

# Trust, but Verify

Factors affecting media trust  
in Bangladesh

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**Management and Resources Development Initiative**

8/19, Sir Syed Road (3rd Floor), Block-A, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

Phone : Tel: +88 02 48117412, +88 02 48120879

E-mail : [info@mrdibd.org](mailto:info@mrdibd.org), Web : [www.mrdibd.org](http://www.mrdibd.org)



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## Ross Settles

*In his 30-year career in the business of media, Ross Settles has worked in different organisations in varying roles. Currently an adjunct professor in Hong Kong University teaching digital media and entrepreneurship, Ross began his career in media and entrepreneurship as an associate for the famous consultancy firm Kearney. He led advertising, marketing and public relations at the Baltimore Sun where he was also responsible for developing and executing the annual marketing plan as vice president marketing. As director of online business at the South China Morning Post, Ross Settles was responsible for all online business operations of Hong Kong's largest English daily. He was chosen to provide support in marketing, communications and business and product development at MalaysiaKini.com, as a Knight International Journalism Fellow. Working as a digital media advisor of the Media Development Investment Fund, Ross divided his time between San Francisco and Prague consulting for clients transitioning from traditional media platforms in print and broadcast to new digital platforms and business models. An MBA from the University of Chicago and an English graduate of Princeton University, Ross Settles remains an avid student of classical Chinese literature and theatre.*



## Tanim Ahmed

*Beginning as a cub reporter at the erstwhile Bengali fortnightly magazine Shaptahik Dui Hajar in 1997, Tanim Ahmed has worked in various roles of reporter, leader writer and news editor at newspapers like New Age, web portals like bdnews24.com and broadcasters like Independent TV. Tanim has also had a brief stint as head of sales and marketing for bdnews24.com where he was in charge of the portal's entire commercial operations. He has been an adjunct faculty at the University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh, teaching business journalism since 2010. Currently he runs his own content generation firm Omnispace. Tanim Ahmed has an MBA from Dhaka University's Institute of Business Administration.*

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### MRDI Team

Hasibur Rahman  
Executive Director, MRDI

Sarwat Tarannum  
Senior Programme Officer, MRDI





# Executive Summary

This research study, 'Trust, but Verify: Factors affecting media trust in Bangladesh' was conducted by MRDI with the objective to develop a foundation of understanding in media trust and develop audience segments based on respondents' attitude and behaviour as regards media trust. The study is meant to benefit news outlets, news managers, media development professionals as well as the advertisement industry. The findings will also benefit international development agencies with an active interest in media engagement in Bangladesh.

The study describes a universe of news consumers who have over many years developed a general scepticism about the "truth" of any media outlet. Some media like Prothom Alo and Somoy TV have developed broadly shared reputations for reliability and have earned a certain amount of trust. They are often cited as the media of record with which most other news reports are compared. But even these media are subjected to a healthy scrutiny that makes up the Bangladeshi news consumer's "trust but verify" attitude toward all news reporting.

Bangladesh news consumers are in many ways like their peers in other regions. They trust based on a complex mix of factors, including tradition, availability, personal economics, personal relationship among many others. News professionals often anticipate that media trust will equate directly to whether the media reports the facts. For journalists, truth must equal trust. But based on this research, truth in news reporting is only one factor that determines media trust. Academically, this "uses and gratifications" approach to understanding the complexity of media trust has resulted in similar results in developing markets like Brazil and India as well as developed markets like the US and the UK.

The MRDI Trust Survey has provided a strong baseline for understanding news consumers' media usage during the pandemic and their attitudes and behaviours surrounding media trust and fake news. The following will highlight the key findings and suggest initiatives to support the healthy development of an independent news media industry:

**Media Usage and Fake News Behaviour:** Bangladeshi news consumers consider themselves both regular recipients of "fake news" and well prepared to determine what is credible and



what is not. Over three quarters of news users were confident in their ability to recognize and deal with "fake news" items. Focus groups with news consumers in this same period also suggested that the amount of "fake news" has increased in part due to the pandemic.

**Media Trust:** In focus group participants had indicated that all news was suspect. The quantitative research showed just how much doubt news consumers had about different types of news. Across the ten types of news surveyed, respondents uniformly found all types most likely to be only "somewhat trustworthy", the middle point on a five-point scale. News consumers tended to find news that lends itself to live video presentation, such as "news on natural disasters", breaking news, and sports news more trustworthy than other types. News associated with local reporting tended to fare less well. News users found local news, agricultural news, and news on market prices to be less trustworthy. Rural news users who accounted for 76% of respondents tended to find most news categories marginally less trustworthy than their urban peers and these three "local" categories were found to be much less trustworthy.

**Internal and External Influences on Media Credibility:** Bangladesh news consumers have decades of experience with corporate or government ownership/control of news media. The research looked at external and internal influences and the role news users expect that they play in news reporting. Over one in four news users saw the government's impact on news reporting to be either overwhelming or significant, substantially more than the impact of advertisers. Among internal influences, the research looked at the financial and political interests of editors, reporters, and media owners. Among total respondents the political interests of media owners were seen on par with the role of government in news reporting. These points together underscore the impact that government and political influence has on news reporting and the broad recognition of this role among Bangladesh's news consumers.

**Media Literacy and the 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA) :** Bangladeshi news consumers' lack of awareness about the mechanics of the news industry appears to include the potential impact of DSA on news reporting. News users were not broadly aware of DSA. According to the survey less than one in three were aware of the law. This awareness did vary with the respondents' level of education. Over half (55%) of respondents with some university experiences were aware of the DSA. Among those respondents who were aware of DSA many found the law to be beneficial, making Bangladesh media stronger by reducing the amount of fake news. These DSA-aware respondents also acknowledged that the law would impact news reporting on some government related stories and would be a special burden on reporters.





# Background

Over the last decade, Bangladesh news audiences have experienced an increasingly complex environment that has undermined news media trust. News consumers are faced with a steady increase in the supply of news both from a growing number of traditional media outlets like newspapers and television and the advent and growth of an online, only news industry. The increased competition and the shift to digital media and digital revenue models has steadily undermined the business model for all but the largest news outlets. Smaller and more economically vulnerable outlets are left to tighten their belts and cut corners often reducing the investment in reporting quality. Added to this already difficult environment, Bangladesh has experienced an outbreak of "fake news" providers aggravated to "infodemic" proportions by the disinformation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. To remedy the influx of "fake news" Bangladesh's government has begun aggressively prosecuting the 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA) impacting both the traditional journalistic reporting outlets and fake news efforts. DSA's "vague and overly broad provisions"<sup>2</sup> have caused professional journalistic outlets to second guess needed reporting while fake news social media efforts often are hard to identify and even harder to prosecute.

The impact on Bangladeshi consumers from an ever increasing number of outlets with more financial and governmental constraints in an atmosphere easily polluted by "fake news", has been a rapid collapse in "job approval ratings" for "the media" according to recent public opinion polls. In the 2019 National Survey of Bangladeshi Public Opinion, the percentage of people responding that the media "was doing a good job" declined by 26 percentage points from 89% in November 2015 to 63% in September 2019.<sup>3</sup> While many of Bangladesh's foundational institutions like the High Court, declining by 20 percentage points and the military by 16 points, media experienced the steepest decline. On the other hand the police gained by two percentage points and the government gained by 11 points.

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<sup>1</sup> In Bangladesh, "Infodemic" is more Dangerous and Worrying than the Coronavirus Pandemic", Muromar Mostafiz, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act is attack on freedom of expression", Amnesty International, November 2018.

<sup>3</sup> National Survey of Bangladeshi Public Opinion, Centre for Insights in Survey Research, August 1 - September 15, 2019.

To understand the factors undermining confidence in Bangladesh's news media, Management Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) has commissioned a series of reports looking at media literacy, media viability and economics. The report below adds to this series a national survey of media trust among Bangladesh's news consumers. The report includes the following sections:

- **Media Trust: The Global Discussion** summarises recent global academic research on media trust.
- **Overview of the Research Approach** provides a summary of the overall research plan.
- **Qualitative Preamble: Discussions with News Media Professionals** offers a summary of discussions with media executives on the causes and impact of a general decline in media trust.
- **Focus Group Discussions: View from the Audience**, a summary of focus group discussions held with news consumers in urban and rural locations across the country.
- **Quantitative Research Findings** summarises top line and significant segment findings of the national survey.
- **Summary and Implications** discusses the main areas of findings and potential implications for the local media industry.

The research finds in short that Bangladesh's news media users are in many ways similar in behaviour to news consumers around the world who are faced with the same complex news universe. News users whether in Dhaka or rural Bangladesh have developed a set of tried-and-true heuristics for dealing with a long tradition of government, corporate and religious involvement in news reporting. that dates back to the British colonial era. When the news is important to users - often a very personal decision, Bangladesh news users have well established brands and verification patterns that give them confidence in news facts reported. They are a group of "trust, but verify" news users. The challenge in the current media turmoil is ensuring that these techniques are supported, expanded, and not undermined. The research below is offered as a support for understanding the main issues and potential implications.



# Methodology

The research includes both qualitative and quantitative components.

**Qualitative:** The research team pursued two types of qualitative research to understand key issues surrounding media trust.

One-on-one interviews with five news and media professionals to understand their perspective on the current situation with media trust in Bangladesh. Newsroom executives from print, online and television news organisations were interviewed to develop an outline of the industry's concerns about and efforts to address trust among news audiences. In order to support fully candid discussion of the issues, interviewees were guaranteed that topics and responses would not be attributed to any individual executive or media house. As a result, the discussion points are offered in aggregate and represent directions to explore in the subsequent research.

Based on the landscape described by our interviews with news executives and the factors and trends identified in the review of recent research on media trust globally, the research explored key themes from the perspective of the news consumer. The research held six exploratory focus groups with ten participants each over the first two weeks of April 2021. The mix of the focus group by participant is below:

*Illustration 1: Media Trust Focus Group Overview*

Participants	Location	Participant Count
Urban Women (25 to 65 yrs)	Barisal	10
Rural Women (25 to 65 yrs)	Jeshore	10
Urban Men (25 to 65 yrs)	Bogra	10
Rural Men (25 to 65 yrs)	Barisal	10
Urban Youth (18 to 25 yrs)	Dhaka	10
Rural Youth (18 to 25 yrs)	Rangpur	10



Each focus group was conducted in Bangla and followed the same general outline - explore current media usage, concepts and reasons for trust, special questions related to external influence and bias, including the impact of the Digital Security Act. The FGD discussion leaders moderated the groups flexibly, allowing for variations to explore potential topics outside of the common discussion guide. Focus groups were screened to exclude journalists and news users who had worked in the media in the previous twelve months. Focus group participants were guaranteed anonymity to encourage candid discussion. The summary below attributes quotes and comments by group only.

**Quantitative:** Findings of the qualitative research helped lay the foundation for a national quantitative survey on media usage, attitudes, and behaviours toward media trust as well as specific questions about the impact of commercial and government influence, including the impact of the 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA). The research conducted 1,344 interviews of which 144 were not used. The calculations to weight the respondent sample to the national profile resulted in a further reduction of 24 respondents for a final weighted sample of 1176.

For the quantitative research, the team worked with Dhaka-based survey house, Luminaries who conducted the research and tabulated the findings. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all survey interviews with respondents were conducted by phone between 26 May and 16 June 2021. The survey was conducted with adults over the age of 18, who use news media and have not worked in the media business as either a journalist or other media business professional in the previous twelve months. To balance the survey, the sample of respondents was weighted based on the 2011 Bangladesh National Census to reflect the national profile of age, gender, education, and location both by division and urban/rural divide.

Luminaries conducted 1,344 interviews of which 144 were not used. The calculations to weight the respondent sample to the national profile resulted in a further reduction of 24 respondents for a final weighted sample of 1176. A summary of the survey sample is included below for reference:

*Illustration 2: Media Trust Survey Sample Summary*

Contact Summary	Number	Excess Contacts	Number
Total Contacts	1344	Rejected Interview	4
(Excess Contacts)	-144	Screeners: Media Workers	19
Total Interviews	1200	Screeners: No News Media Use	9
(Weighting Effects)	-24	Excess Interviews	112
<b>Total Weighted Respondents</b>	<b>1176</b>	<b>Total Excess Contacts</b>	<b>144</b>

Luminaries' full discussion of their survey methodology, sample plan and weighting approach is included in Appendix A. Questionnaires in English and Bangla are also provided for reference in Appendices B and C, respectively.





# Media Trust: The Global Discussion

Media trust is seen as the foundational requirement for a news media whose role in a democratic society is to provide a common set of facts and information to the electorate. A well-informed citizenry can then make electoral choices that reflect a common understanding of the facts. Academics and researchers have studied the components and impact of media trust since at least the late 1960's and early 1970's when television news broadcasts began to dominate the news media diet of American and European citizens. The Roper Organization began surveys and analysis of American audience attitudes towards television as early as 1969.<sup>4</sup> The pace and urgency of research has accelerated in the last decade as deliberate political efforts to undermine media trust have increased. As digital and social networking media have reached greater levels of reach and impact, the ease of creating "fake news" has increased the interest in understanding the complex dynamics of media trust across media channels. Multiple universities, mostly in North America and Europe, have established research centres and projects dedicated to understanding the factors influencing and the trajectory of media trust. Noteworthy among these efforts is the Reuters Institute at Oxford University's "Trust in News Project" funded by Facebook Journalism Project, the University of Oregon Journalism School's, "The 32 Percent Project" and the London School of Economics' "Truth, Trust and Technology Commission" among many others.

As research into media trust has continued, academics and researchers have increasingly understood media trust as a more complex personal decision than simply who provides the most reliable, credible information. Research has frequently turned to a "Uses and Gratifications" approach to understand the complexity of media usage and trust. "Uses and Gratifications" research explores the many layers of a citizen's decision to trust a media outlet or an individual news report<sup>5</sup>. This approach sees multiple decision criteria and multiple factors that influence a media user's decision to trust the media provider and content. The

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<sup>4</sup> Roper, B. W. (1969). A ten-year view of public attitudes toward television and other mass media, 1959-1968. New York, NY: Television Information Office.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Fisher (2016): The trouble with 'trust' in news media, *Communication Research and Practice*, DOI: 10.1080/22041451.2016.1261251



credibility of facts reported in a news report are considered as only one factor. Citizens may trust a media report or outlet because it suggests a particular role in society or because of family or community traditions. Media trust may be established because of direct or virtual personal relationships with media personalities. Together an individual trusts a media outlet based on personal history, social circumstances, the occasion for consuming the news media and finally whether the media is credible.

Professor Caroline Little from the University of Canberra provides a framework to understand the different potential factors influencing media trust<sup>6</sup>. Fisher sees three levels of media trust. First, "message credibility" describes trust in the credibility and reliability of the information provided by a media outlet or individual media report. For instance, I believe and trust the facts of this news story. Second, "source credibility" describes the credibility of the individual media outlet or brand. I believe and trust this newspaper. Finally, third, "channel credibility" which describes the perceived relative credibility of different media channels. I believe and trust newspapers. To understand the current state of research and understanding surrounding each layer of media trust, the report outlines key findings from recent media trust research with a special emphasis on international comparative findings.

Message credibility reflects the audience's opinion about how the news is created and presented. In recently published research from the Reuters Institute's Trust in News Project, editorial practice played a relatively small role in audience's trust in media. The Reuters Trust in News Project analysed qualitative feedback on trust factors from news users in India, Brazil, the US and the UK. In summary, the report found that news users are less concerned and even unaware of how the news is created.

*"Editorial processes and practices of journalism were rarely central to how people thought about trust. Only a small number in each country expressed confidence in their understanding of how journalism works or the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how the news is made."*<sup>7</sup>

Reuters' findings also found that more stylistic attributes of reporting could enhance or undermine a users' trust. For example, clickbait and other online media techniques used to encourage interactivity (usually with an implied advertising or revenue gain) were found to undermine media trust. In a separate report from BBC World Service, Indian news consumers found that video, especially from TV broadcasters, were highly credible and often used to verify other reporting, especially in social media and messaging outlets of natural disasters and other breaking news events<sup>8</sup>. While news consumers use attributes of the message to evaluate the credibility of the message, they mostly declare a lack of knowledge or interest in the mechanics of news reporting. News users tend to look at the more visible attributes of a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Listening to What Trust in News Means to Users: Qualitative Evidence from Four Countries", Trust in News Project, Reuters Institute, 22 April 2021. Page 8.

<sup>8</sup> "Duty, Identity, Credibility: Fake news and the ordinary citizen in India", BBC World Service, Audiences Research Team, November 2018.

news item. For instance, the use of video to show breaking news items, confirms the facts and supports trust. Conversely, the intrusion of digital marketing techniques which obscure the reporting generally undermine trust.

Source credibility is a complex dynamic. News users interviewed in the Reuters report found that all news media have some bias in their reporting, making the single criteria of whether the media is objective less useful than whether it is familiar, transparent, or ultimately likable. News users found elements of presentation style (copyediting and design) and importantly whether their lifestyles and points of view could be found in the coverage of a particular media important factors that influence media trust. News users often blurred the dynamic of "like" with trust.

*"...news audiences were far more likely to emphasise their sense of familiarity with brands or stylistic qualities pertaining to appearance or how news was presented. Most put far less emphasis on news organisations' journalistic practices since only a few were particularly knowledgeable about how news was made or even interested in knowing more about such matters."*<sup>9</sup>

In Reuters interviews in India and Brazil, news consumers often criticized the media for lacking representation and not reporting on "people like them" as a reason for limited trust. Many found the media to be "out of touch" and pursuing stories more related to the media's own interests than the audience's interests.

Finally, channel credibility was less of a factor in determining overall media credibility. Many established, trusted media brands have created complex portfolios of reporting across text, audio, video, and social media. As a result, research on channel credibility has been less insightful. Digital media, in particular social media, often was less trusted in part because of the association with the different digital marketing (clickbait) techniques. Even in an environment where many rely primarily on digital sources, traditional print and television media and brands were often used as verification and back-up when consumers are faced with questionable reporting. Television news broadcasts have a unique advantage in the presentation of visual events (natural disasters, emergencies, sporting events, etc.). Newspapers also remain a valuable and verified source of news and information. In the BBC's research into Indian news consumers, newspapers were found to benefit from their legacy slowness which consumers believed gave them more time to get the story right<sup>10</sup>. In summary each media channel created some credibility based on its intrinsic attributes. Online was fast, good for breaking news; but also deceptive in its "clickbait practices". Television was trusted for stories best communicated visually. Newspapers were trusted because of traditional standards and desire to take the time to get the reporting right.

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<sup>9</sup> Listening to What Trust in News Means to Users: Qualitative Evidence from Four Countries", Trust in News Project, Reuters Institute, 22 April 2021. Page 7.

<sup>10</sup> Duty, Identity, Credibility: Fake news and the ordinary citizen in India", BBC World Service, Audiences Research Team, November 2018.



Source Credibility stands out among the three levels described above as being the strongest contributor to overall trust. Ben Smith, media columnist for the New York Times who was interviewed for the Reuters "Trust in News Project", remarked, 'if you think about other products that ask for real trust, it is mostly brands, not individuals'. Most news consumers are less interested in the details of news creation and more likely to trust a story based on the media brand that distributes it. Finally, the channel seems to be a more tradition and occasion-based decision. News consumers have some preconceived opinions about the trustworthiness of the media channel. But usage appears more driven by occasion and habit than the desire to find the most trusted or credible news channel.

The global research into media trust is rich and growing. The summary above is meant to highlight the most recent comparative international findings as a backdrop for understanding the factors that make up media trust for Bangladesh news consumers. The research presented below will largely agree with the global findings. Consumers make trust decisions about a news media or news reporting largely based on brand attributes of the media outlet. The specific reporting attributes of a story are less likely to be understood and as a result less likely to contribute to media trust.

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<sup>11</sup> What We Think We Know and What We Want to Know: Perspectives on Trust in News in a Changing World". Trust in News Project, Reuters Institute.

# Qualitative Preamble: Discussions with News Media Professionals

All interviewees shared a common view that trust in Bangladesh's media had declined in recent years. These media executives saw the rapid proliferation of media voices in the past two decades as the beginning of the deterioration of media trust. Many felt that the liberalisation in cable/satellite TV news licensing in the early 2000's had led to a glut of television news outlets, many with negligible audiences. This expansion has since been compounded by the current boom in online news and opinion portals and "social media commentators".

The news executives emphasized the complex media environment that exists today for news organisations and for Bangladeshi news consumers. At the outer edge of this environment, audiences are faced with a proliferation of citizen provided tips and features plus "fake news" and opinion efforts producing material to create commercial, political, or religious advantage. At the next level, audiences are faced with news provided by the dozens of national and local newspapers and TV news outlets competing for audience and advertising. Finally, the state news outlet BTV offers the government's version of the news, including important government announcements about local holidays, development, and policy efforts among other newsworthy items. News executives all believed that the steady growth in the universe of news content threatens to outstrip the ability of most Bangladeshi news consumers to evaluate quality and to develop trusted sources.

News executives recognised that audiences had developed a consistent response to the past proliferation of news outlets and often conflicting news reporting. Interviewees believed that news audiences often discovered breaking stories on social media or TV, but almost always "verified" the details of important stories against a common set of trusted brands in television and print or directly with friends and family.

News executives felt that the proliferation of news outlets had created a competitive environment among news providers that undermines news quality and as a result audience trust. In this very competitive news marketplace, the smallest and most commercially vulnerable news organisations often cut corners on well-established journalistic and



commercial practice resulting in lower quality news production, which contributes to an erosion of trust for all but the most well-established media outlets.

For some news executives, social media's role in breaking news had also led to a 24x7 news cycle that was difficult to sustain. These executives discussed the "breaking news" pressure to get story scoops or to at least be competitive with the social media outlets. Many felt that the pressure to stay abreast of social media led to less depth of reporting and often the reporting of "facts" before they were fully confirmed. Again, the pressure to stay abreast of the social media competition led to less well reported stories which again undermined trust across the industry.

News executives also believed increased political and religious polarisation in Bangladesh society contributed to recent declines in media trust. Audiences with strong political and religious points of view were increasingly felt to trust only news providers that shared their views. As a result, news outlets were less inclined to provide balanced coverage resulting in less objective reporting, and further erosion of trust among news consumers. Many of the news executives felt that more balanced and more in-depth reporting with regular follow-ups would help rebuild trust at least among the audience with the greatest interest in the news.

As a whole, the media executives interviewed were not optimistic about the current state of media trust in Bangladesh. Many felt the situation would require major changes to the government's involvement in the media industry and substantial efforts to improve the audience's understanding of the complex media landscape. Many of the news executives interviewed felt a rationalisation of the number of news providers could also lead to less commercial and competitive pressure. This would in turn allow them the resources to provide the depth and balance in reporting that contribute to rebuilding greater trust among local news audiences.

# Focus Group Discussions: View from the Audience

Overall FGD respondents fell into three general segments based on media usage. The first group, heavy news users, spent multiple hours each day reading and viewing the news. While most used some online outlets, more traditional news media, especially television and newspapers were their primary news sources. This heavy news group was very media literate, articulate in both the laws and trends impacting the news media. Heavy news users included participants from the FGD's with urban and rural men and urban women. The second group consisted of online news users who were highly engaged and relied on online news portals and social media as their primary source of news. Online news users included FGD participants from both urban and rural youth. Finally, the last group included rural women who were the lightest news user group. These consumers were much less involved in the national political news topics and more interested in local topics with direct relevance to day-to-day household management, for example education and public health issues. This group of news users tended to be heavy on television viewers for both news and entertainment programming.

Heavy news respondents in all three FGD's - urban and rural men and urban women - tended to have similar news media behaviour. All used multiple newspapers and TV outlets to understand the news. Online newspapers and Facebook played at most a supporting role for breaking news and headlines. Since these heavy news users were all from outside of Dhaka, the importance of local news and the role of local newspapers was unique to this group.

*"I mainly read Prothom Alo. Among local papers I read Ajker Barta and Poribartan. ... I read the local news to stay updated on the local events of Barisal. ... Besides these, I watch the news on Somoy TV and Channel i."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"I need to read three dailies every day. ... After waking up, the first thing I do is to check them. Also, I watch news on Ekattor TV, Independent, and Somoy. ... I also skim through e-papers for the headlines."*

- Urban Woman, Bogra



*"I read Prothom Alo whenever I read a newspaper. That's my first preference. Besides, there are 3 to 4 local newspapers - Ajker Barta, Motobad, Bhorer Alo. I take a look at them sporadically. Among these, I don't have to read Bhorer Alo. I follow them on Facebook. So, when I wake up, I visit their page to stay updated. Among TV channels, I watch Channel 24, DBC News, and Independent TV."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

News users in these FGD's regularly spent multiple hours a day consuming news, often starting by checking headlines online in the morning, followed by scanning/reading multiple printed newspapers, especially those available in offices. Evenings were regularly occupied with a mix of national TV news channels. Given the depth of the news appetite among this audience segment, the role of brand stands out as an important factor in news media selection. During the discussion of daily media habits, consumers rarely differentiated between media channels and tended to refer to well established media brands irrespective of the channel of distribution. For example, among the savviest of news consumers, reading a newspaper first thing in the morning was often a reference to reading the paper's website or checking its Facebook account. "Newspaper reading" later in the day could be either the printed news product or one of the newspaper's online outlets. For these heavy news consumers, the newspaper's brand was more important to the choice of news media. Media channel choice appeared to be more about convenience and availability than any unique attributes of the media channel itself. It is clearly easier to read the morning paper on your mobile if it has yet to be delivered or acquired for the day.

