “off-site” formats, where publishers can reach audiences without relying on their own websites or apps, and the way in which brands like BuzzFeed have built significant reach beyond their own channels, have led some to suggest the future of news will be entirely distributed with news organisations focusing on production and platform companies controlling distribution.⁶ Most news organisations still, however, insist on investing in channels for direct communication with their target audiences through legacy channels as well as digital channels including websites, mobile apps, alerts, notifications, and email letters.⁷ There is a keen awareness amongst both private sector and public service news media that what a platform gives, it can also take away—sometimes suddenly—and that technology companies are primarily focused on what they see as their users’ and their own best interests.

⁶ See e.g. http://www.cjr.org/analysis/facebook_and_media.php.

⁷ Cornia et al. (2016), Sehl et al. (2016).