Young news users both rural and urban shared many of the online characteristics of their peers globally. Online sources, both branded news portals and social media accounts, dominated their news diet. This segment also spent substantial time online consuming the news. In general, the group had broader news interests than other groups driven in part by career or academic requirements.

*"I follow Prothom Alo, Ekattor and the Independent News. I watch news on television or read on their Facebook page and website. I have downloaded the Prothom Alo and the Daily Star apps from the [Google] Play store. I spend 2 hours on reading news every day."*

- Urban Youth, Dhaka

*"I usually read Prothom Alo when I do. I follow Jamuna TV and Somoy TV's Facebook pages and read news from there ... there are some websites I sometimes read depending on whether I am intrigued by the news, but I cannot name them."*

- Rural Youth, Rangpur

Rural women were the lightest and generally the least engaged news users. Rural women were regular TV news viewers and at best occasional readers of local newspapers when available. This segment of users had little interest in national political coverage, typically associated with national newspapers and consequently seldom used them. News interests among rural



women were very directly related to their daily lives - market prices, coronavirus updates, school news and developments, weather, and natural disaster news. The cost of newspapers and the urban focus of most newspaper distribution also undermined rural women's use of this media. Online news outlets were not a factor with this news segment.

*"We watch current news. Reports on coronavirus... to know how many people died today... the news on market prices... reports on accidents and storms are also important to us. When will schools resume is another thing we want to know."*

- Rural Woman, Jashore

Common across all FGD's was the fundamental belief that all news media have some biases. Respondents believed that most news is based on an actual event that needs to be reported, but many media may obscure or even misrepresent the facts of a story because of political or religious pressures.

*"We think none of them [TV networks] broadcasts the truth fully... whatever news they give us, they hide some parts of it from us. To some extent, every channel is corrupt."*

- Rural Woman, Jashore

*"Sources like Ekattor TV, DBC, or ATN News or ATN Bangla - I feel like none of them will publish completely false news, it will be relative, to some extent."*

- Urban Man, Bogra

*"Everyone has different perceptions. It is impossible to create 100% authentic reports."*

- Urban Youth, Dhaka

The most news engaged segment (urban men and women and rural men) also found that the amount of bias in the media had increased in recent years. Some mentioned a time in the last four to five years when the change began, but could not attribute the change to any event. Others cited the impacts of DSA. Finally, several people mentioned changes in particular reporters who either are now following the government line or who are no longer reporting or reporting overseas as reasons for their belief that the amount of bias in reporting had increased.

*"Another thing is undoubtedly Prothom Alo is one of the most reliable sources. However, I think, since last year, they have lost their authenticity. ... We all support them, no problem. But they will get lost if they cannot hold onto their previous authenticity."*

- Urban Man, Bogra

*"...they [the media] also should keep in mind the Digital Security Act. Maybe that can be the reason they are not clarifying the news entirely."*

- Urban Man, Bogra

As a corollary to a shared understanding that bias exists in all news media, Bangladesh's news consumers have developed a tradition of verifying the facts of stories that are important to them. One of the most mentioned techniques is to "compare and contrast" important facts to verify authenticity. News consumers in every group mentioned this as an important way to deal with bias and "fake news". For heavier news users, other media are often the baseline to check on suspicious news details. For rural women (the less media, less news involved segment) checking with friends and relatives who might have first-hand understanding was a more common response.

*"...one yardstick of taking Prothom Alo as trustworthy is the local news of Barisal. We are from Barisal and we also read the local newspapers. So, when we read the same news, more often than not, we find that they [Prothom Alo] have published exactly the same information. So, that's a big factor behind our trust in Prothom Alo."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"...when we watch television, we go through all the channels and verify whether the news is true or not. It's not just a particular channel but all of them jointly to find out clarity or trustworthiness."*

- Urban Man, Bogra

*"...news that a cyclone has blown away a house in Dhaka. After watching this news, we call our relatives or friends living in Dhaka. Then they tell us that the entire house hasn't been blown away. Rather, some tins have been blown away. If this is the case, then the news is false."*

- Rural Woman, Jashore

When discussing the factors that create or undermine trust in media, engaged news users often mention the local news market which has given rise to dozens of local newspapers and websites all with minimal or duplicate news stories and photos.

*"...you'd see that there are syndicates of reporters. They sit and prepare the same news. You buy three newspapers, and you see that the news is exactly the same in all of them. Then you'd find a two-page newspaper publishing their story with one and a half pages full of advertisements."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"I have worked with some local district media houses and there are a lot of political pressures or influences on some small media houses. Local leaders use these newspapers for their own interest."*

- Rural Man, Barisal



*"A journalist in my community covered the news of someone running coaching classes but later on struck a deal with the director that he will delete the footage for money. ... local journalists can stay but they have to be honest."*

- Rural Youth, Rangpur

In addition to the complexities of the local news market which undermine trust, FGD respondents also shared several features of news reporting that supported trust. One of the most mentioned features was live reporting from TV networks. Bangladesh's news consumers bring a very pronounced, "I believe it, if I see it" approach to news trust.

*"I feel that television is more authentic. ... Because in case of any big disaster, you see the television channels showing it live. We can watch the actual footage. There is no chance of being unreliable."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"I am in favour of television [as more authentic, trustworthy]. ... Because there are live pictures and videos which makes it more trustworthy."*

- Rural Man, Barisal

*"Somoy TV is trustworthy because whenever they show you any news they show it live, ... I can see everything right in front of me, I can see the updated news all day from all around the country."*

- Rural Youth, Rangpur

Among engaged news users, a news media's ability to reflect balance when reporting about the government contributes to a sense of fairness and authenticity, leading to trust.

*"One thing about Prothom Alo is that they don't write everything in favour of the government. They also write some things against the government. That is one of the reasons I believe that Prothom Alo is more trustworthy."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"I think Prothom Alo is the only one among print media that still holds onto some journalistic values without political affiliation. It is not completely on the opposition side, but they try to publish authentic news while being beside the government."*

- Rural Man, Barisal

Among the most news engaged segments, several features of news reporting also supported media trust. These features included surveys and special sections on topics of particular interest to the reader. Regular follow-ups on important stories were also cited as a factor contributing to news trust. Specific bylines or on-air personalities also have a reputation for truth and a style that resonates with readers and viewers as "authentic".

*"If I talk about Prothom Alo, I'll have to say that I like their reporting because they often publish survey reports. We get informed by these reports."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"When Farzana Rupa presents, I really enjoy watching the news. It's because of her way of presenting. I prefer her presentation over others. She never stops a topic before reaching its end."*

- Urban Woman, Barisal

*"I always used to watch the talk show with Khaled Muhiuddin on Independent TV where many important figures came to discuss a certain topic. There they used to bring up all the important headlines and discuss those issues, so it was very trustworthy."*

- Rural Man, Barisal

News consumers in Bangladesh divide into different segments based largely on their interest and understanding of the news as well as their preferred media. Different segments have pronounced interests in different news topics and media channels. But all segments share a scepticism about the complete fairness of news reporting. Bias appears strongest in political news reporting and weakest in the news categories that lend themselves to live on air reporting. In all segments, news users subscribe to a "trust, but verify" approach to news reporting. Based on this news consumer profile, the research team developed a quantitative survey to understand in greater detail news media usage and the factors influencing media trust.

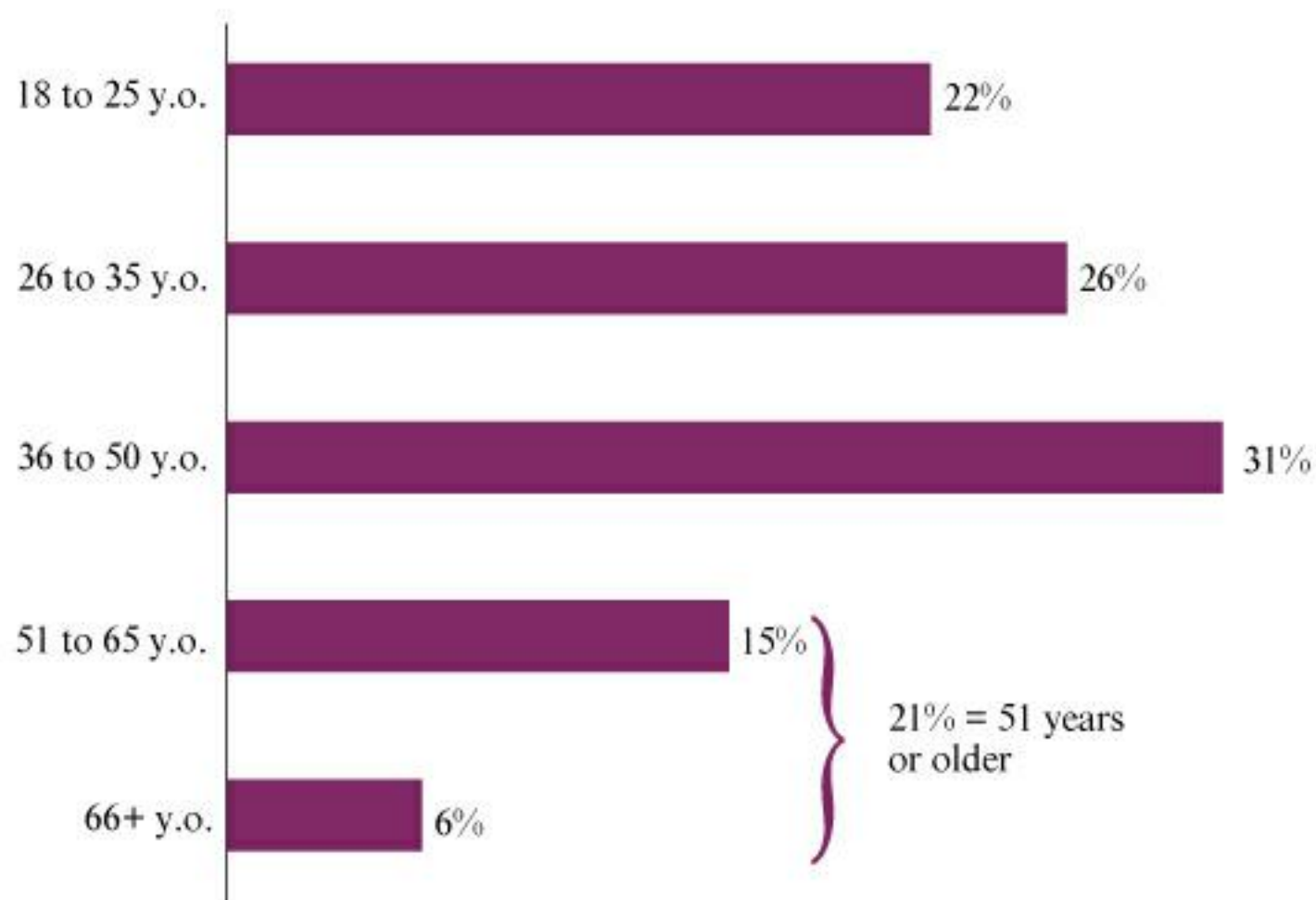
# Quantitative Research Findings

## The Sample Summary

The final weighted sample of 1176 respondents reflects the universe of adult Bangladesh news media users. Over three quarters of the sample (76%) were rural, one quarter (24%) urban. Men accounted for 57% versus 43% for females.

Bangladesh's news audience is young with almost half (48%) of the sample under the age of 35. Approximately 6% of the sample were over the age of 65. In the analysis below, the segment of older news consumers was defined as 51 years of age or older to create a sufficient sample size for segment analysis.

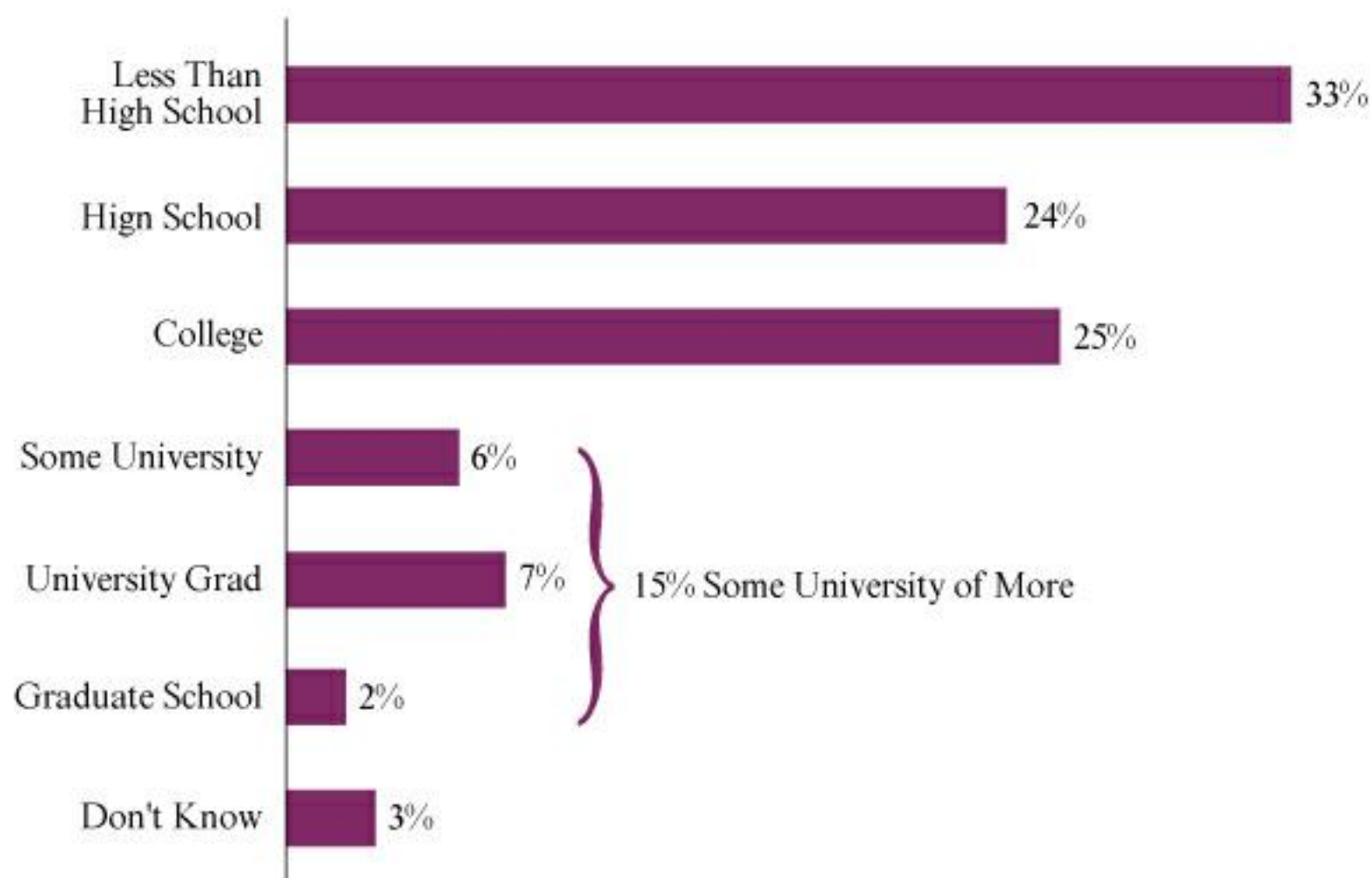
*Illustration 3: Respondents by Age (n = 1176)*





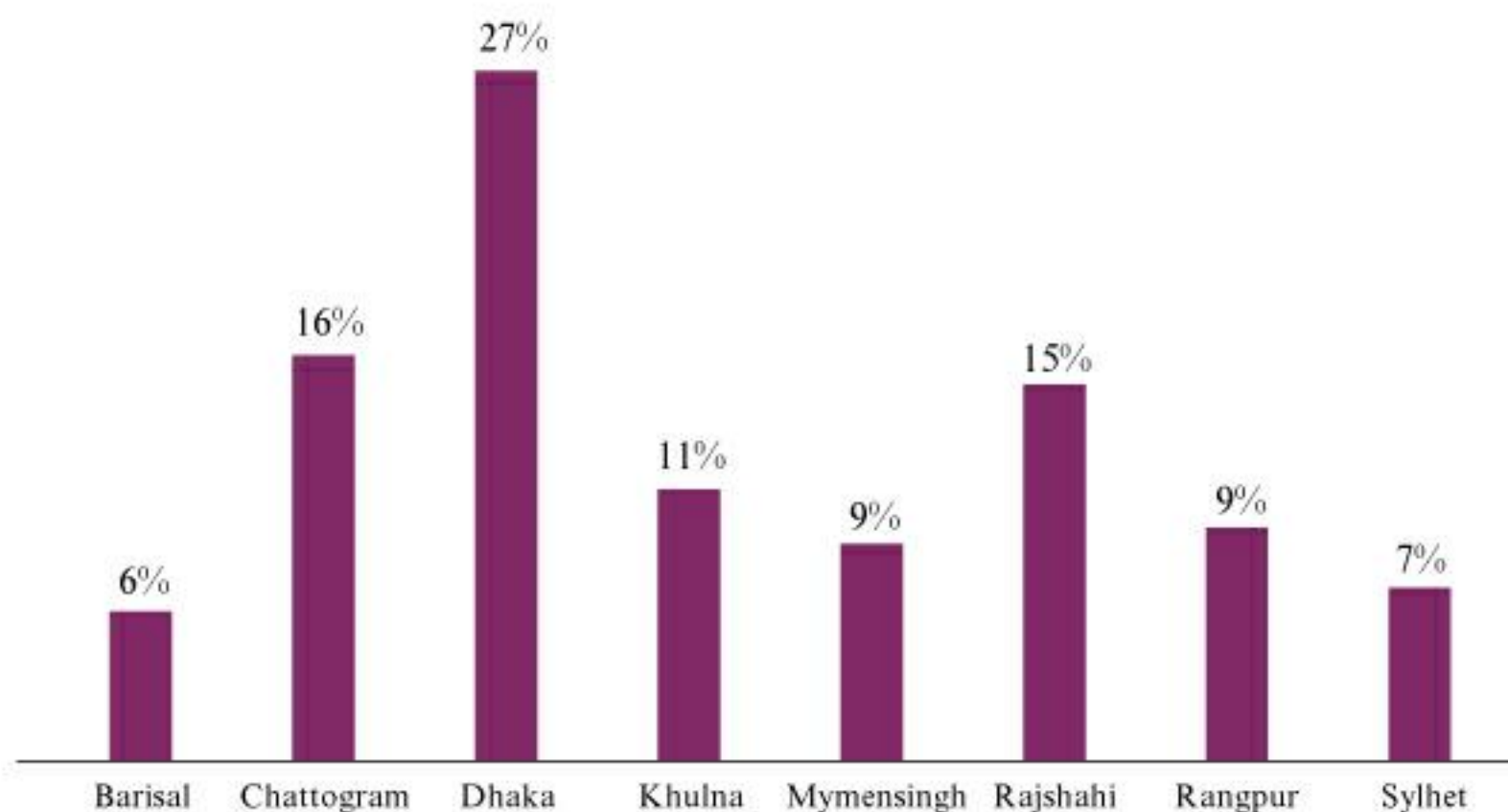
Bangladesh's news audience also tends to have less educational experience. One third of the respondents had only some high school experience. Only one in seven (15%) had some university experience or higher. In the analysis below, news users with greater educational experience were defined as having some university, university graduates and those with graduate school experience or above to create a sufficient sample size for segment analysis.

***Illustration 4: Respondents by Education (n = 1176)***



Geographically the sample reflected the news audience distribution by division.

***Illustration 5: Respondents by Division (n = 1176)***



Finally, in order to understand the impact of media literacy on media trust, the research developed a series of ten questions to evaluate how well news respondents understood Bangladesh's news and media practices, processes and regulations. The specific media literacy questions can be found in the full questionnaire, Questions 27 to 37. For each question, respondents were to select the right answer or to opt out of the question by responding "Don't know/Not sure". The median number of correct responses was only three out of ten. Five segments were proposed based on respondents' correct answers to each question.

*Illustration 6: Media Literacy Segments*

Media Literacy Segments	Definition	Segments Size	
		Count	% Total
Media Proficient	Answered all questions correctly.	0	0
Media Literate	Answered more than the median number of questions correctly.	694	59%
Less Media Literate	Answered less than the median number of questions correctly.	376	32%
Media Illiterate	Answered no questions correctly.	60	5%
Media Uninvolved	Answered no questions "Don't Know/Not Sure".	46	4%

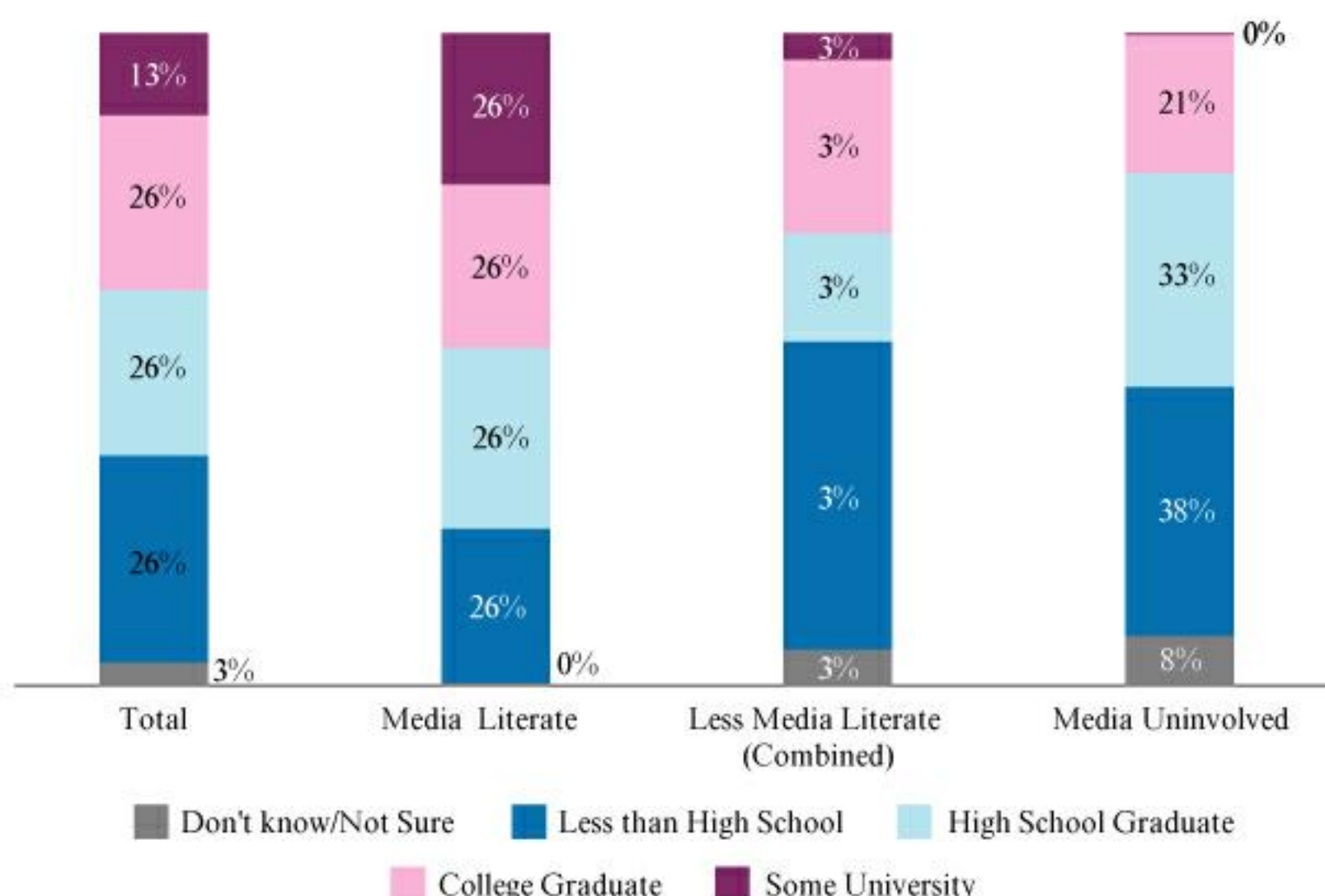
} Less Media Literate (Combined)

Of the five segments proposed, there were no responses that qualified as "Media Proficient". "Media Uninvolved" was a small segment, but unique in its lack of attempts to answer any media literacy questions. The small "Media Illiterate" segment was combined with the larger "Less Media Literate" segment to create a larger segment, "Less Media Literate (Combined)".

In analysing segment demographics, Media Literate respondents tended to have a much stronger education background with almost half (48%) having a college degree or more. Less Media Literate (combined) news users tended to have a much lower educational profile with less than one third having a college degree or more. The very small segment of Media Uninvolved news users had the lowest educational profile with less than one quarter (21%) having a college degree or more. Given the low level of correct answers and the approximate correlation between educational segment and media literacy, the segment analysis below will focus on differences in educational profile.



*Illustration 7: Educational Profile of Media Literacy Segments*



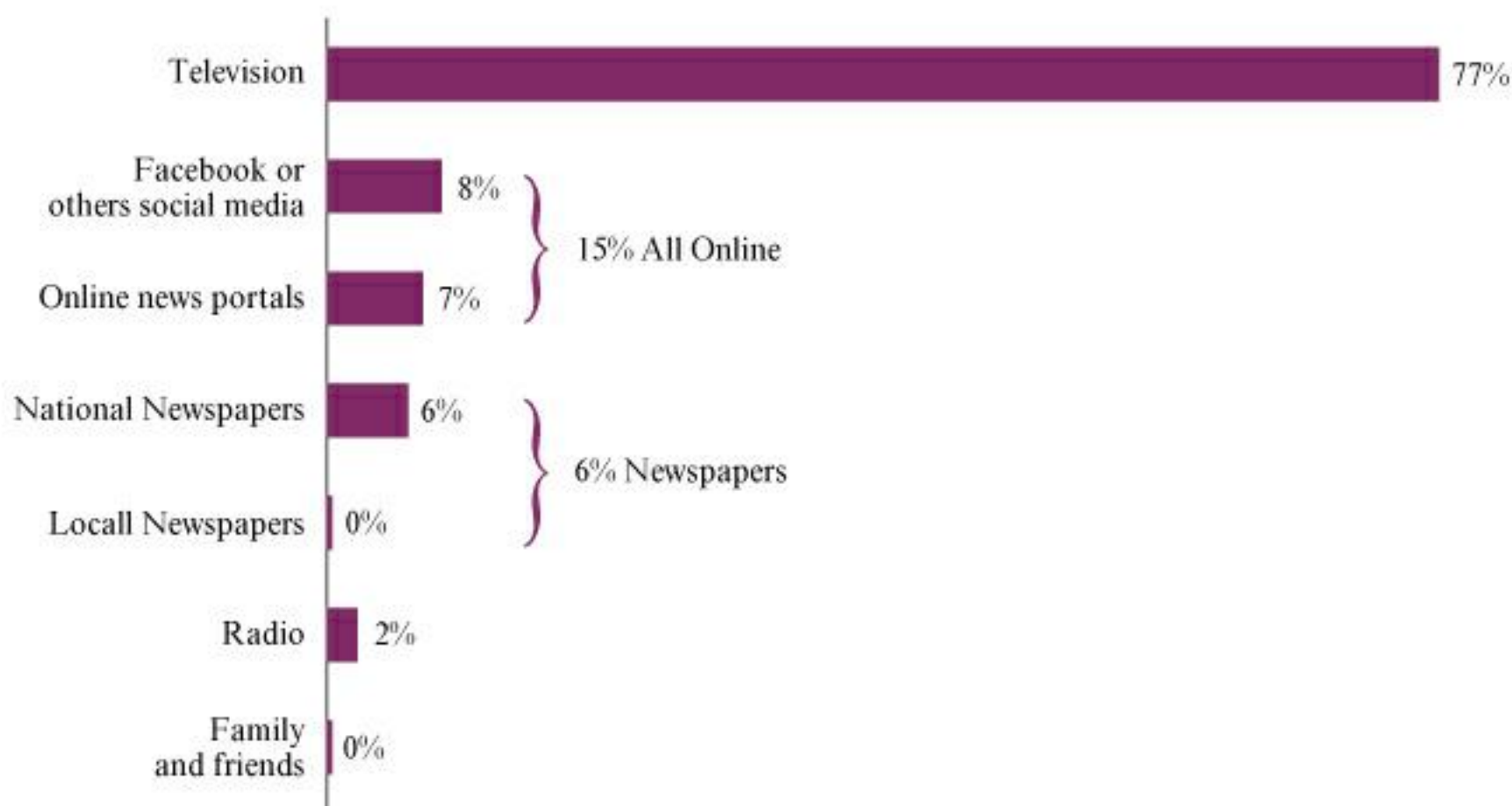
The analysis below will examine the overall results of the survey along six dimensions:

- Media usage
- News and media trust
- Attitudes towards media trust
- "Fake News" understanding and behaviour
- Internal and external news influences
- Understanding and impact of the 2018 Digital Security Act.

For each, the analysis will examine any significant variations by demographics (gender, age and education).

**Media Usage:** Overall news media usage in Bangladesh reflects global trends. Television continues to be the dominant provider of news followed by online sources both online news portals and social media outlets. Newspapers, both national and local, represent the third largest source. Radio is not a significant provider of news.

**Illustration 8: Main News Source (n = 1176)**



Media news consumption in Bangladesh is following well established global patterns of evolution with a general shift toward digital media usage. While only directional, comparison of surveys of media behaviour from before the COVID-19 outbreak and the Media Trust survey taken during the COVID-19 outbreak suggests a significant shift from newspapers as a source of news to online sources. Television's role as the leading news media appears to have remained steady as the leading news source throughout the pandemic.

**Illustration 9: Media Use over Time - Directional<sup>12</sup>**

Media	Media Trust	Media Literacy	Bangladesh Public Opinion Survey
Survey Dates	May 2021	November 2019	August - Sept
Sample	News Users	News Users	All Users
Television	77%	75%	68%
Internet, ex. Social Media	7%	5%	4%
Social Media	8%	11%	4%
Newspapers	6%	8%	2%
Radio	2%	0%	1%
Friends and Family	0%	1%	8%
Others	-	-	1%
Don't Know/No Answer	-	-	13%

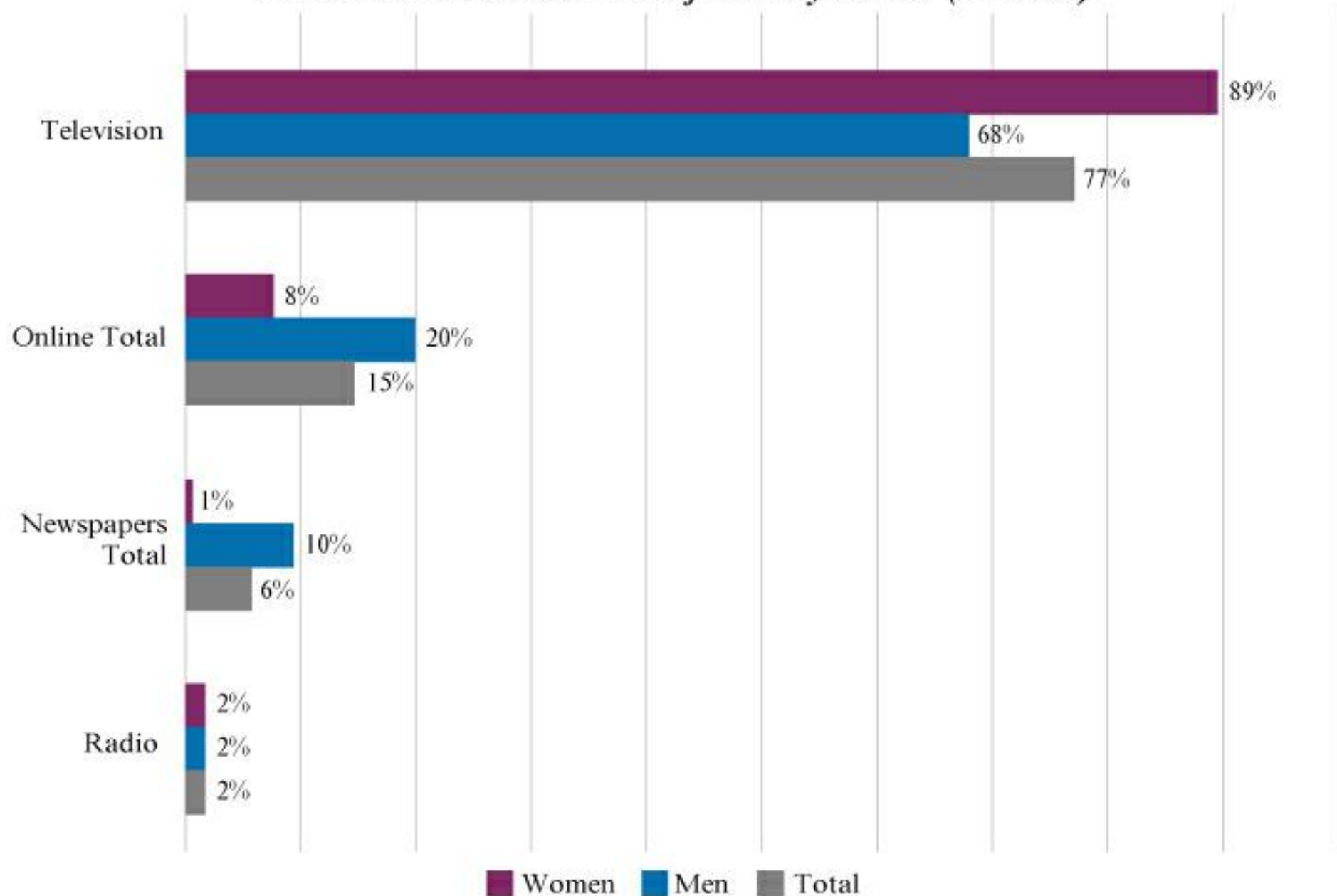
Online Use Increases

<sup>12</sup> Media Literacy Survey results from MRDI, "News Literacy in Bangladesh", June 2020. Bangladesh Public Opinion Survey results from Centre for Insights in Survey Results, October 2019.



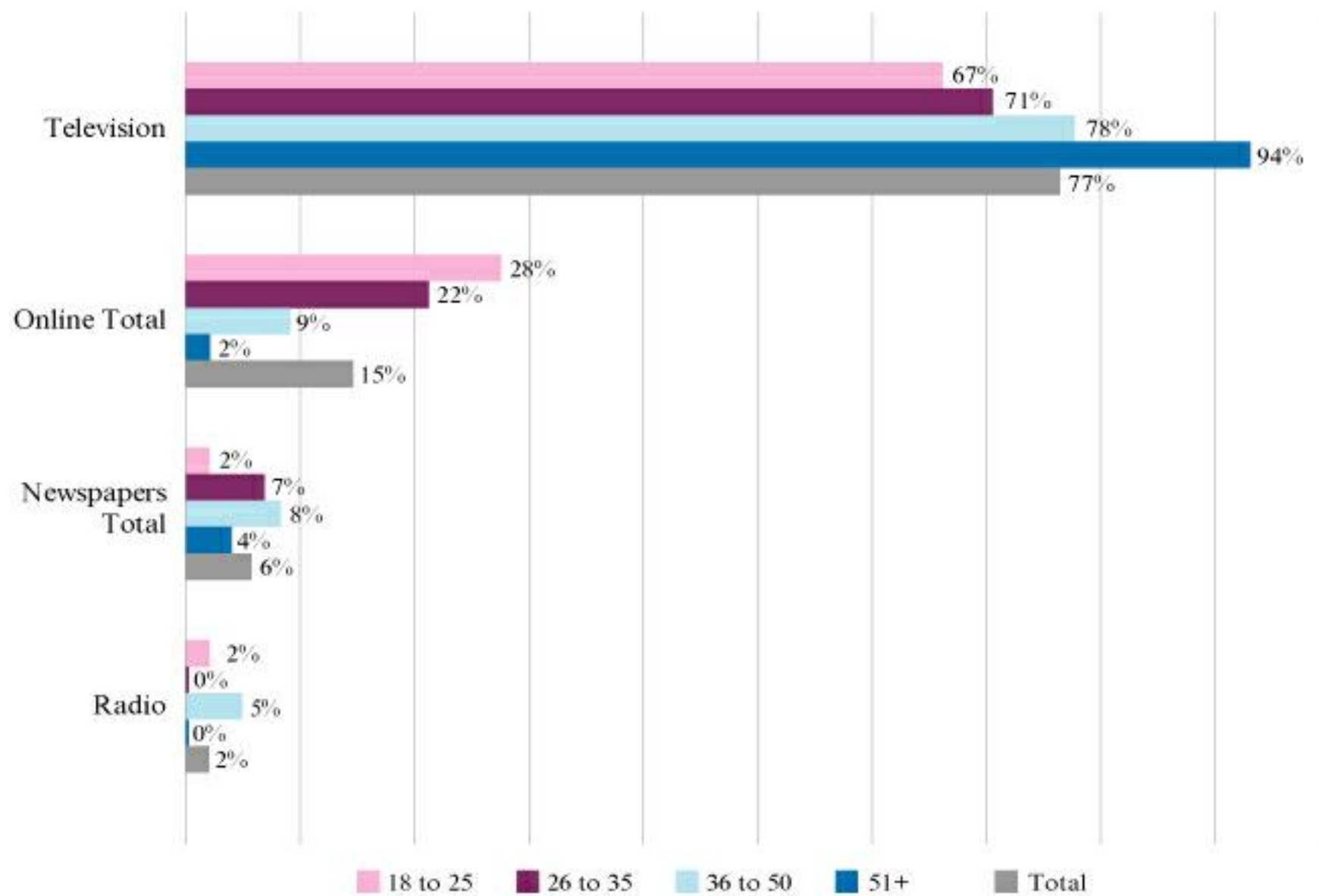
Demographically, gender, age, and education all impact media usage. Across all demographics, television remains the most important source for news. Looking first at gender, men are more than 50% more likely to choose newspapers as their main source of news than the average, and over 30% more likely to choose online news sources than the average. Women conversely are more likely to rely on television with nearly 90% of women choosing TV as their main source of news.

*Illustration 10: Main Source of News by Gender (n = 1176)*

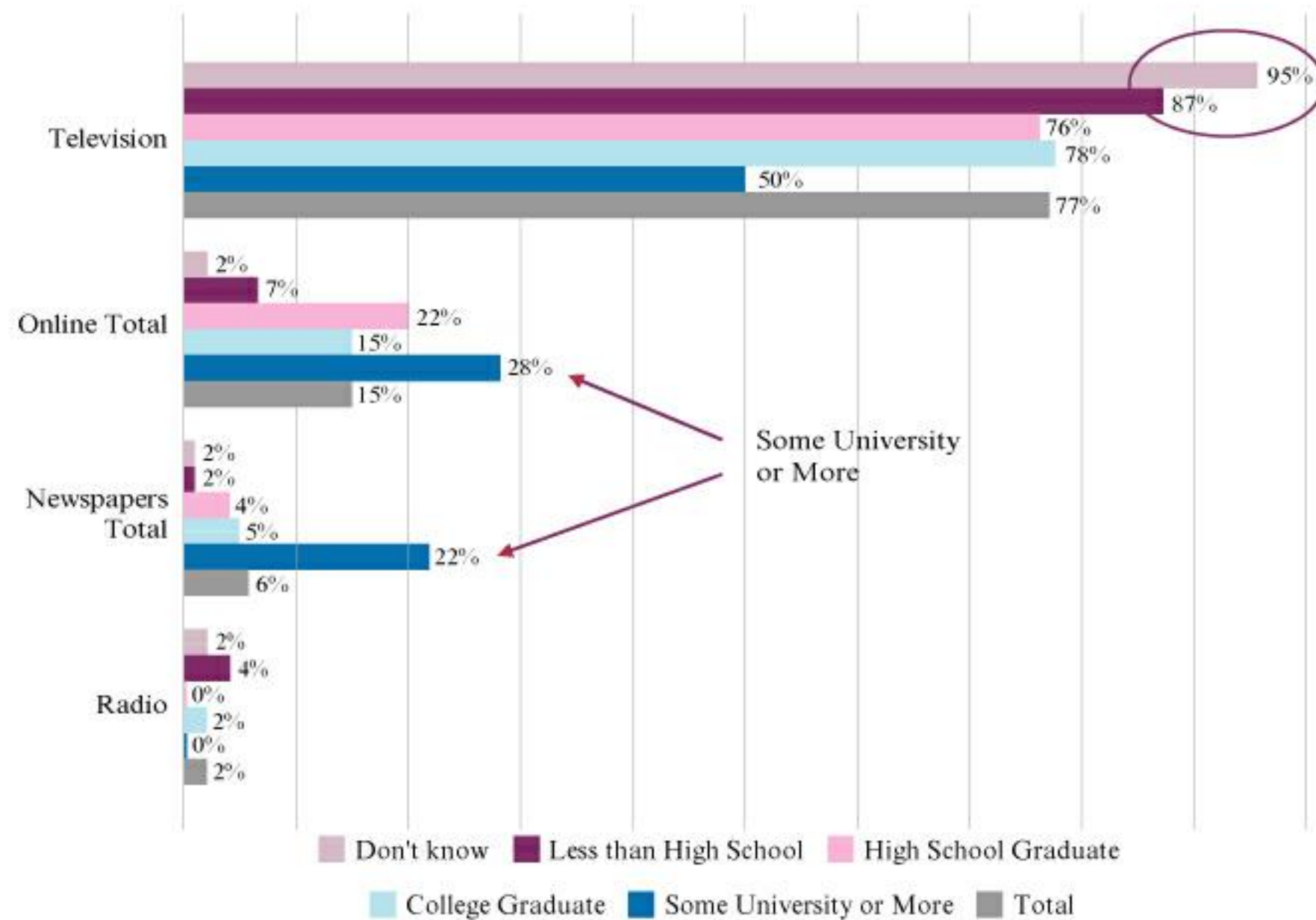


Age also plays a significant role in preferred news media choice. Over 94% of older respondents aged 51 years or older chose television as their preferred news media versus 77% of the total population. Online sources appealed much more to younger news consumers, especially under 25 years of age. Twenty-eight percent of the youngest segment of respondents chose online news sources as their preferred news media, second to television, versus 15% of the total sample. Younger respondents (18 to 35 years of age) also were more likely to choose Facebook or other social media as their primary news source. For older news consumers 51 years of age and older, newspapers supplanted online sources as the second choice for preferred news media source after TV.

**Illustration 11: Main Source of News by Age (n = 1176)**



**Illustration 12: Main Source of News by Education (n = 1176)**

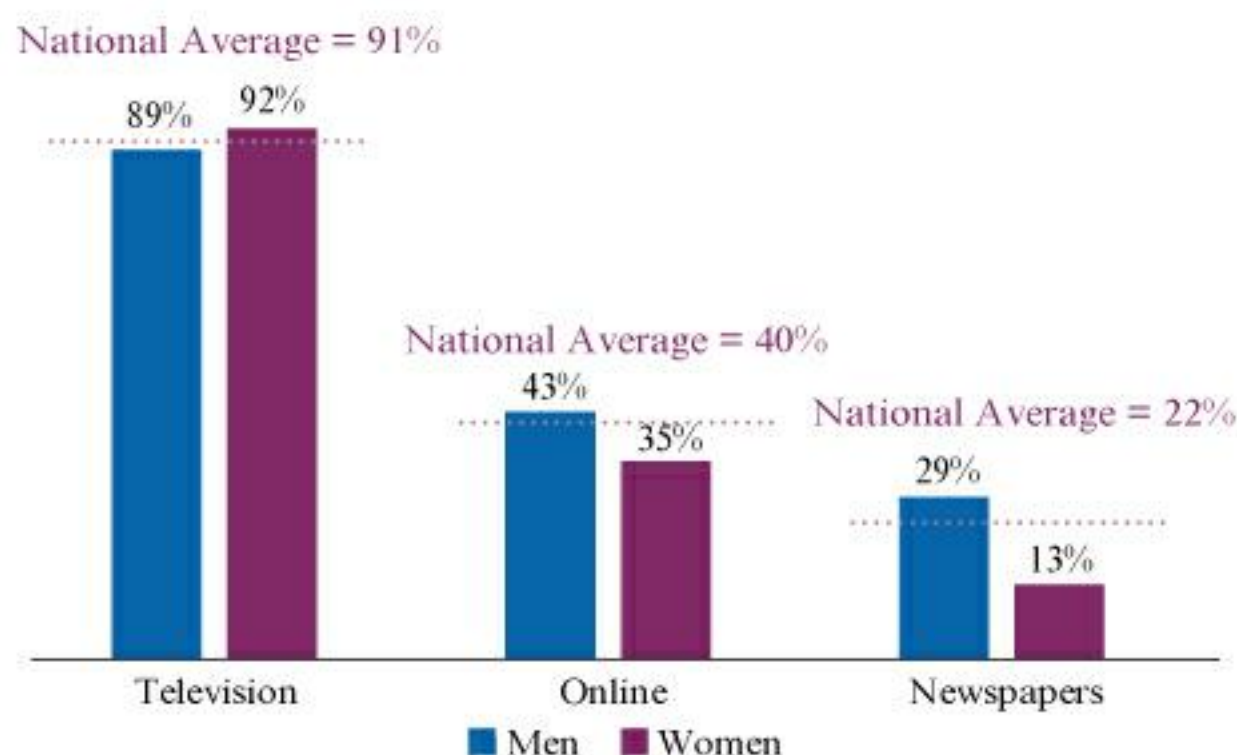




Bangladeshi news users are heavy consumers of news from all sources with over one in six respondents (18%) getting the news as many as five or more times a day. Around forty percent get the news once or twice a day with another 42% getting the news between three and four times a day. Across the main demographic segments there was little variation in the frequency with which news is consumed daily.

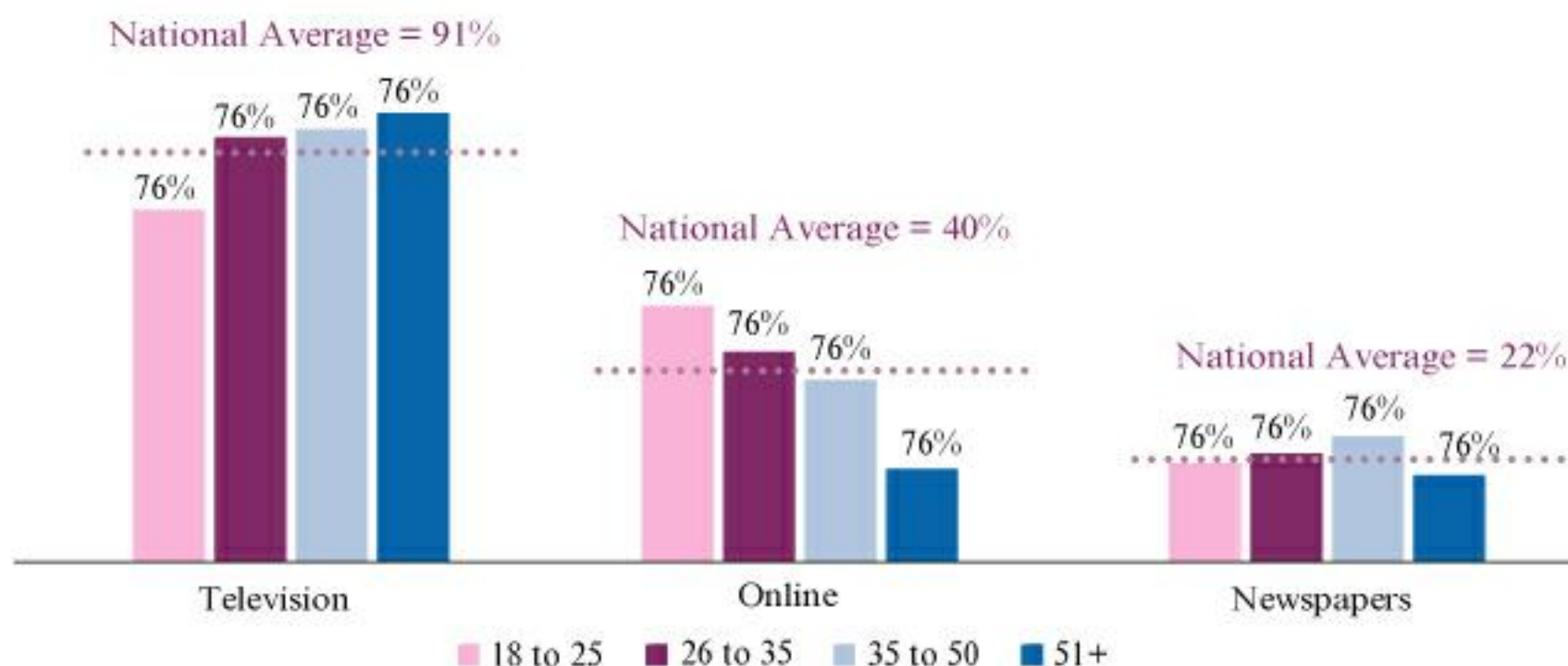
During an average day, Bangladeshi news consumers tend to use many different media channels. When asked to indicate all the news sources they used during an average day, 91% watch TV for the news, 40% will also turn to online and 22% will read a newspaper. While television is the dominant daily choice, digital and newspaper news sources are also used to supplement TV. While both men and women are heavy daily TV news users, men are slightly more likely than women to read a newspaper and significantly more likely to use online news sources.

**Illustration 13: Average Daily News Media Usage by Gender (n = 1176)**



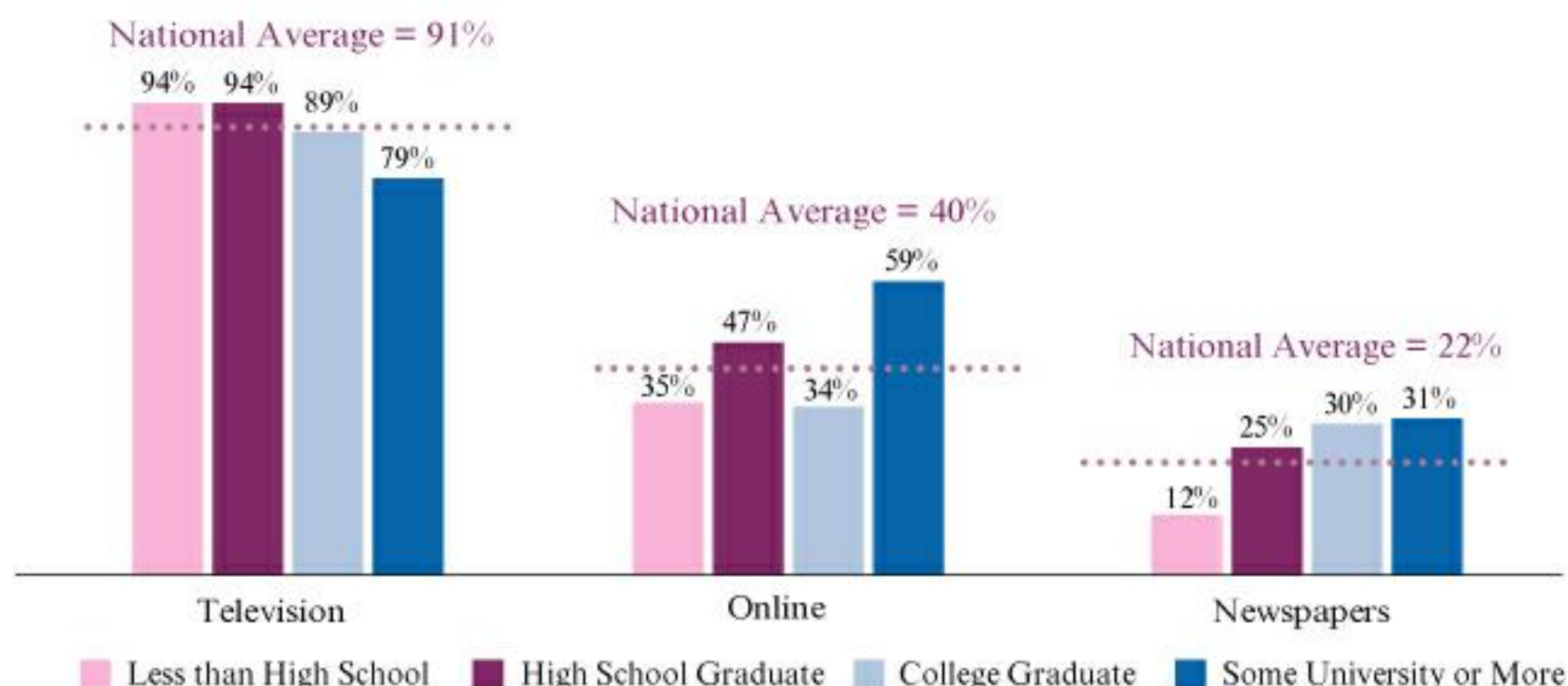
Daily news media use also reflects shifts in news media focus for the younger news audience with 18- to 24-year-olds more likely to choose online news sources at almost twice the level as news consumers 51 years of age or over. While TV news is still the dominant news source, younger news consumers (under 25 years of age) are less likely to use TV than their older peers.

**Illustration 14: Average Daily News Media Usage by Age (n = 1176)**



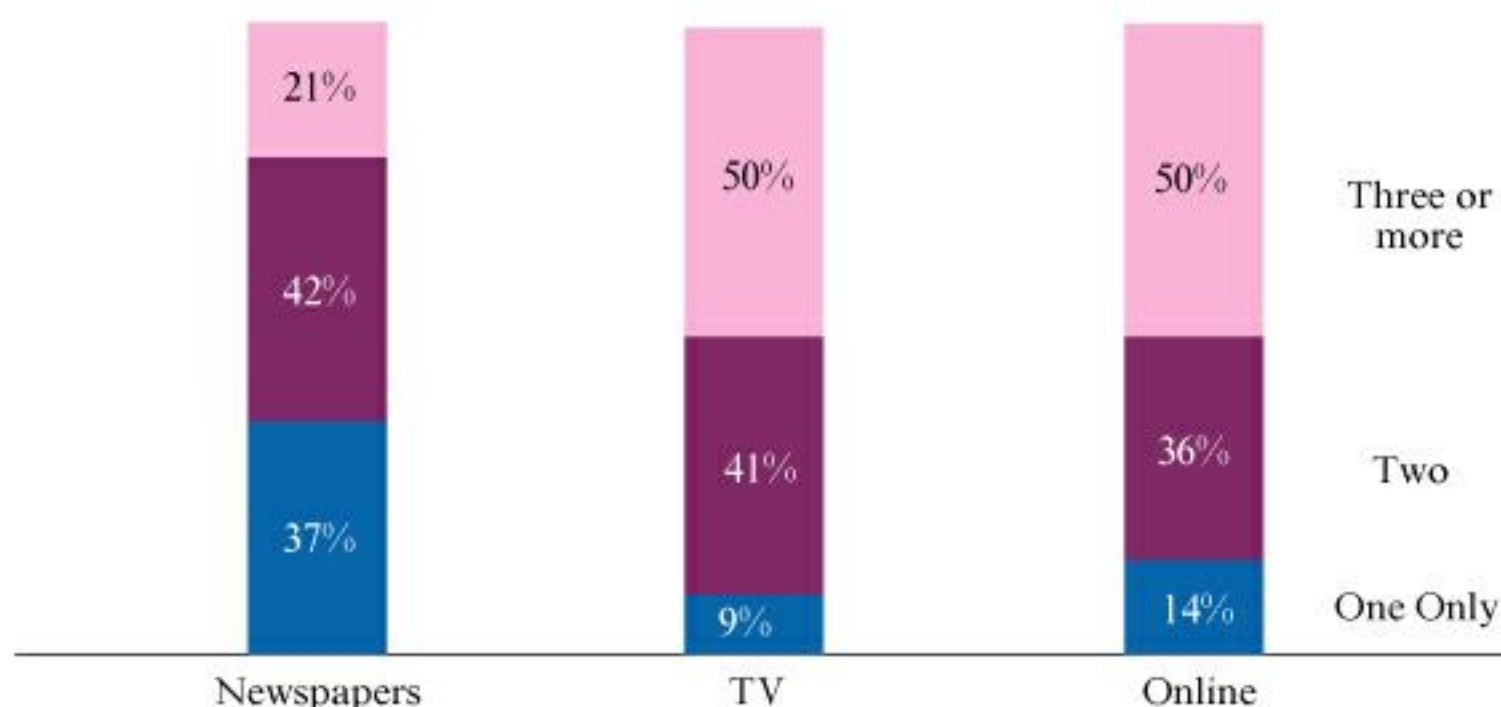
Daily news media selection also varies with education. For news consumers with at least some university experience, daily usage of online sources and newspapers were higher than the national average and significantly higher than daily usage among segments with fewer years of education.

**Illustration 15: Average Daily News Media Usage by Education (n = 1176)**



Bangladesh's news consumers regularly use more than one media outlet in a typical day. Almost two-thirds of newspaper readers read at least two newspapers during an average day. Easy and lower cost access to online and television news media allow news users to access even more news outlets daily. During the average day half of respondents use three or more television and online news outlets.

**Illustration 16: Number of News Outlets Used Daily by Media (Total = 1176)**



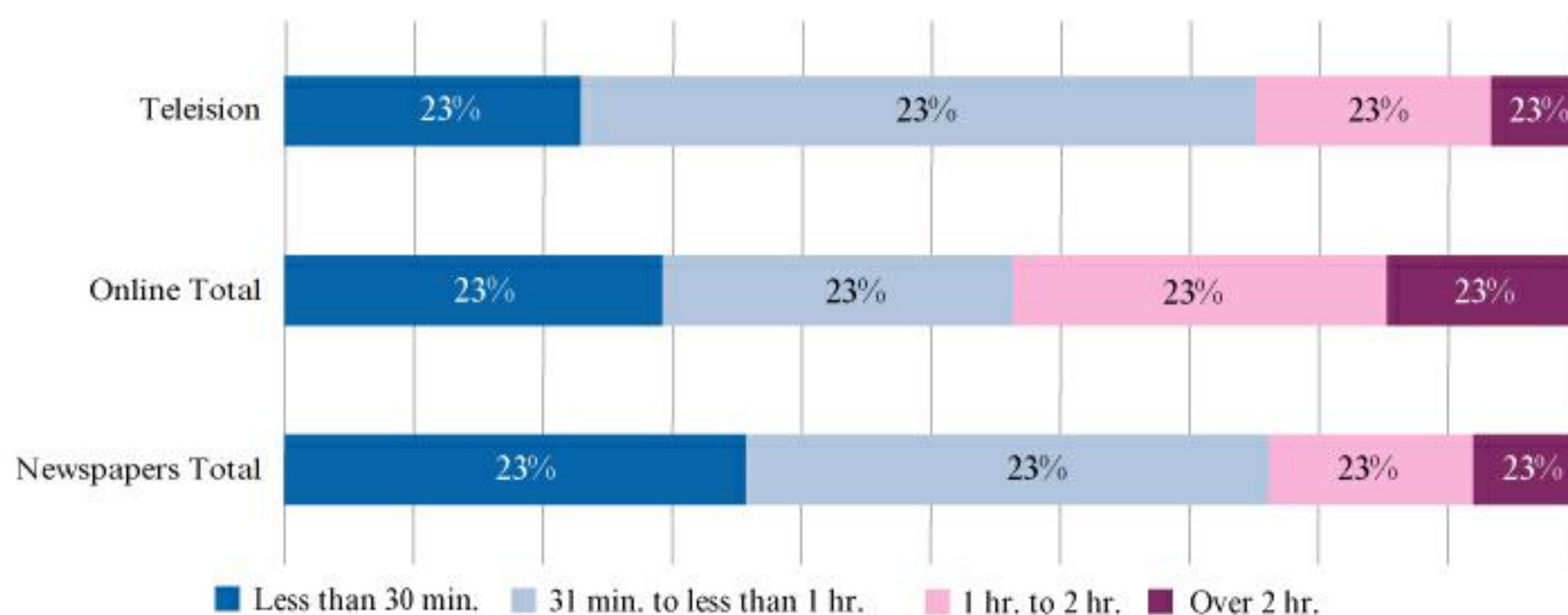
Looking across demographic segments, younger news users and news users with higher education levels tend to be slightly more likely to choose three or more online and television outlets for their daily news. Almost three-quarters of respondents with some university



experience or more use three or more television news outlets on an average day and two-thirds choose three or more online news outlets.

Time spent on the news varies somewhat by media. On an average day, about 75% of those who get the news from TV spent an hour or less on the news. Similarly, about three out of four consumers who get the news from newspapers spent an hour or less on the news. Online news consumption tended to receive a greater investment in time with over 40% spending over an hour online to read/view the news. Social media based on the research's estimate accounts for about 60% of the total online news time spent.

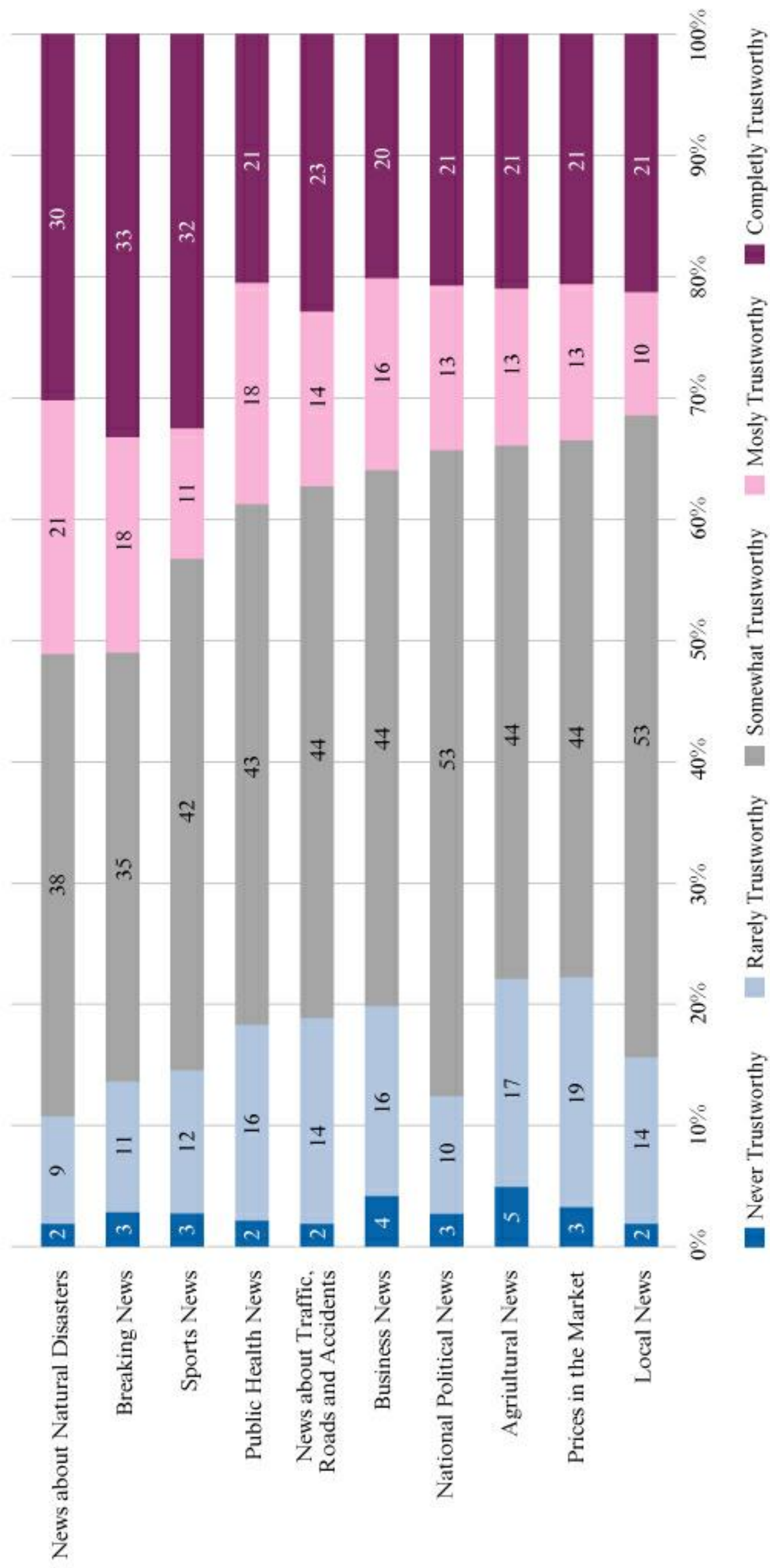
**Illustration 17: Average Daily Time Spent on the News by Media (Total = 1176)**



Variations in the average daily amount of time spent on news by media mostly mirrors media choice by both age and education. Younger news consumers tend to spend less time-consuming news on television, while older consumers tend to spend slightly longer with television news. Young people tend to spend longer online with almost one in five spending over two hours daily with online news media. News consumers with higher levels of education also tend to consume less television on an average day with approximately two thirds of respondents with some university experience or above spending an hour or less on television news. These same respondents with some university experience or above also tend to be heavier daily online users with 22% using online for news over two hours a day.

**News and Media Trust:** Bangladesh news consumers evaluated the overall trustworthiness of ten different news beats. As suggested from the focus group findings, news users were mostly lukewarm in their opinion of the trustworthiness of all ten news beats. News audiences were most likely to choose the "somewhat trustworthy" intermediate choice to describe all types of news. Only two news beats - Natural Disaster News and Breaking News - were considered broadly trustworthy with both receiving over 50% of respondents rating them either "completely trustworthy" or "mostly trustworthy". Sports News was a close third with over 40% of respondents rating it as mostly or completely trustworthy. Consistent with FGD findings, these beats tend to advantage television news providers who have the capacity to supply video news in real time. Bangladesh news consumers tend to trust news reporting on topics that lend themselves to video reporting.

**Illustration 19: Percent Trustworthy by News Beat (Total = 1176)**

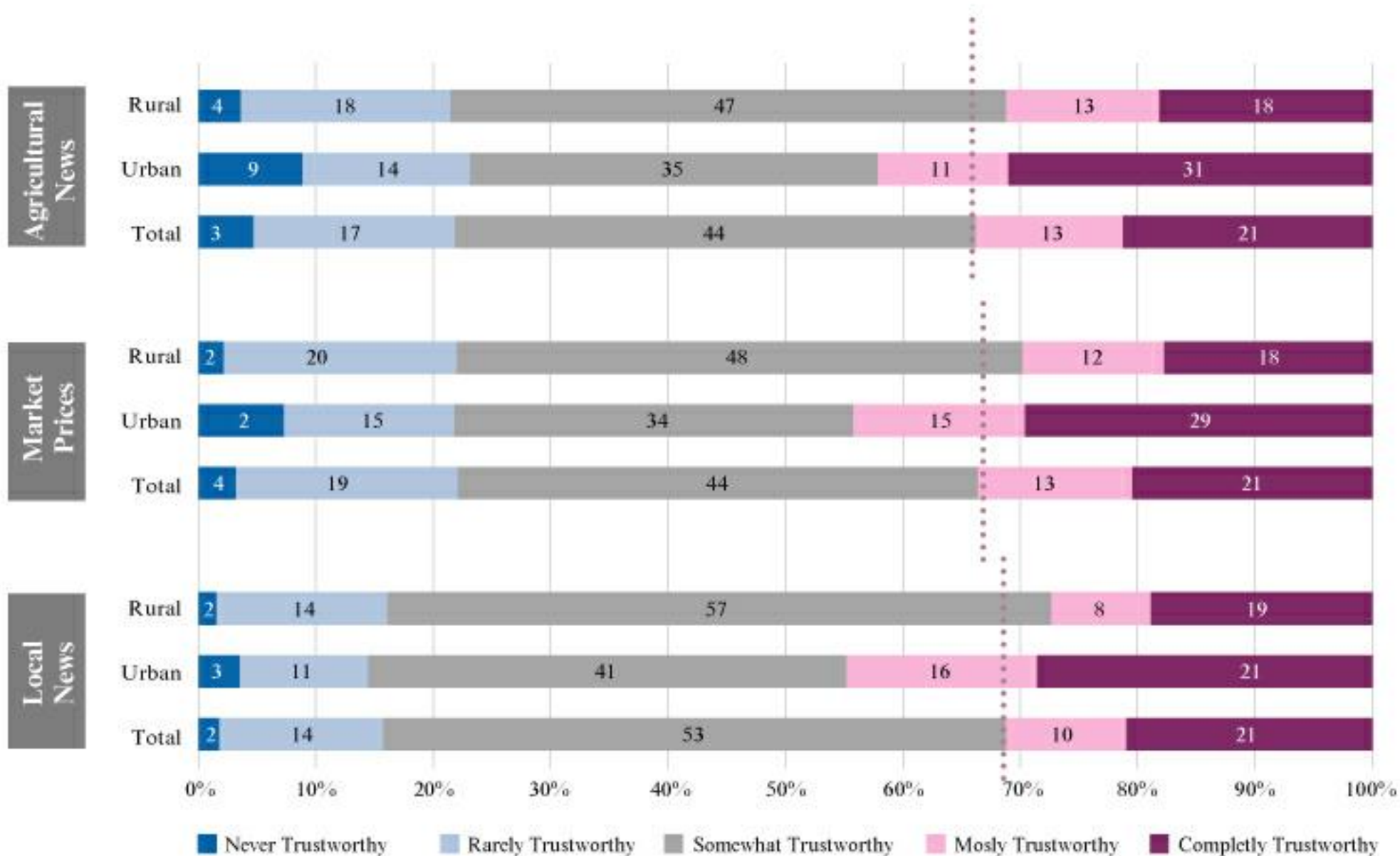




Respondents found that Local news, News on Market Prices and Agricultural News were the least trusted news beats. Almost one in five respondents found Market News and Agricultural News to be "rarely trustworthy" or "never trustworthy". These types of news reporting are usually local in nature. Looking at the response through the context of the FGD findings where local news providers were generally more suspect than national providers, these local beats may suffer due to local context.

Looking at the differences in survey responses between urban and rural news users, rural users in general were slightly less likely to fully trust any news type. For these three "local news types" rural news users were much less trusting than their urban news user counterparts. For example, almost half (48%) of urban news users found local news to be either mostly trustworthy or completely trustworthy. Barely one quarter (27%) of rural news users found local news to be similarly trustworthy.

*Illustration 19: Percent Trustworthy by Local News Beat Urban*



Demographically, rating for news beats varied only modestly between age cohorts. The most trusted news beats for all age cohorts were "Breaking News" and "News about Natural Disasters". The least trusted news beats were "Market Prices" and "Agricultural News". With the exception of older respondents, news users at all ages were most likely to find all news beats to be only "somewhat trustworthy". Respondents 51 years or older tended to find "Breaking News" to be completely trustworthy.

Differences in educational experience resulted in some modest differences. Overall respondents at all educational levels were most likely to find all news beats "somewhat trustworthy". For the three beats rated most trusted - "News about Natural Disasters", "Breaking News", and "Sports News" - respondents with higher education found the topics slightly less trustworthy than the overall audience, but still more trustworthy than other beats. Conversely respondents with less than a high school education were slightly more likely to find these topics more trustworthy.

For each news beat the research also examined the most trusted news media. Across news beats, television was uniformly the most trusted media type. Depending on news beat, two thirds to three quarters of respondents chose television as their most trusted news source.

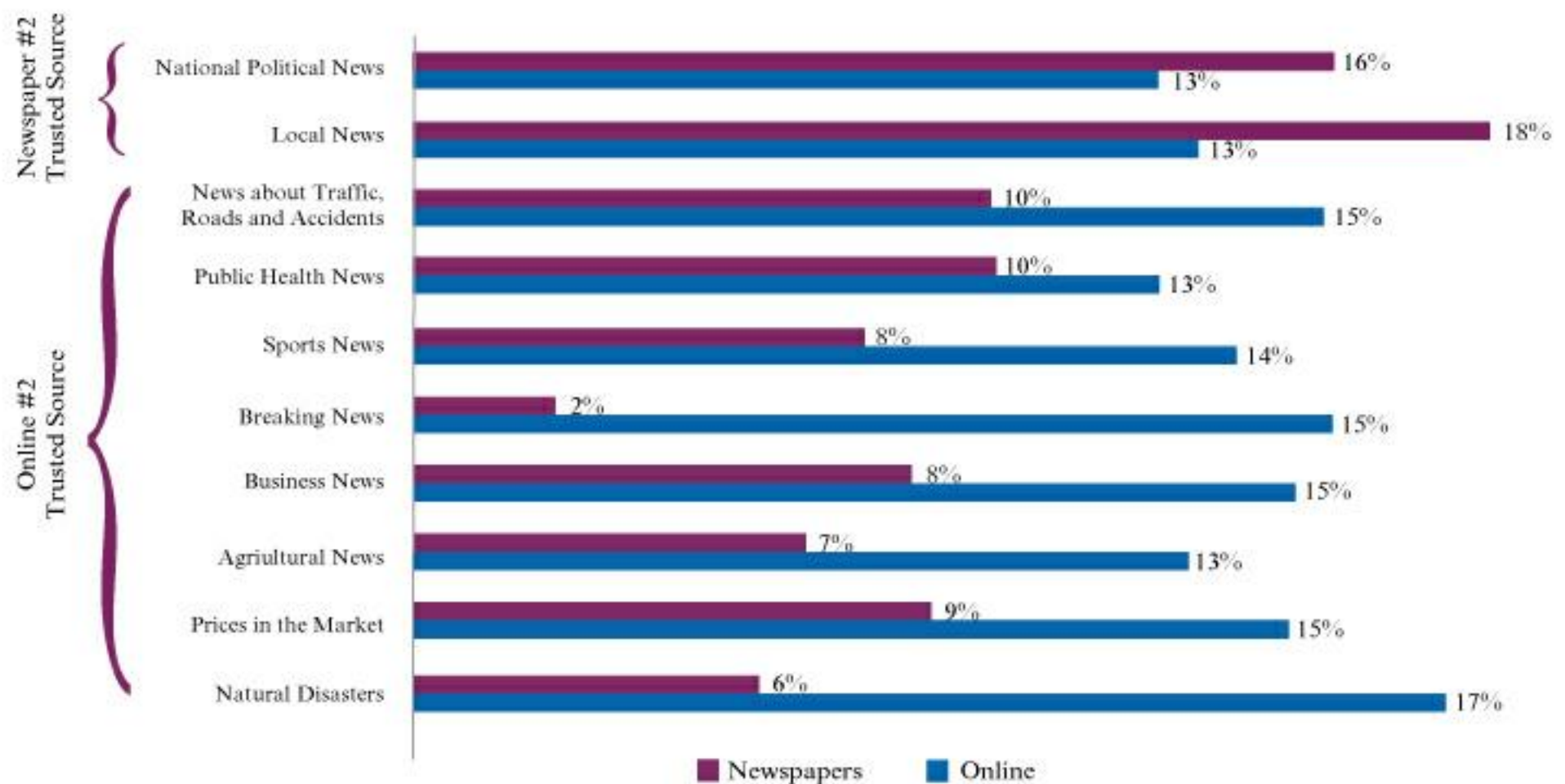
***Illustration 20: TV as Most Trusted News Source By News Beat (n = 1176)***



After television, newspapers both local and national were found to be the second most common choice for national political and local news with online news sources statistically tied or very close third choices. For other news beats online news sources were uniformly the second most trusted news source.

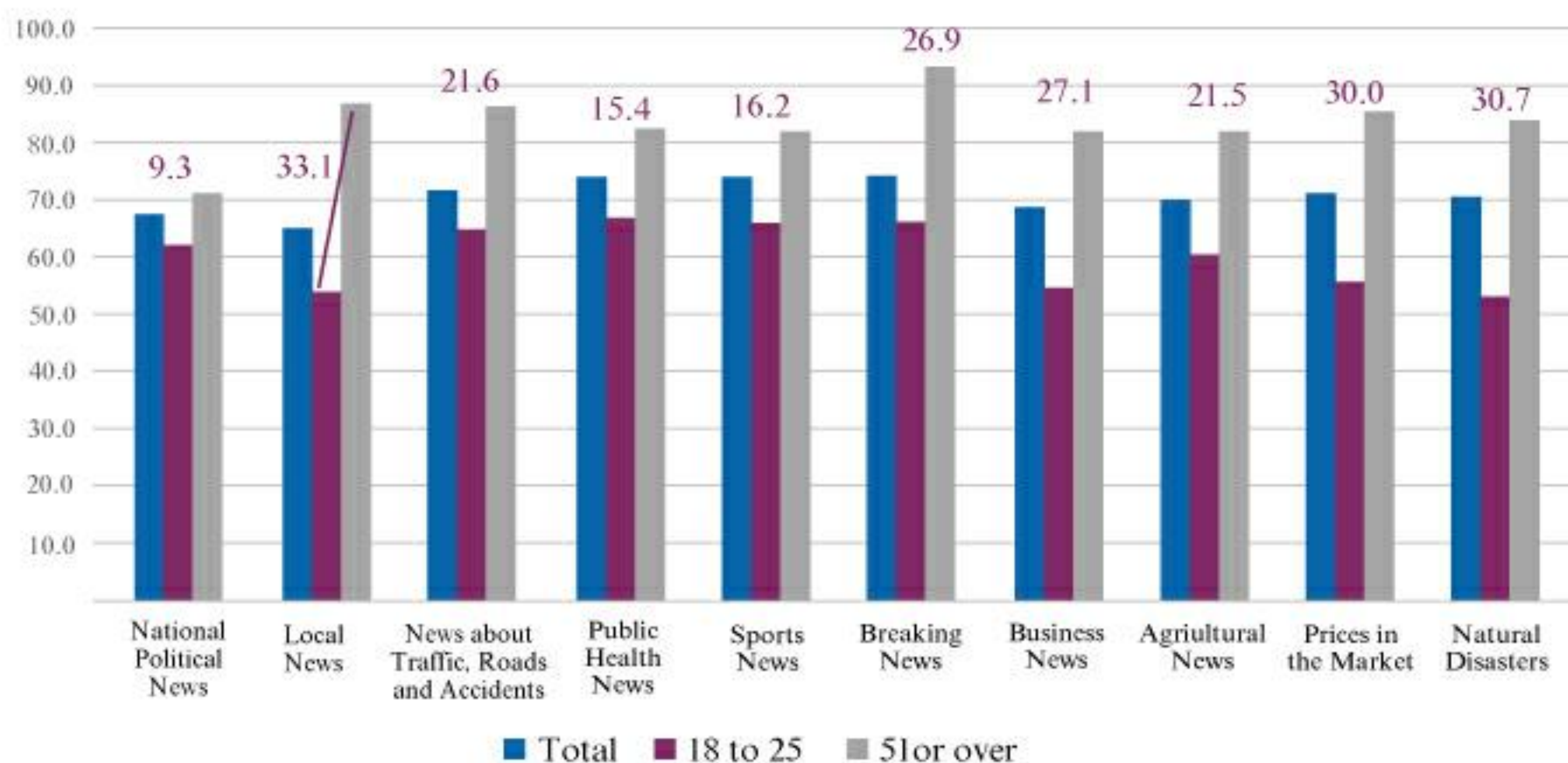


**Illustration 21: Newspapers and Online as Most Trusted News Source by News Beat (n = 1176)**



Demographically, the same trends evident in media behaviour also present themselves in media trust. Looking specifically at television, all demographic segments (gender, age, and education) choose television as their most trusted source for the news for all news beats. For most news beats, young news consumers were less likely to choose television as the most trusted news source than consumers over 51 years of age. National political news was the one exception where the differences between age groups were less pronounced.

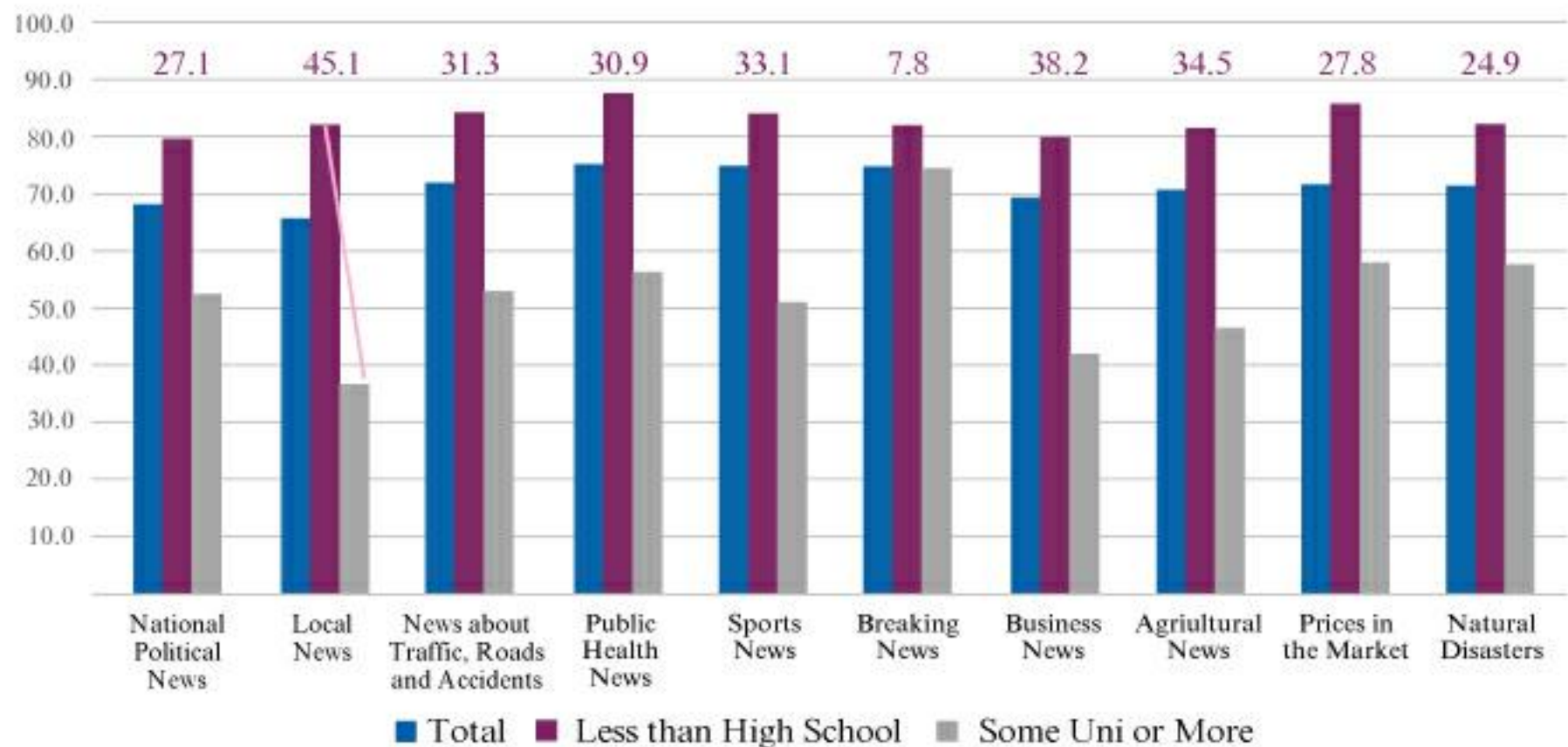
**Illustration 22: Differential Selection of Television as Most Trusted News Source by selected Age Cohort and News Beat**



*Note: Annotations in red represent the differential in percentage points between 18 to 25 years olds and consumers 51 years of age or over.*

Educational experience also influenced the likelihood that a respondent would choose television as the most trusted source of news for any news beat. Respondents with lower amounts of education, especially those who had not graduated from high school, were more likely to choose television as their most trusted news source for all news beats. Respondents with at least some university experience including university graduates and graduate students were less likely to choose television as their most trusted source of the news for any news beat.

***Illustration 23: Differential Selection of Television as Most Trusted News Source  
By Selected Educational Experience and News Beat***

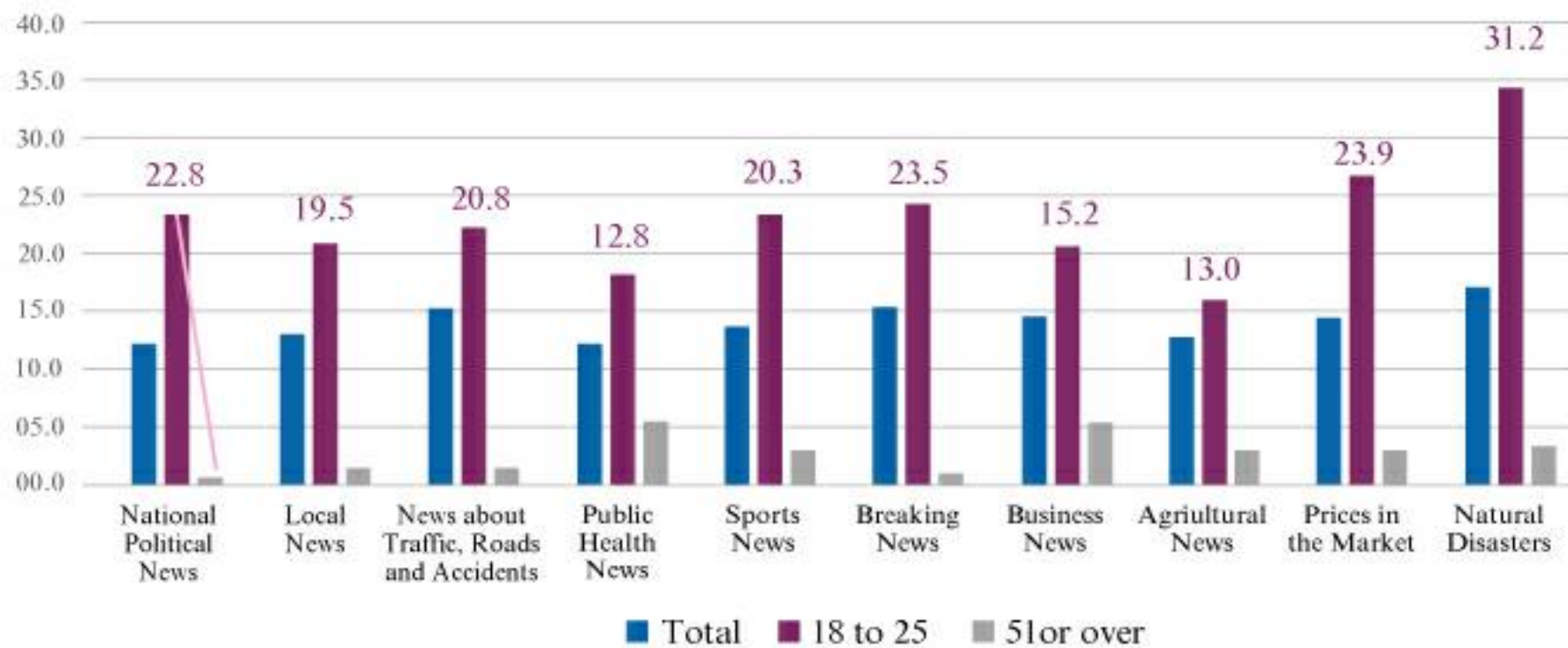


**Note:** Annotations in red represent the differential in percentage points between news consumers without a high school degree and those who have some university or more educational experience.

Similar trends exist for the choice of online sources as most trusted sources of the news. Younger news consumers are more likely to choose online as most trusted sources than consumers over the age of 51 for all news beats.



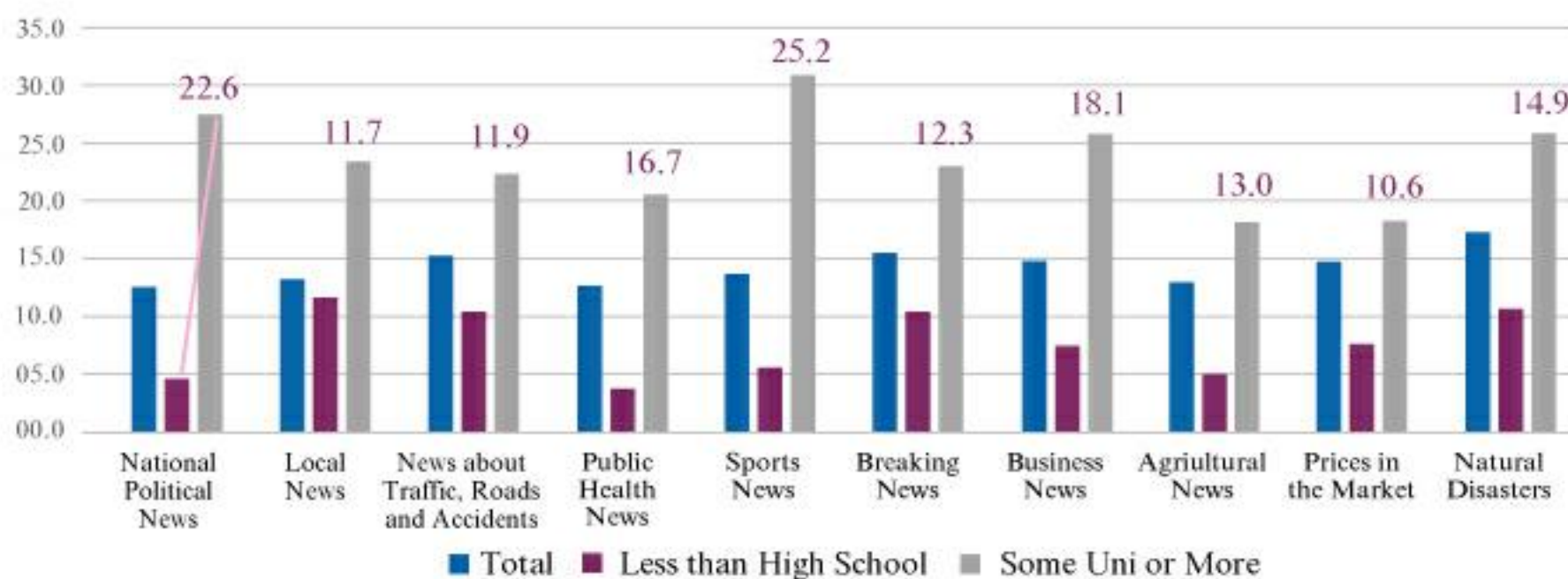
**Illustration 24: Differential Selection of Online as Most Trusted News Source by age Cohort and News Beat**



**Note:** Annotations in red represent the differential in percentage points between 18 to 25 year olds and consumers 51 years of age or over.

Educational level also influenced the likelihood of news consumers choosing online sources as the most trusted news source. For every news beat, consumers with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to choose online sources as their most trusted source of news than those with lower levels of educational experience.

**Illustration 25: Differential Selection of Online as Most Trusted News Source by Educational Experience and News Beat**

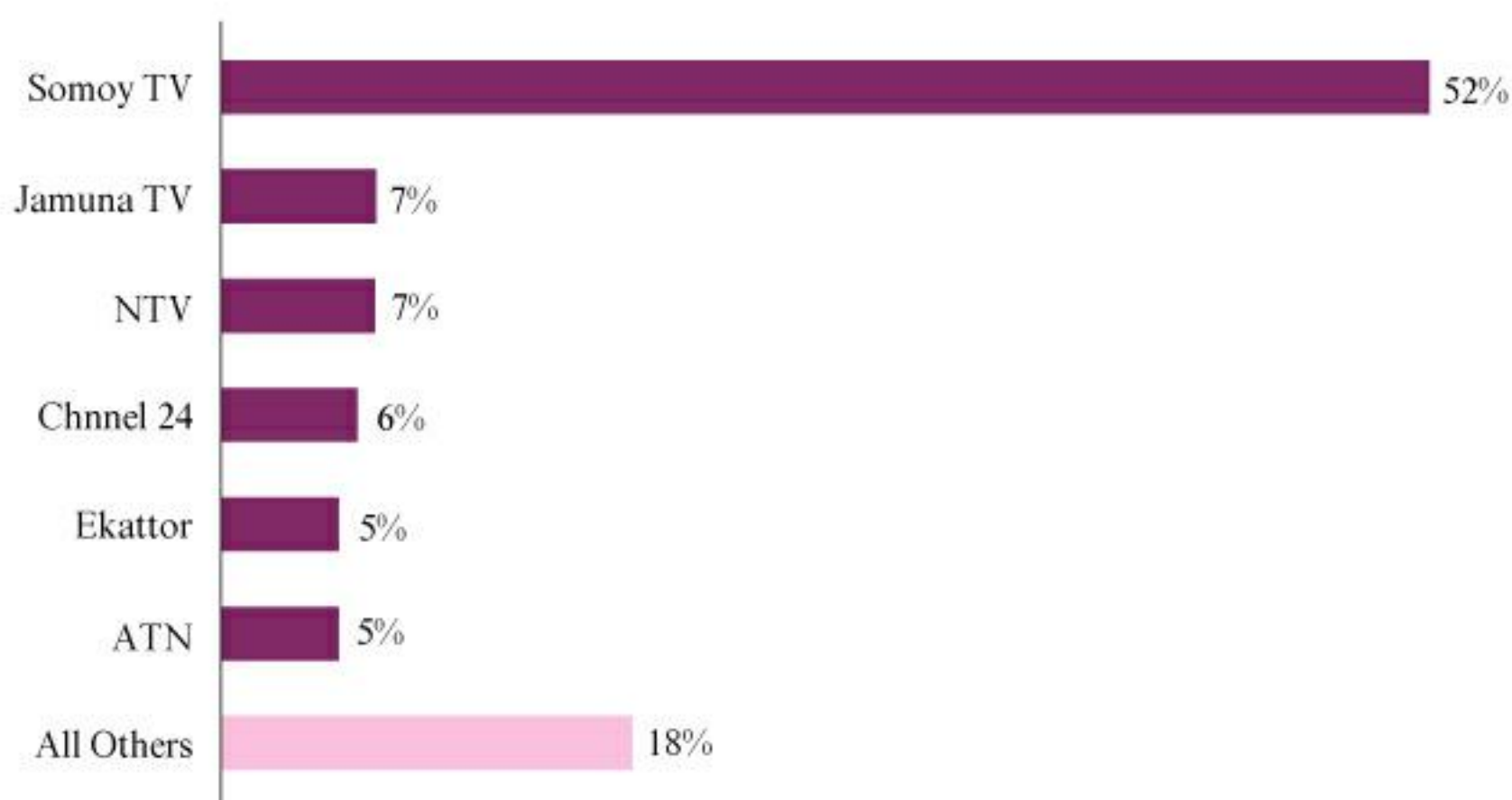


**Note:** Annotations in red represent the differential in percentage points between news consumers without a high school degree and those who have some university or more educational experience.

Broadening the discussion of trust from an individual news beat to an entire news brand respondents were asked to name a media brand that they felt was most trusted within media types used on an average day. Daily television users named the television outlet that they trusted most. Daily newspaper readers chose their most trusted newspaper. Daily online users chose their most trusted online news outlet.

In the unaided question, among the twenty-one different TV news providers mentioned, daily television news users overwhelmingly chose Somoy TV as their most trusted television news source with over 50% of respondents citing the network. Among the remaining twenty networks mentioned, only five received more than 5% of the "vote". The remaining fifteen TV news outlets in total were mentioned by less than one in five respondents (18%).

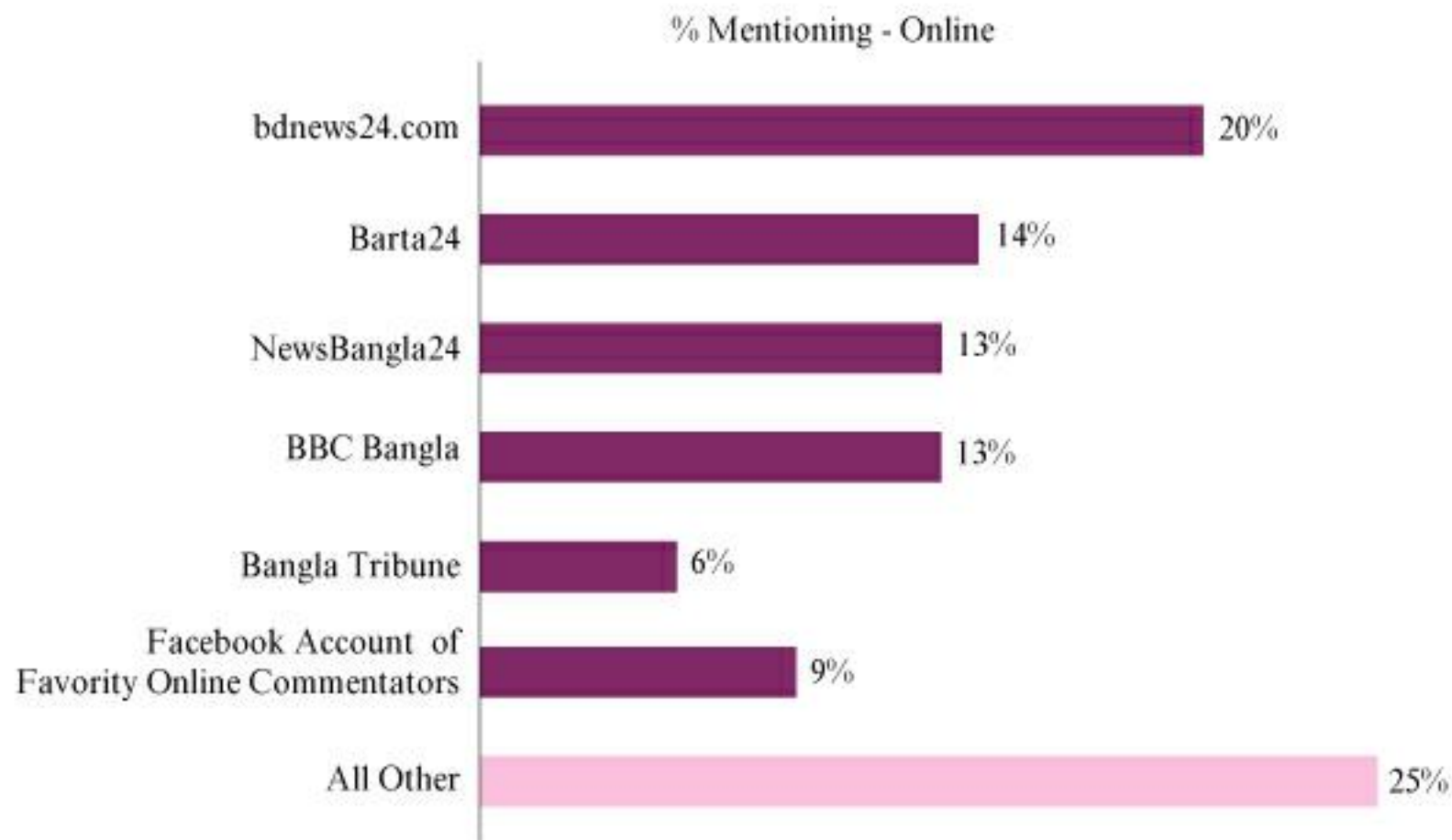
***Illustration 26: Most Trusted Television News Provider  
by Daily TV News User, Unaided (n = 1065)***



In surveying most trusted online news outlets, respondents tended to focus on online only news providers. This is consistent with FGD findings in which consumers were more focused on brands than on media channels. Among daily online users of both online news portals and social media outlets over twenty different online-only news sources were mentioned as "most trusted" online news sources. The most mentioned online-only news source was bdnews24.com. The differential between sources was much closer with eight online sources representing over 90% of the mentions.

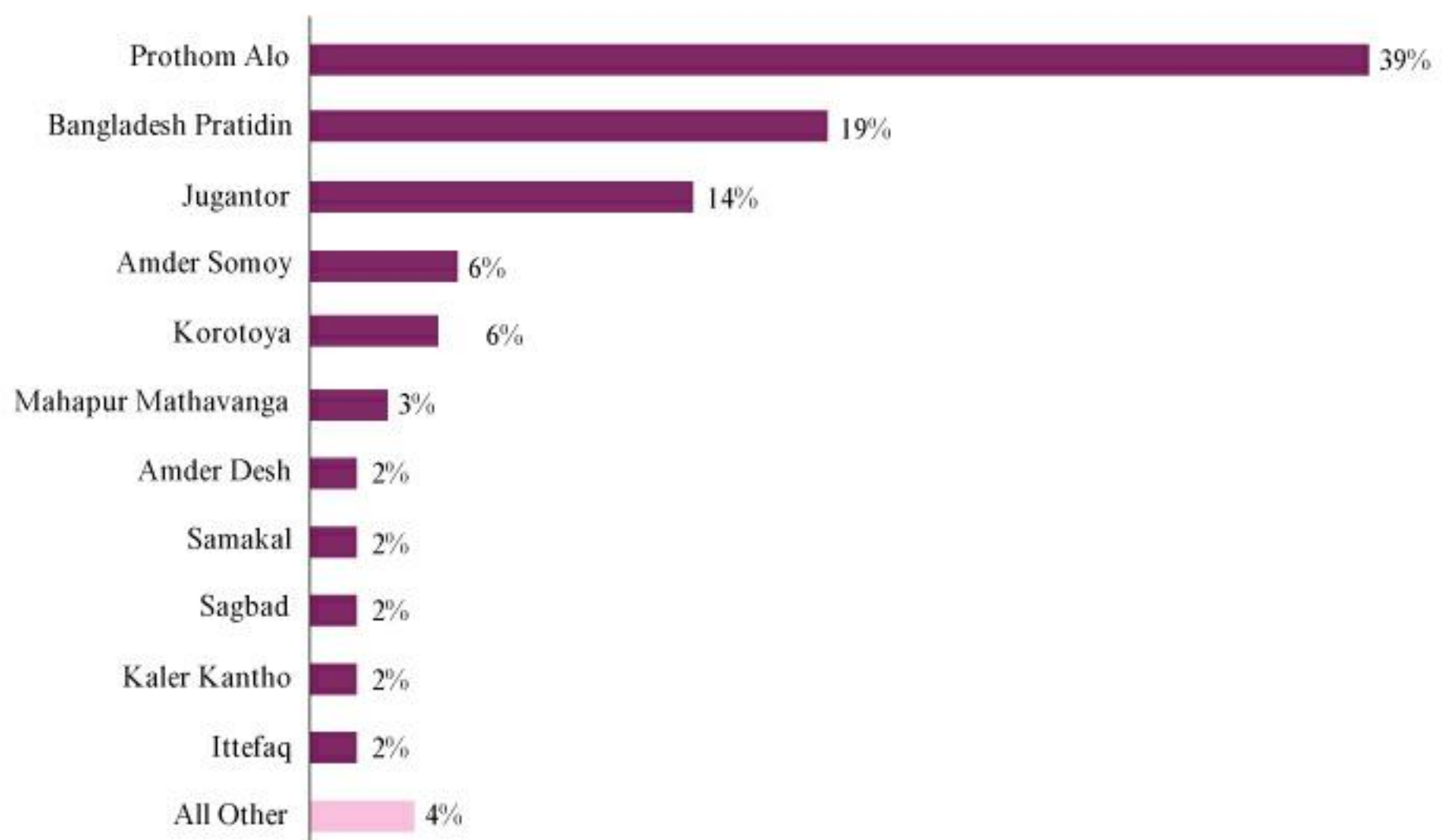


**Illustration 27: Most Trusted Online-Only News Provider  
by Daily Online News User, Unaided (n = 467)**



Among daily newspaper users, twenty-seven different newspapers were mentioned as most trusted, with only five receiving more than 5% of the mentions and those receiving over 1% of mentions representing another seven papers. Prothom Alo was chosen as the most trusted newspaper source by 39% of respondents, twenty percentage points more than the second most mentioned newspaper, Bangladesh Pratidin.

**Illustration 28: Most Trusted Newspaper by Daily Newspaper User, Unaided (n = 261)**

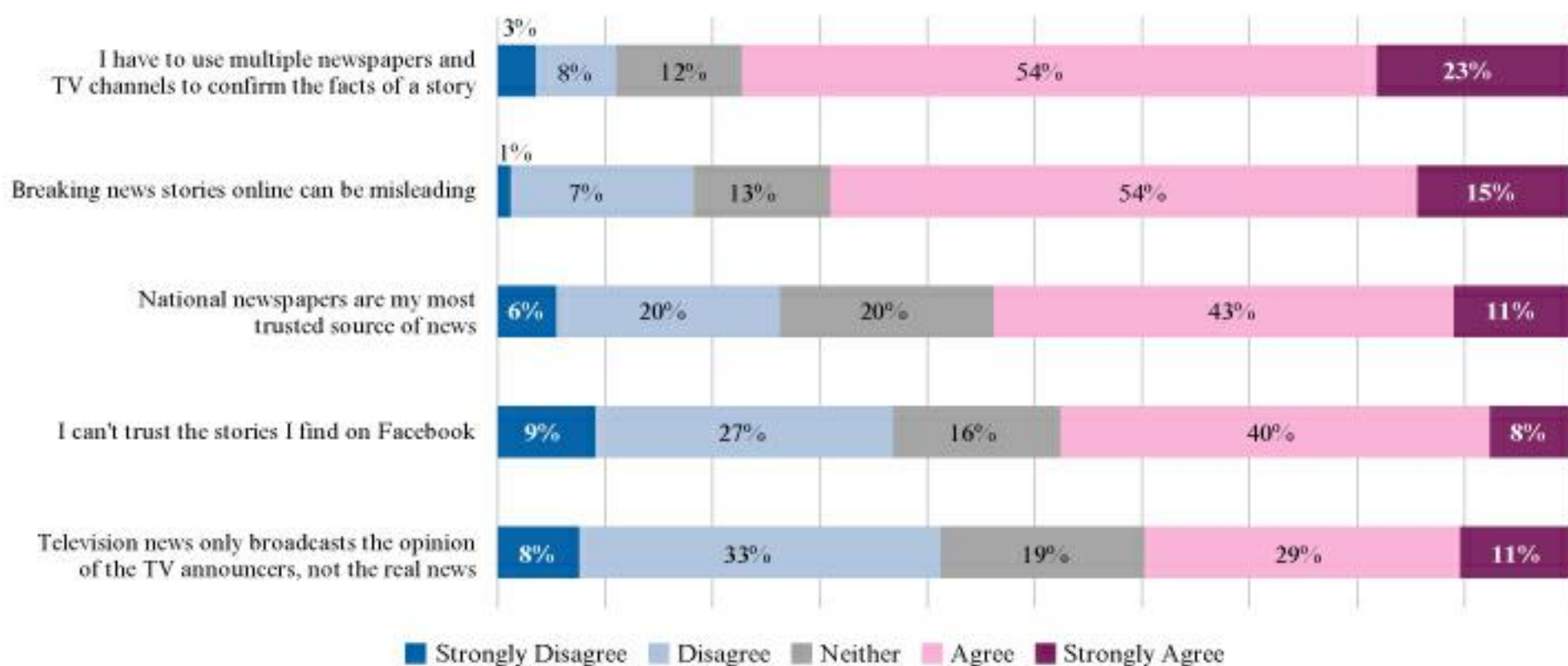


**News Audience Attitudes towards Media Trust:** In order to understand news audience attitudes to media trust, the research evaluated agreement with twenty different attitudinal statements focused on four different dimensions of media trust:

- Attitudes towards types of media
- Attitudes towards particular news features
- Attitudes towards different types of news media
- Personal Attitudes towards the news

Looking at attitudinal statements related to specific media channels, respondents strongly agreed with the need to use multiple television and newspaper outlets to confirm the facts of a news story. This statement, which received the highest level of agreement of all twenty attitude statements, was consistent with the research's focus group findings and as well as the heavy media usage described above in the quantitative research.

**Illustration 29: Percent Agreement with Attitudinal Statements towards Types of Media (n = 1176)**



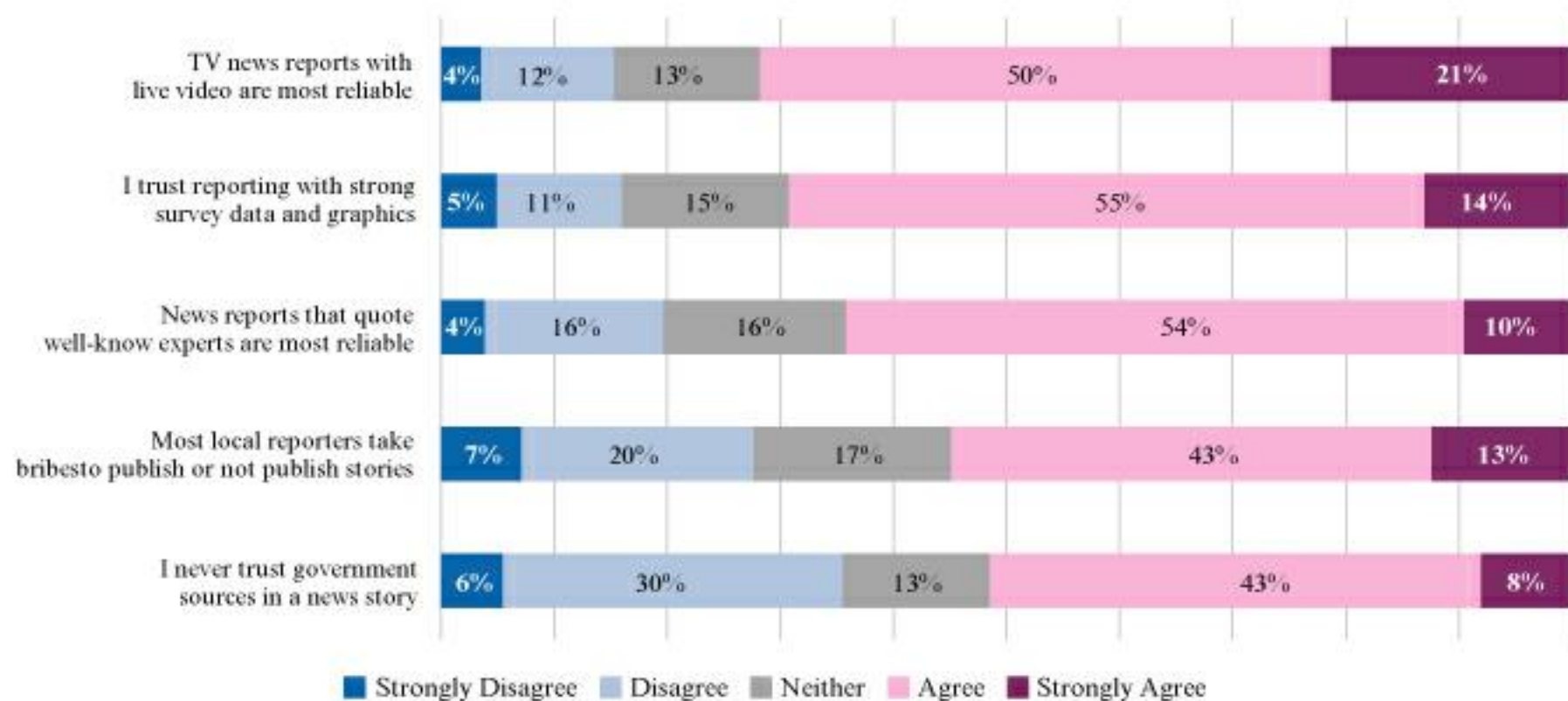
There were some slight demographic differences by age and educational experience that mostly reflected media behaviour. Respondents with higher levels of education who are more likely to turn to national newspapers for their news were also more likely to agree with the statement, "National newspapers are my most trusted source of news". Younger respondents under 25 years of age who are more familiar with Facebook were slightly more likely to agree with the statement "I can't trust the stories I find on Facebook". This leads to a potential hypothesis that the more familiar a segment is with Facebook, the less likely they are to trust Facebook's stories.

Attitudes towards particular features of news reporting tended to see strong agreement with the ability of live video to deliver the facts of a story followed by data and infographics and trusted experts. This is very consistent with earlier FGD findings, and the high trust placed on



news beats (breaking news and news of natural disasters) that rely on live reporting. There was also surprisingly strong agreement with over 50% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements which questioned the trustworthiness of local news reporters and government sources. Demographic differences did not significantly contribute to different results for statements related to different news features.

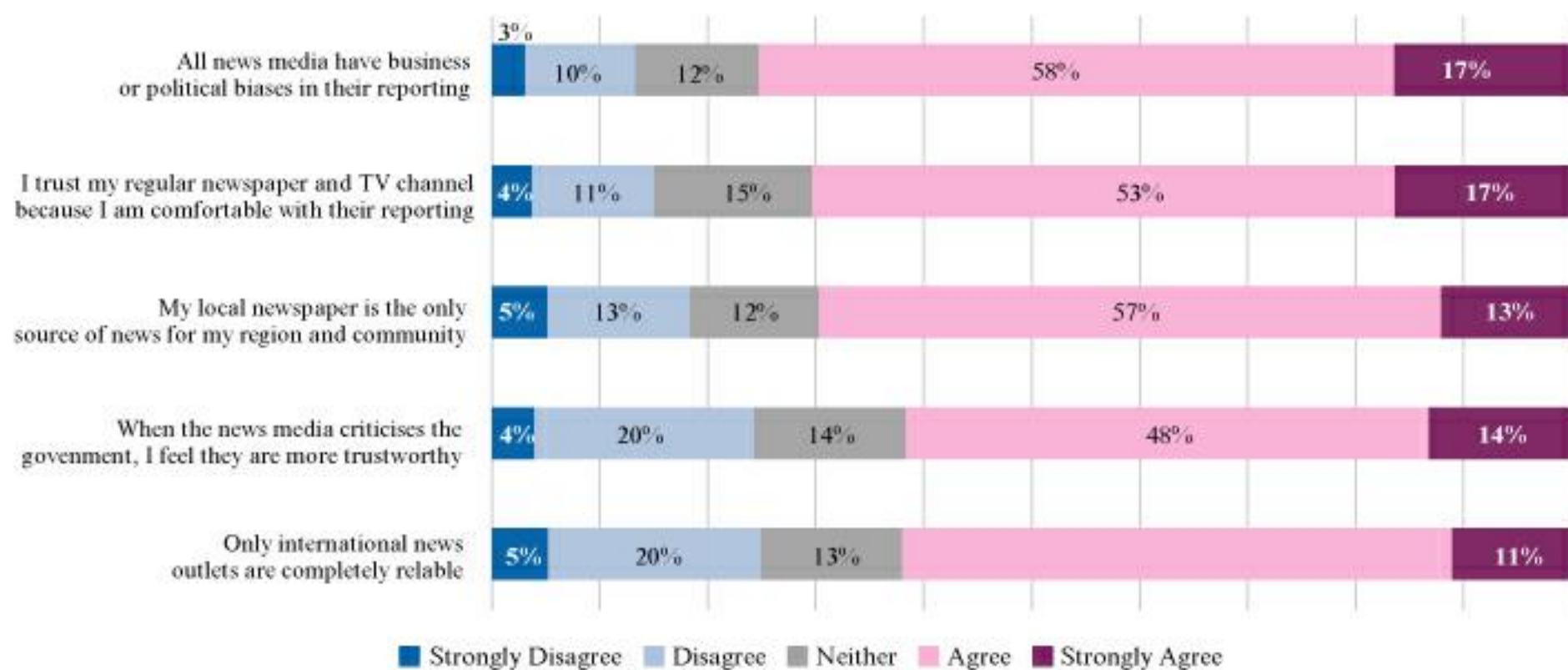
**Illustration 30: Percent Agreement with Attitudinal Statements towards News Features (n = 1176)**



Statements about news media outlets showed Bangladesh news consumers strongly in agreement that all news media have political biases in their reporting with over three quarters of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. At the same time over 70% of news users agreed that they trust their "regular" chosen news outlet, reflecting the role of tradition in creating trust even with the recognised political biases.

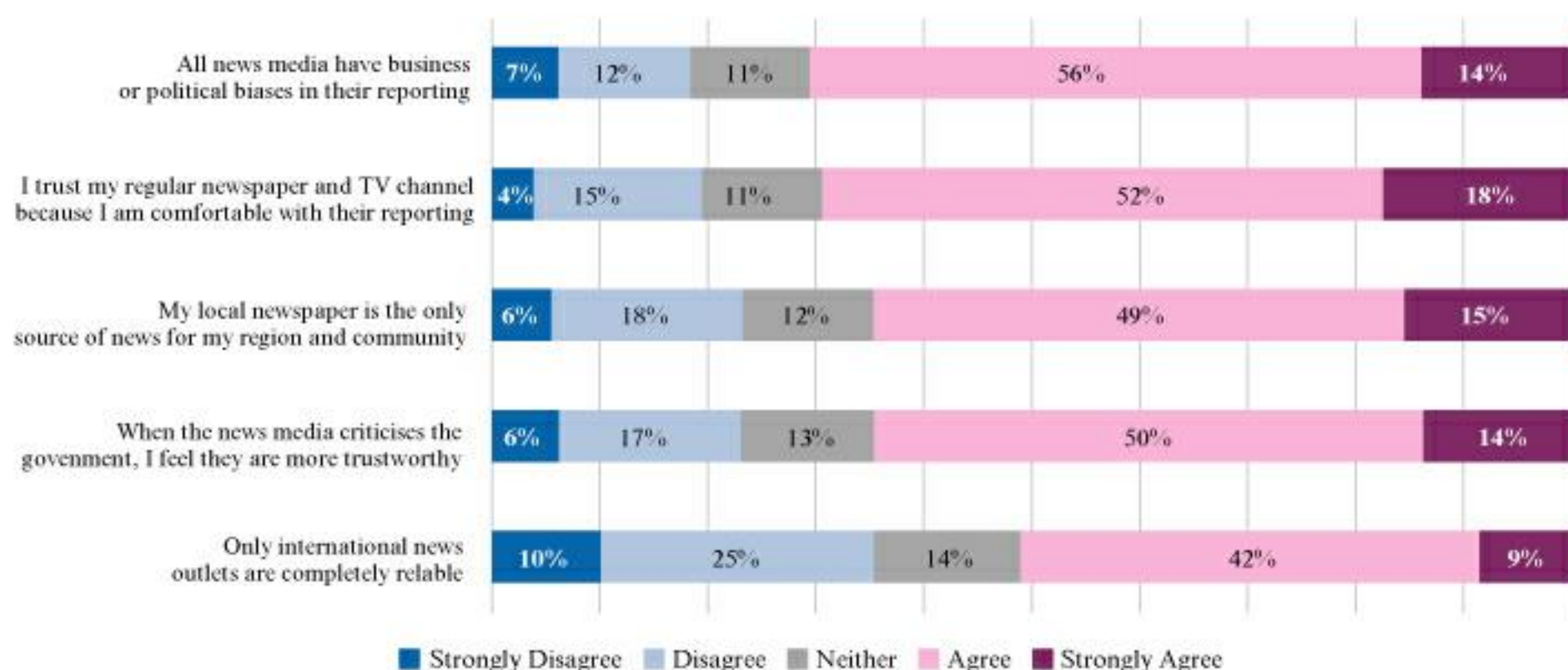
The role of the Bangladesh government in media reporting saw strongly polarised views. Most respondents (over 60%) agreed or strongly agreed that criticism of the government creates trust and credibility for news outlets and that international news outlets were generally more trustworthy. But simultaneously, a strong subset of respondents, approximately one in four, disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements. Demographic differences in responses were modest for these attitudes. Predominantly older respondents were slightly more likely to agree with statements that media that criticise government and international news media were more trustworthy.

**Illustration 31: Percent Agreement with Attitudinal Statements towards News Media Outlets (n = 1176)**



Personal attitudes towards the news were generally agreed to with more than 50% of all respondents agreeing to all statements. Respondents agreed with the news media's role in supplying diverse points of view and the need to explain their reporting. Respondents also agreed with the role of shared points of view in generating trust among news users.

**Illustration 32: Percent Agreement with Personal Attitudinal Statements about the News (n = 1176)**

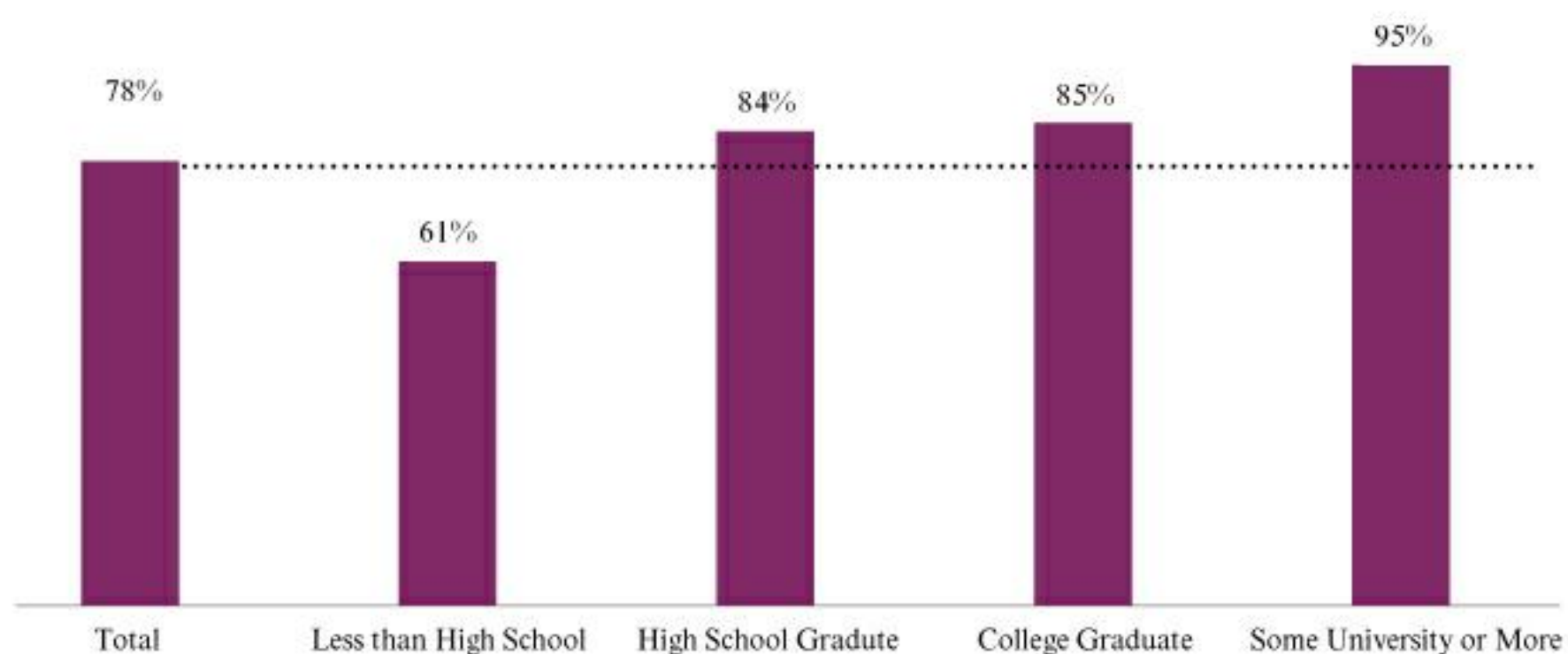




**Special Topics:** The research also explored three special topics related to media trust in Bangladesh. First, news users responded to questions about specific experiences of fake news and different potential reactions when experiencing fake news. Second, news users were asked about the influence of different external forces on the authenticity of a news article. Finally, the research asked specific questions about news consumers' understanding of the 2018 Digital Security Act and its implications.

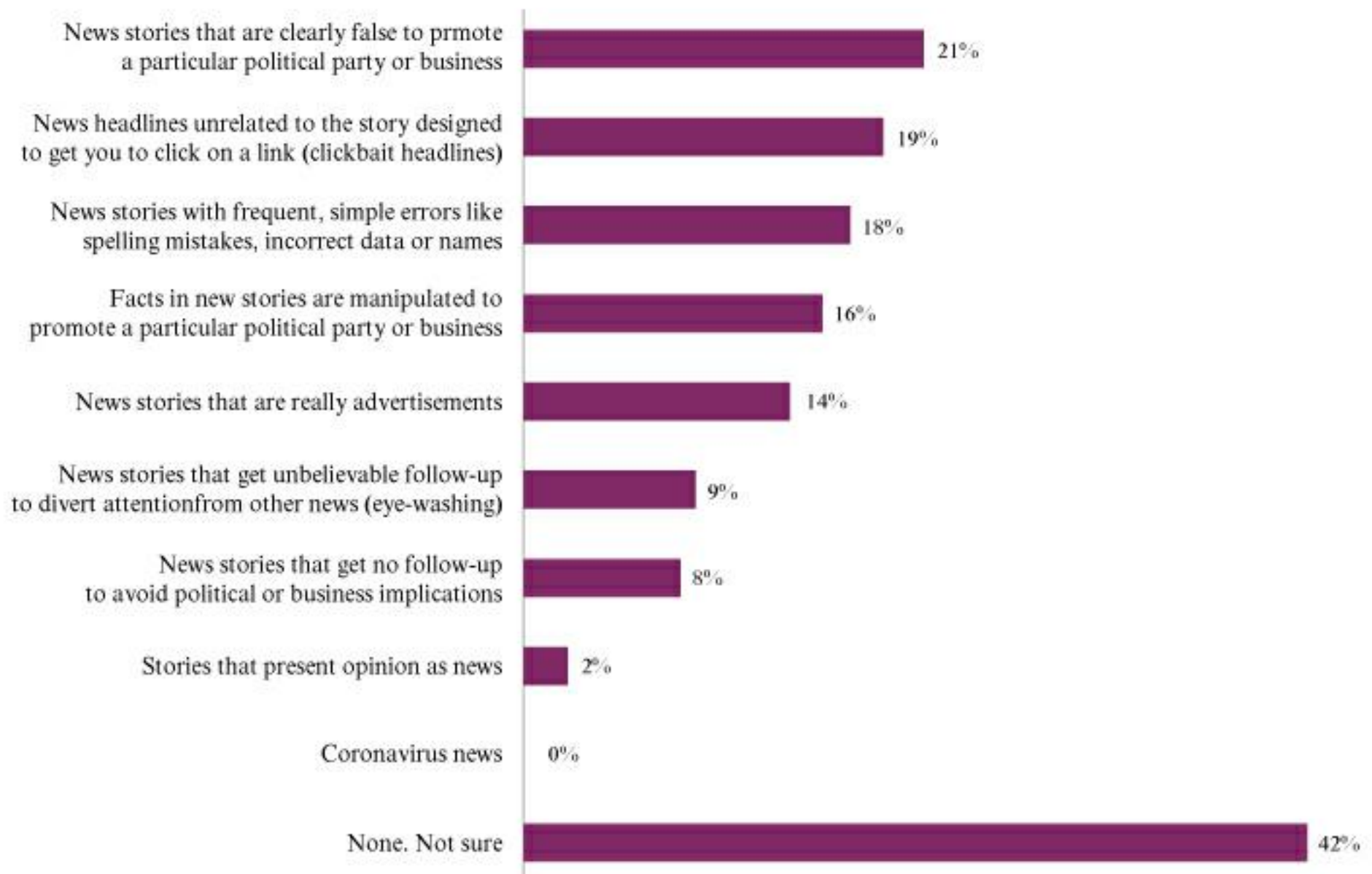
**Fake News Experience and Behaviour.** Over three quarters of news users are confident they can recognise "fake news" and have strategies for addressing it. Confidence was higher among those with some university or greater educational experience and lower among those without a high school diploma.

*Illustration 33: Percent Confident in Recognition of "Fake News" (n = 1176)*



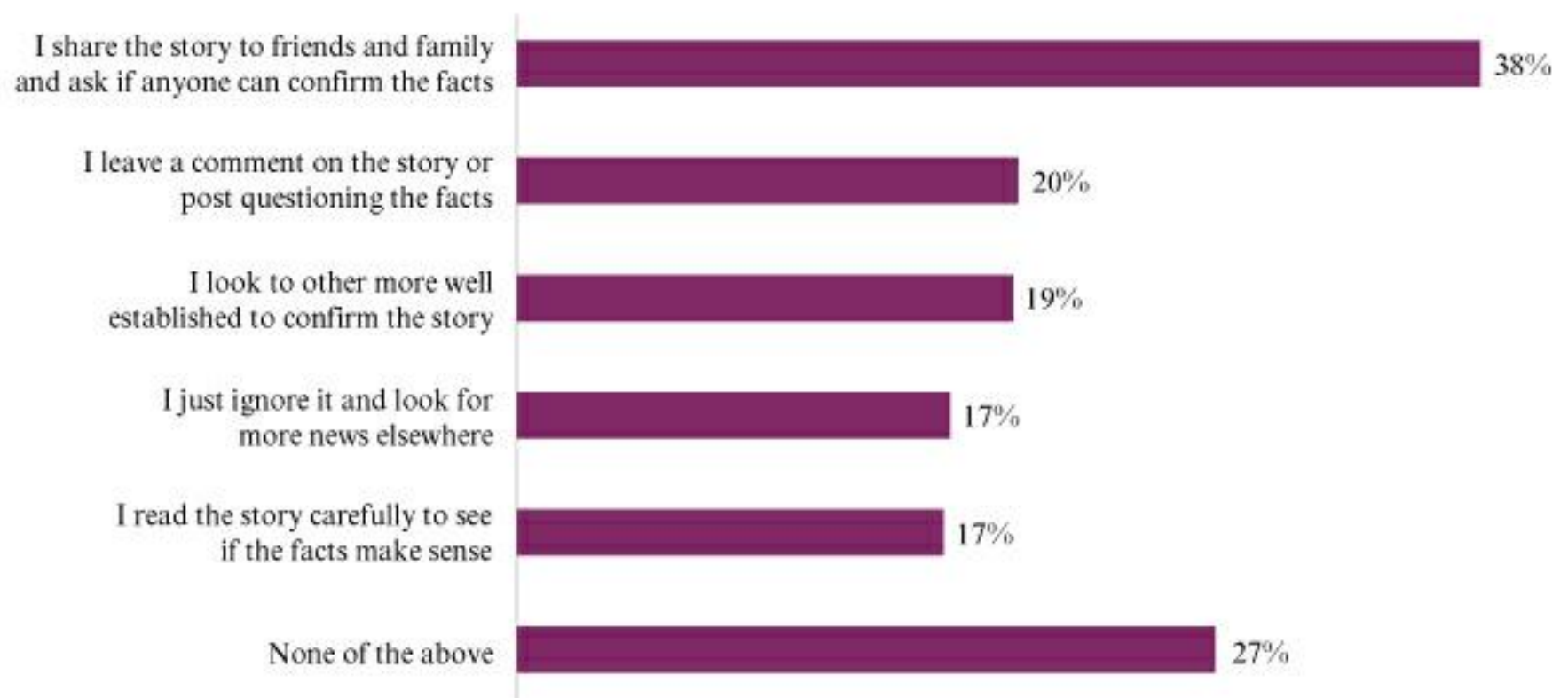
News users confident in their ability to recognise "fake news" experienced a variety of different types of "fake news" with over 60% experiencing "fake news" in the past month. News users with some university or higher educational experience were more likely to experience some fake news during the past month.

**Illustration 34: Of Confident Users, Percent Experiencing "Fake News" in Past Month (n = 922)**



The research also explored different strategies for addressing "fake news" based on the most common strategies raised in the pre-survey focus groups. Overall, sharing the news item with friends and family to confirm the facts was the most common strategy.

**Illustration 35: Of Confident Users, Percent Using Different "Fake News" Strategies (n = 922)**



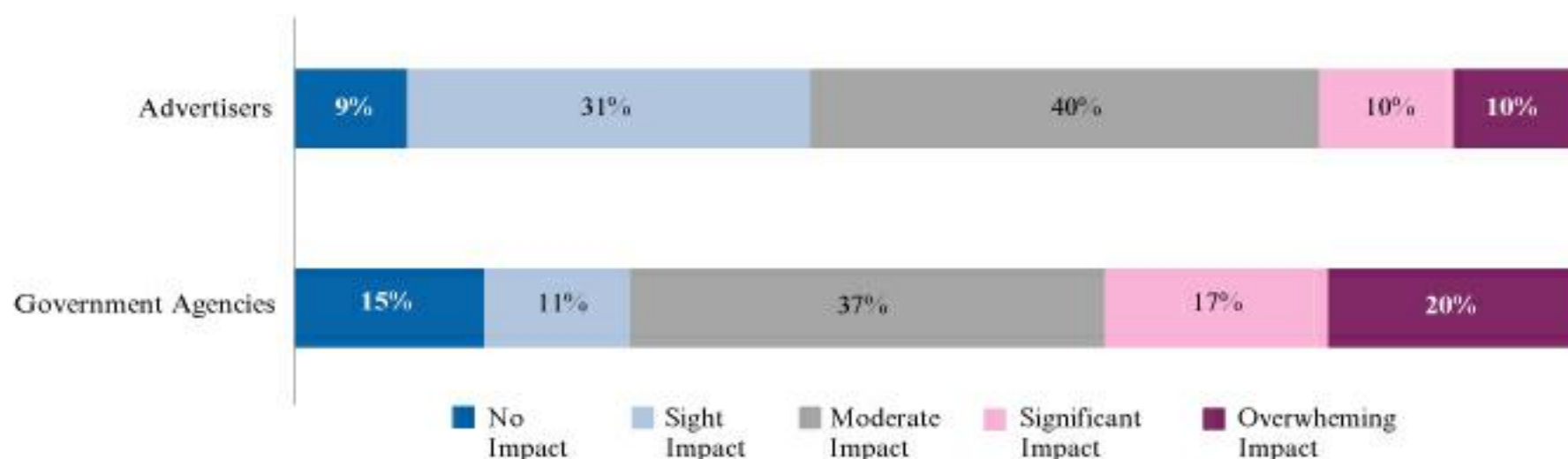


News users with some university experience or more were slightly more likely to share the story to confirm the facts with friends and family. These news users were also slightly more likely to rely on close reading of the story "to see if the facts make sense".

**Internal and External Factors Impacting the Believability of News Reporting:** The survey evaluated three factors which might impact the believability of news reporting. Factors external to the media outlet included the influence of government agencies and advertisers. Internal factors included the financial interests and political leanings of media professionals who work within media organisations. Similar to responses about the role of bias in media, most respondents expected some both internal and external factors to impact the believability of news reporting. On the whole respondents were much more likely to expect internal factors to impact the believability of news reporting. Demographically, individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to have a more critical view of the role of external and internal influences.

Among external factors, Bangladesh government agencies were considered the most likely to impact the believability of news reporting. More than one in three people expect government agencies to exert either significant or overwhelming impact on the believability of news reporting. Approximately one in four respondents expected government agencies to have little or no impact. Finally, another one in three respondents expected government agencies to exert a moderate impact on news reporting. Bangladeshi news consumers were less likely to see the impact of advertisers or commercial interests on news reporting. Forty percent of respondents expected slight to no impact. Only one in five respondents expected advertisers to exert a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting.

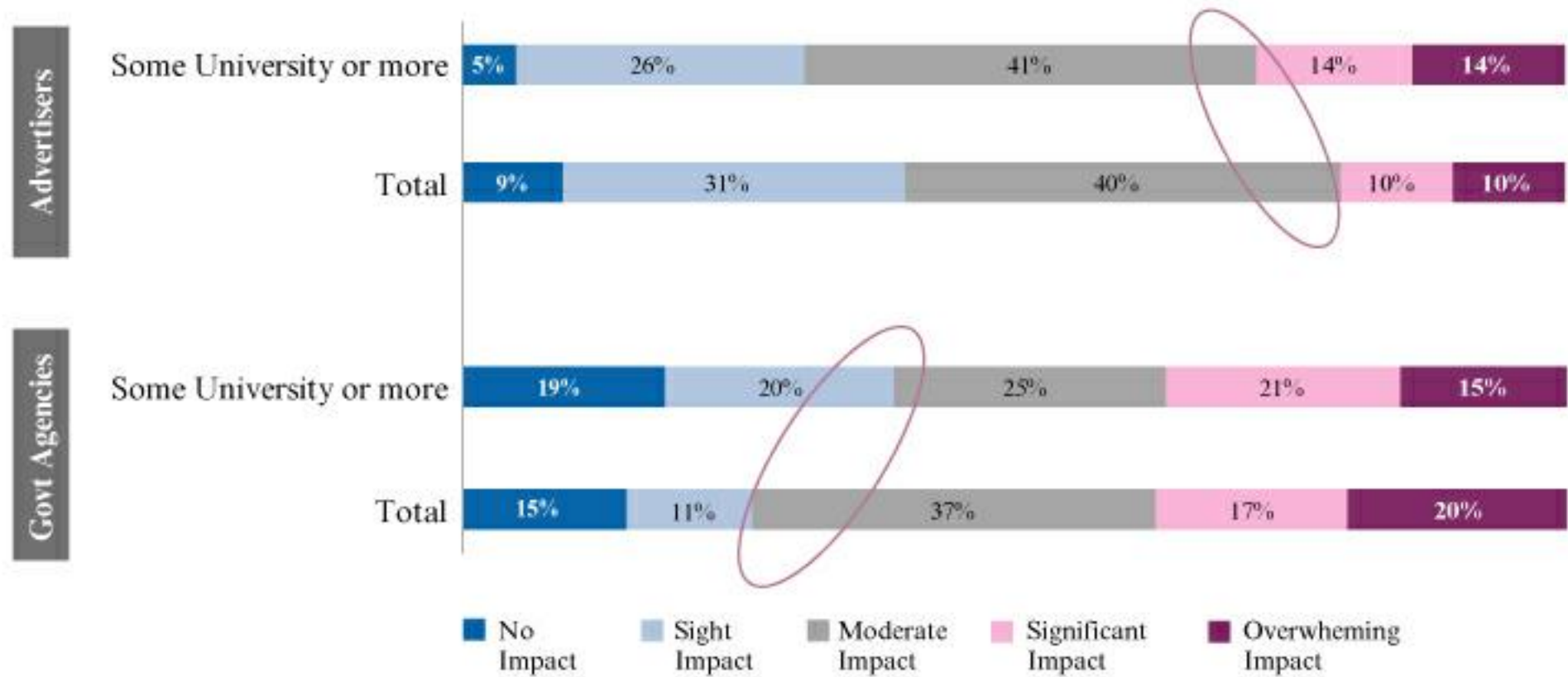
***Illustration 36: Percent Impact for External Influences (n = 1176)***



Demographically, respondents with higher levels of education were slightly more likely than the entire population to expect advertisers to have a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting. Conversely, these same highly educated respondents were more likely to expect government agencies to have slight or no impact on the believability of news reporting.

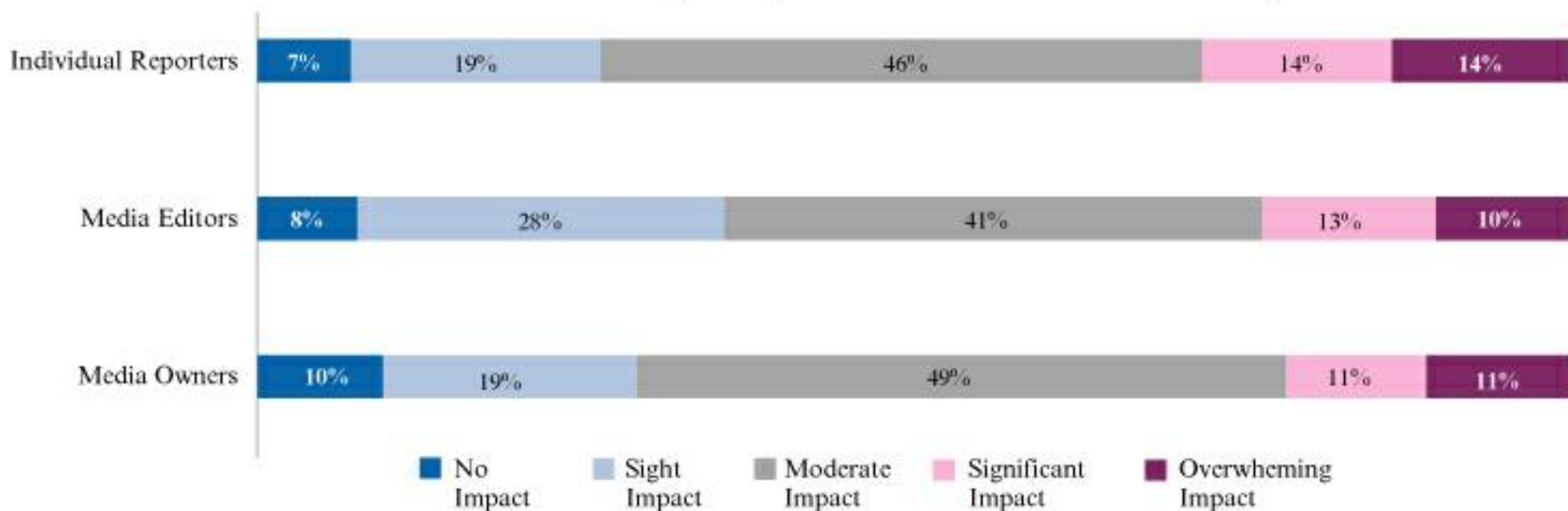


**Illustration 37: Percent Impact for External Influences, Higher Education vs Total**



Overall respondents found that the financial interests of media professionals - reporters, editors and media owners had at best a moderate impact on news reporting. Between 40% and 50% of respondents expected the financial interests of media professionals to have an impact on news reporting. Between one quarter and one half of respondents saw slight to no impact of the financial interests of media professionals. Less than 30% of respondents expected financial interests to have a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting.

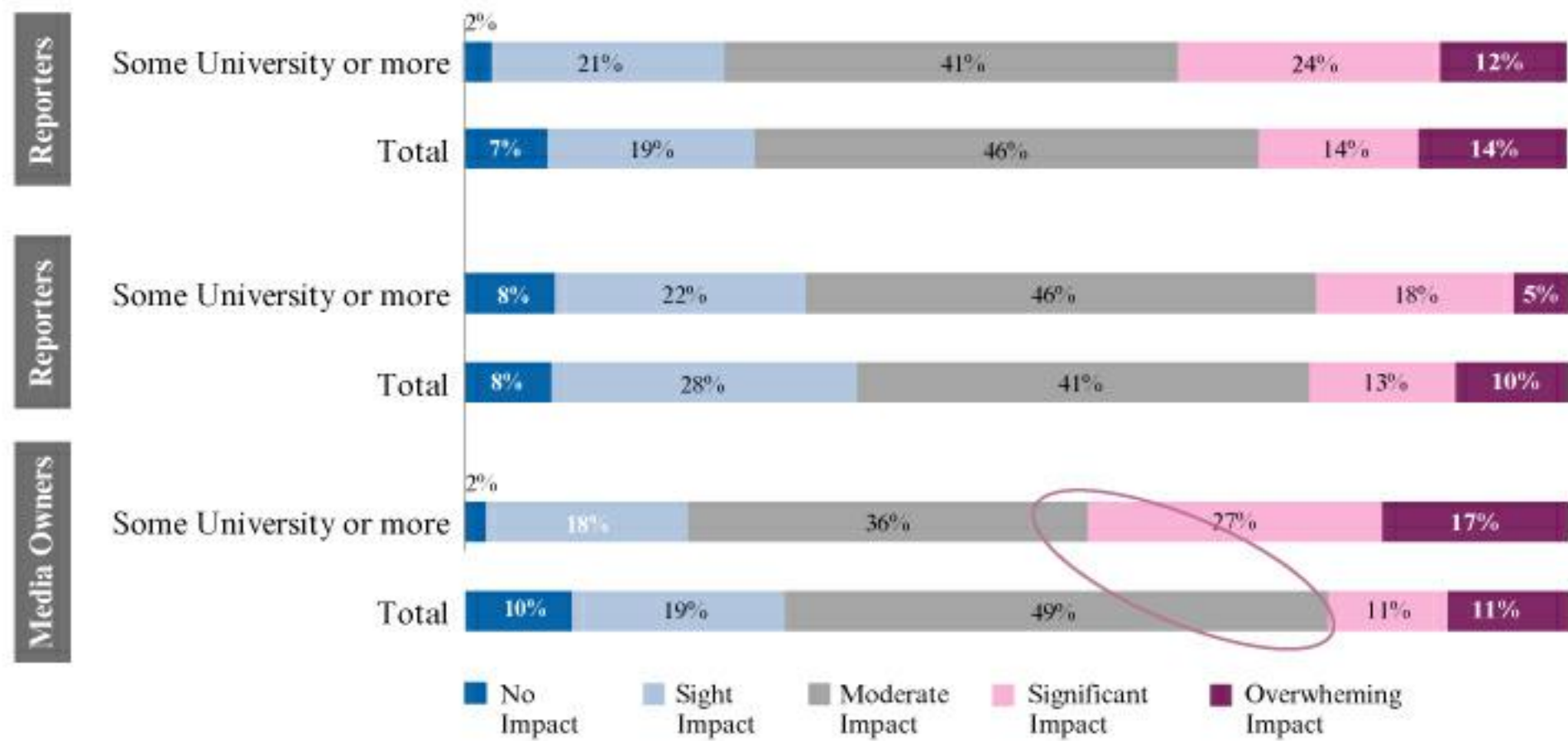
**Illustration 38: Percent Impact of Internal Financial Interests of ...**



Demographically, age had little impact on the perceived impact of internal financial influences. But over 40% of respondents with greater educational experience expected the financial interests of media owners to have a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting, significantly higher than the overall population.

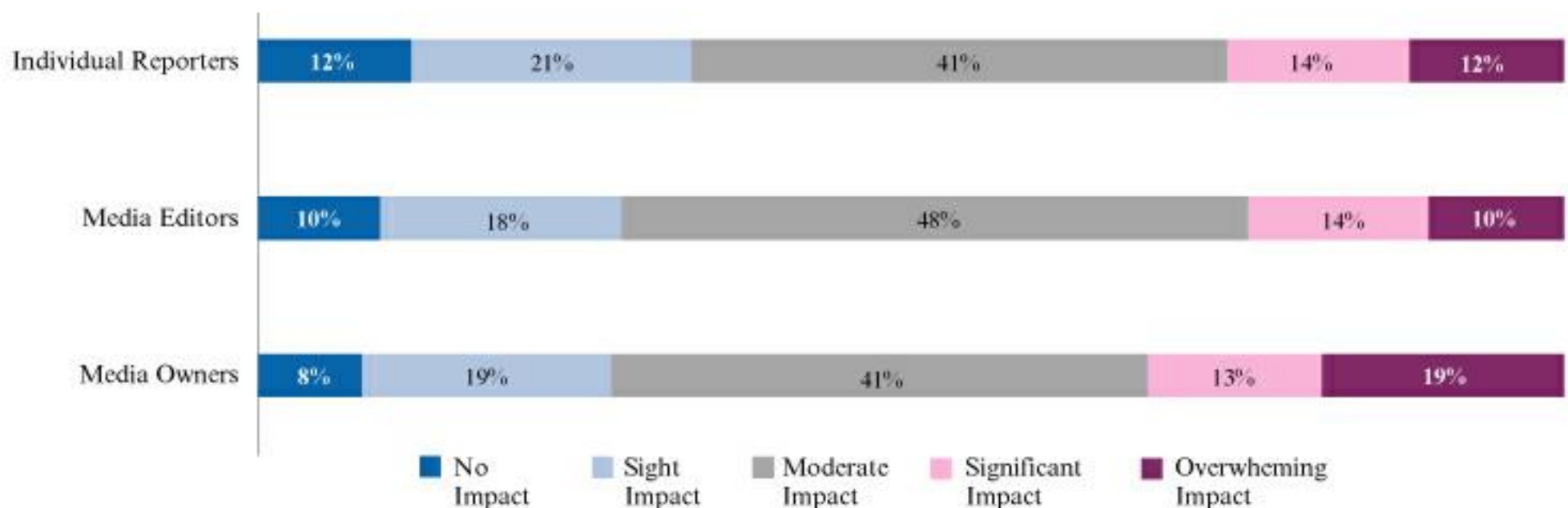


**Illustration 39: Percent Impact for Internal Financial Influences, Higher Education vs Total**



Similar to internal financial interests the internal political leanings of media professionals also were mostly considered moderate. Across all three types of political influence those who saw a large influence were approximately equal to those who saw no to little influence.

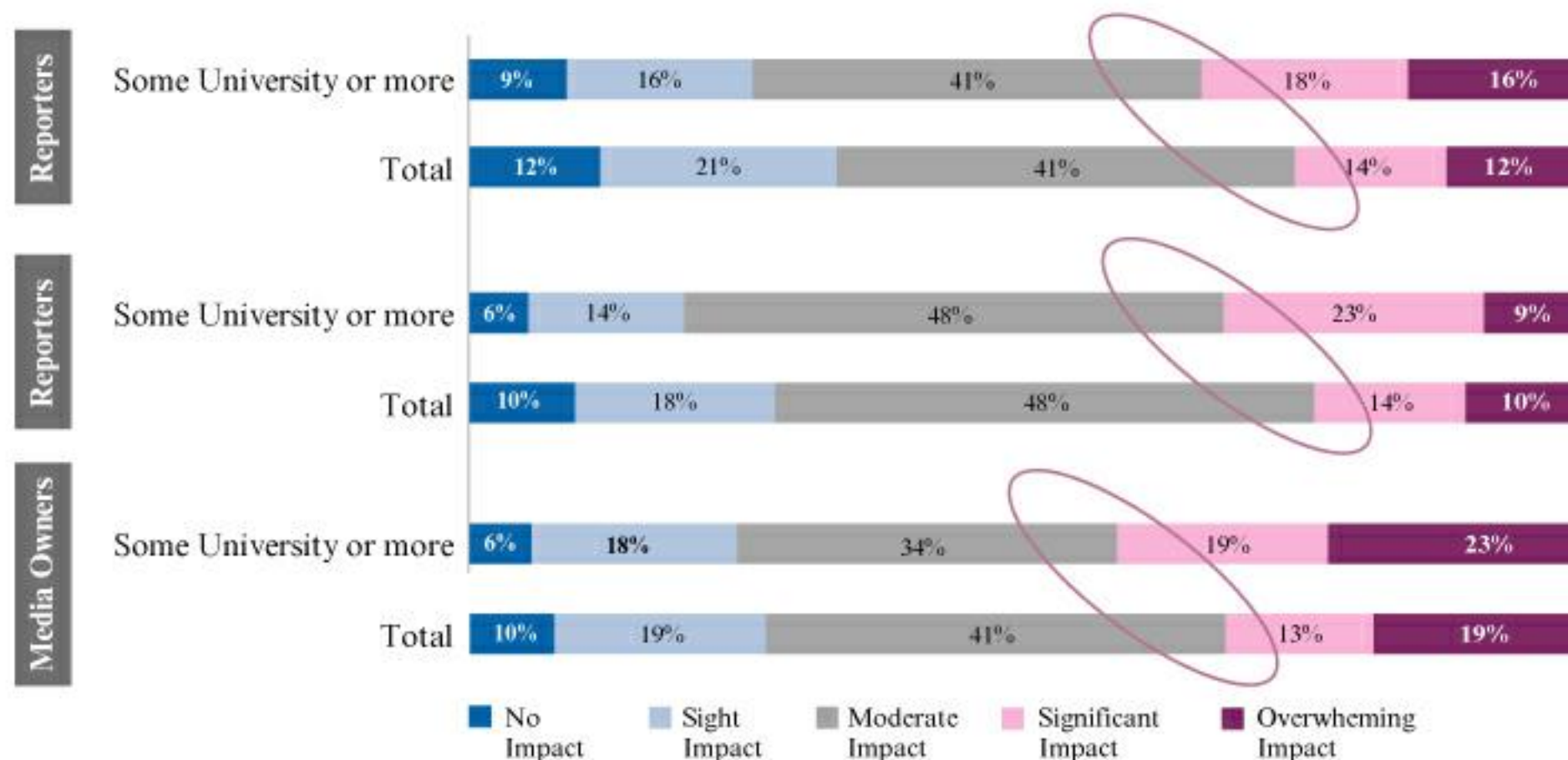
**Illustration 40: Percent Impact for Internal Political Interests of ...**



Demographically, age had little impact on the perception of impact of internal political leanings. Education, on the other hand, did have some impact on the perception of the impact of internal political leanings. Respondents with greater education experience were more likely to expect a greater impact of internal political leanings on news reporting at all levels. This was especially true of the impact of the political ideology of the media owners. Over 40% of those with higher education expect the politics of media owners to have a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting.



**Illustration 41: Percent Impact for Internal Political Influences, Higher Education vs Total**

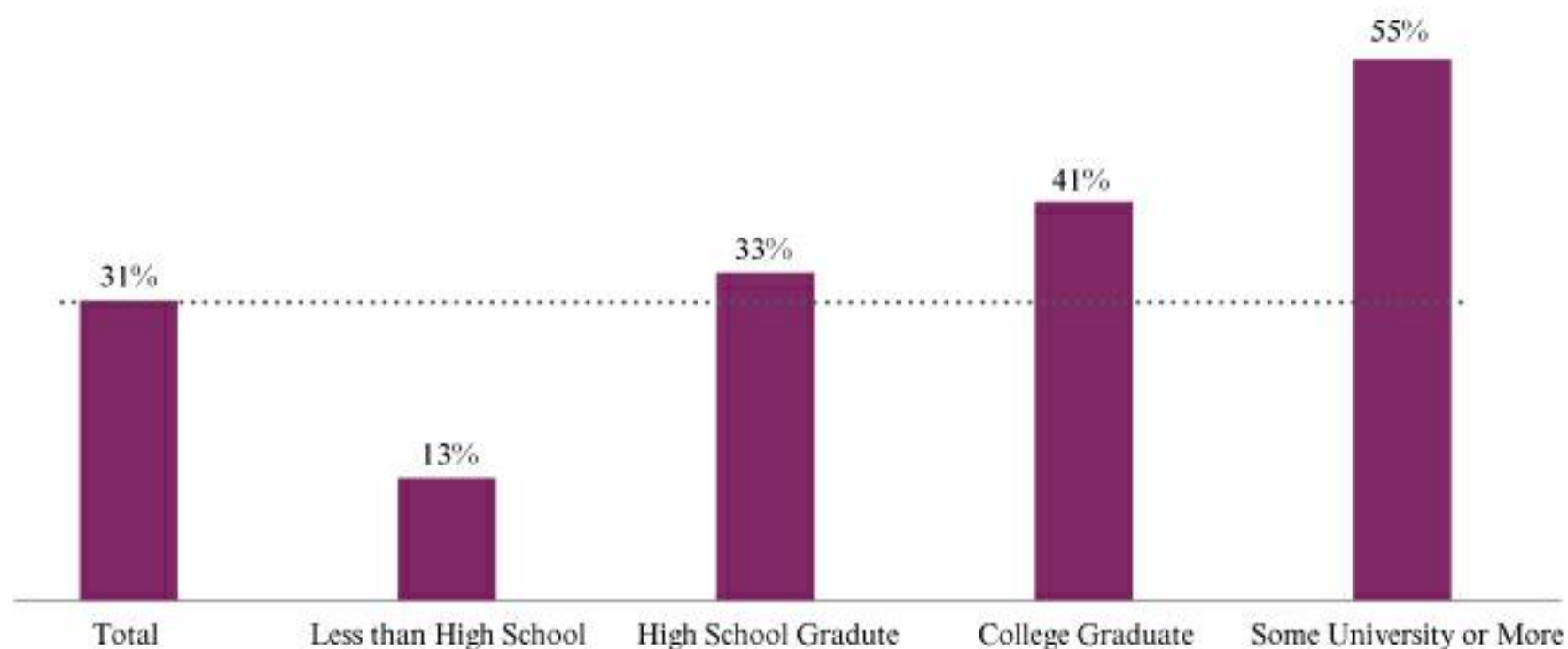


As a whole Bangladesh news consumers expect both internal and external factors to have an impact on the believability of news reporting. Among external factors over one third of respondents saw the potential for government agencies to exert either a significant or overwhelming impact on the believability of news reporting, significantly higher than the expectation for the impact of advertisers. Among internal factors, between a quarter and a third of all respondents considered political ideology to be a significant or overwhelming factor in news reporting. Among the most educated of the respondents, over 40% saw the financial and political interests of media owners to be a significant or overwhelming impact on news reporting, significantly higher than other internal and external influences.

2018 Digital Security Act (DSA). As we have seen above, the Reuters Institute's research found that news consumers internationally do not tend to have a great understanding of the factors that influence the creation of trustworthy and credible news reporting. Bangladeshi news consumers appear to be no different, with most consumers unable to answer more than a handful of questions about how the news is made and published. Consequently, a topic like the Digital Security Act which news reporters and editors see as a critical factor in undermining their ability to report the news has only a modest recognition among Bangladesh news consumers. In fact, most respondents (69%) were unaware of the DSA. This awareness did vary with the respondents' level of education. Those with less than a high school degree were much less aware than the average while those with some university experience were significantly more aware. Over half (55%) of respondents with some university experiences were aware of the DSA.



**Illustration 42: Percent Aware of the Digital Security Act (n = 1176)**

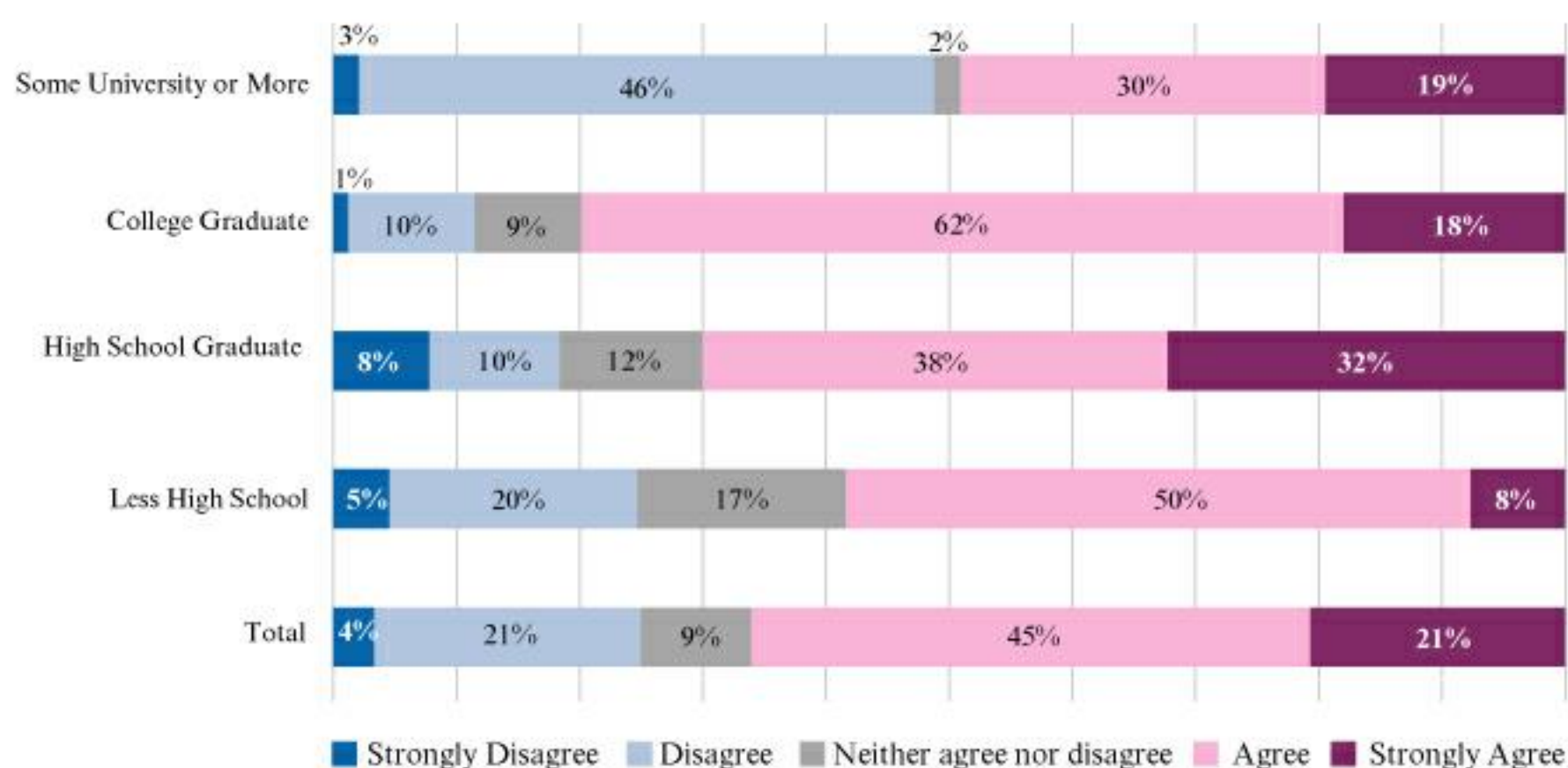


To understand more specifics on the news users' understanding of DSA and its impact on digital news and information. The survey asked those respondents aware of DSA (364 respondents) a series of attitudinal questions to understand the level of agreement or disagreement.

Demographically, educational experience had the most significant impact on respondents' understanding of DSA. Consequently, for each of the five DSA statements, results are presented below in total and by educational segment.

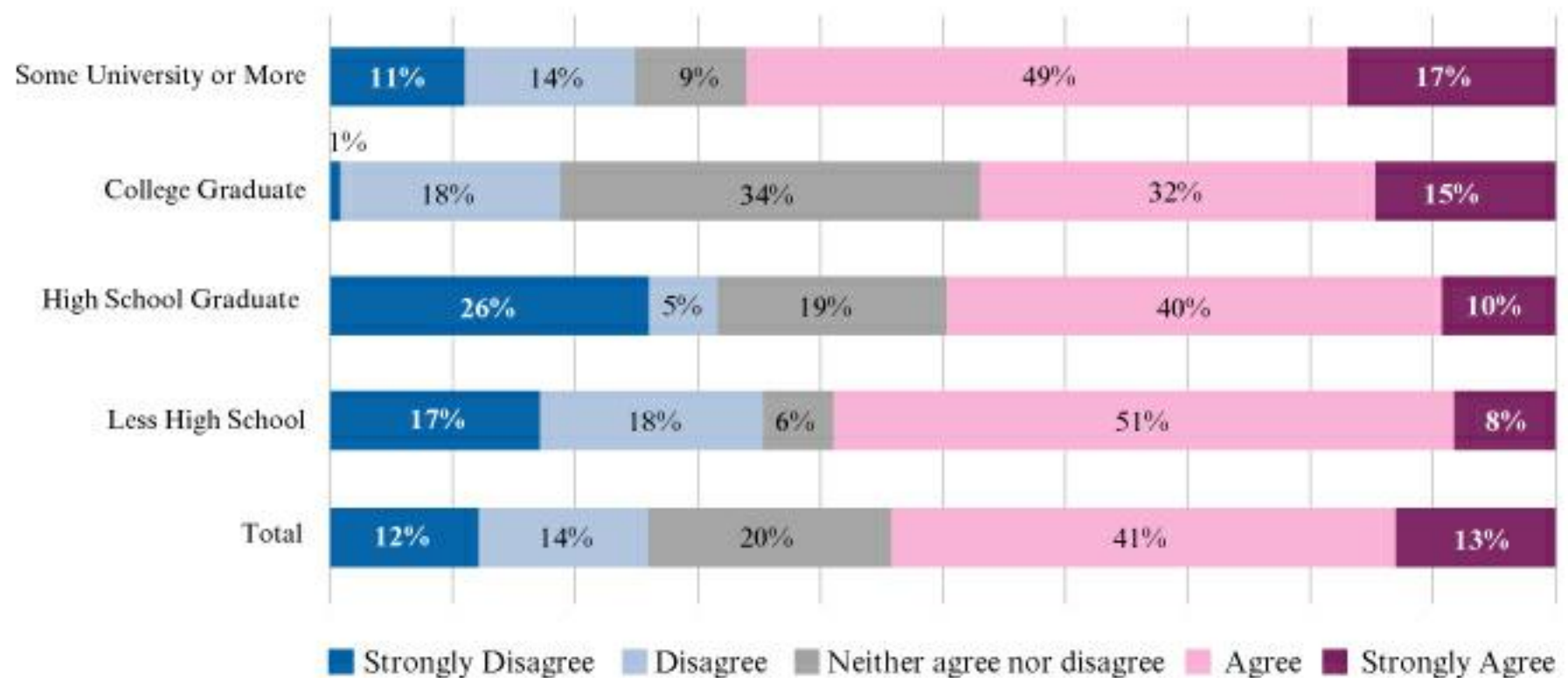
Of those aware of DSA, over two-thirds agree that DSA has made Bangladesh media stronger while one quarter disagreed with the statement. Respondents with higher educational experience were approximately twice as likely to disagree with the statement.

**Illustration 43: Percent Agreement with the Statement "DSA has made Bangladesh media stronger" (n = 364)**



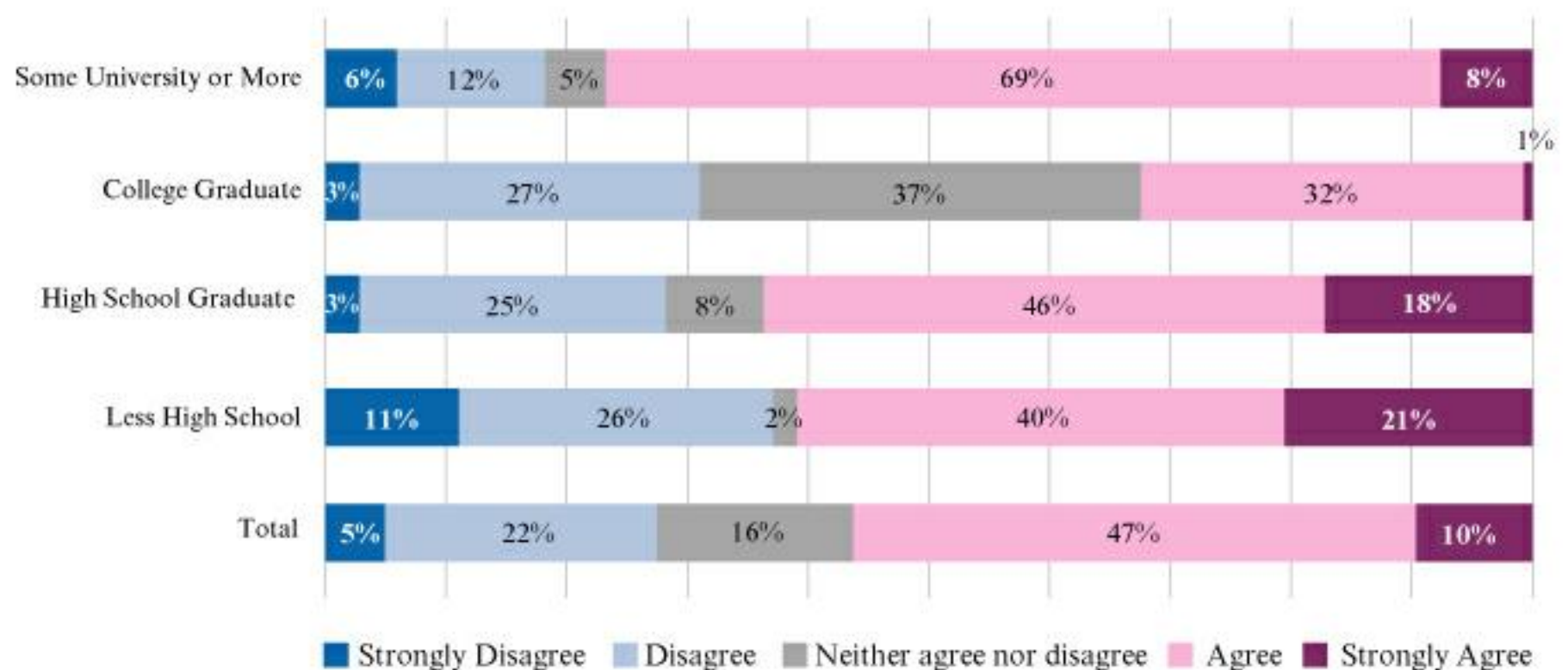
Over half of those aware of DSA agree or strongly agree that it has significantly reduced the amount of fake news. Those with higher educational experience were somewhat more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement. High school graduates and those with less than a high school education were conversely more likely to disagree with the impact of DSA on the amount of fake news.

**Illustration 44: Percent Agreement with the Statement "DSA has significantly reduced the amount of fake or unreliable news on digital platforms." (n = 364)**



Slightly more than fifty percent of DSA aware respondents (57%) agreed that online news outlets do not accurately report the news to avoid breaking DSA rules. Those with higher levels of education were even stronger in their agreement with over three quarters agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

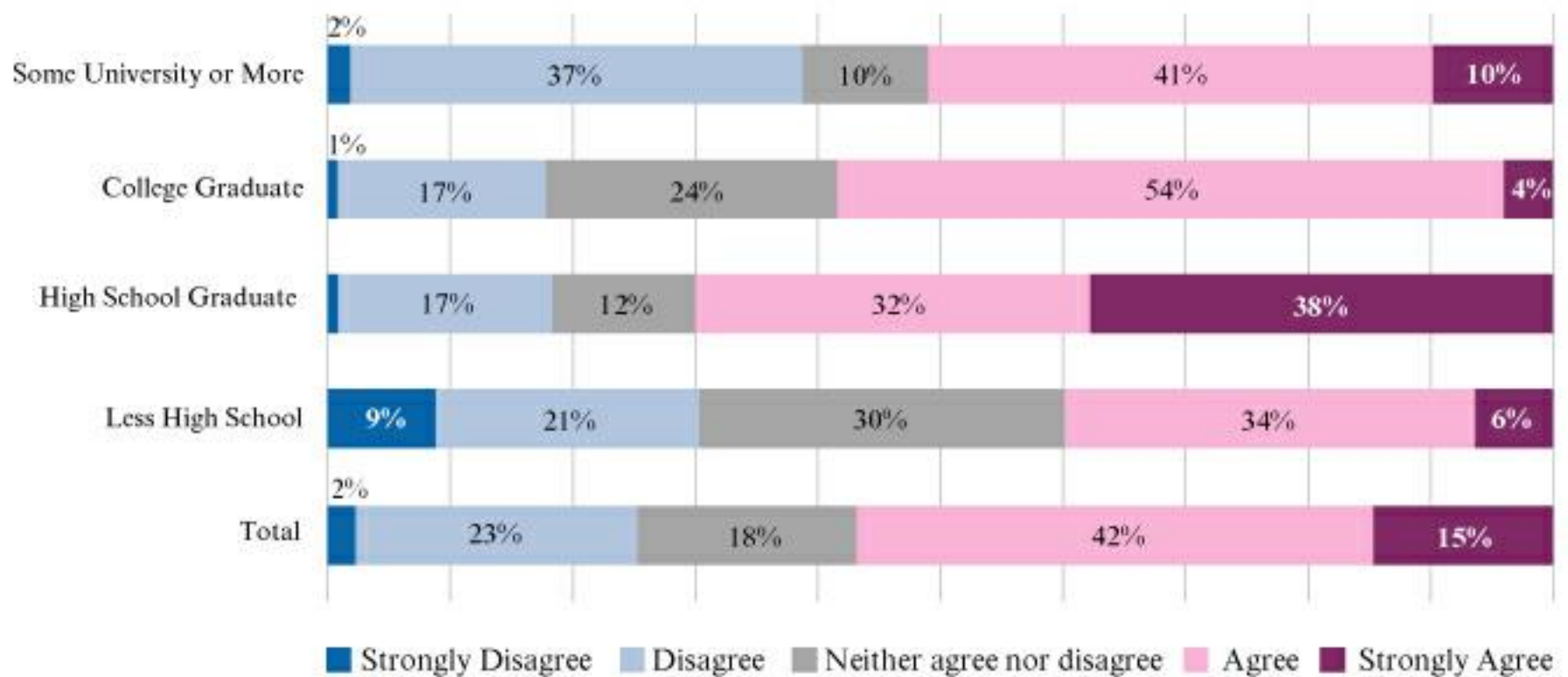
**Illustration 45: Percent Agreement with the Statement "Online news outlets do not accurately report the news to avoid breaking DSA rules" (n = 364)**





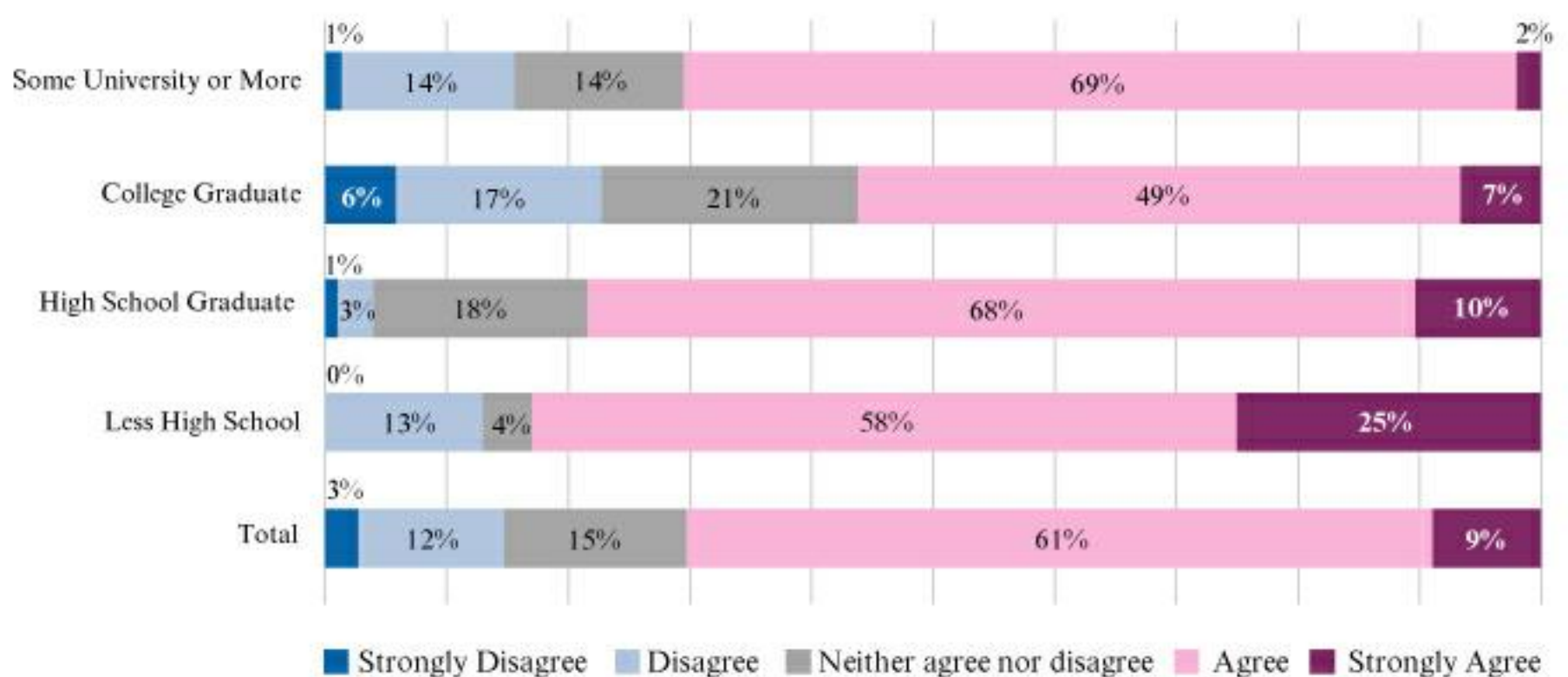
Over half of DSA aware respondents agree or strongly agree that the law is only related to reporting on government policies. Looking at differences in educational experience, only high school graduates were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement.

**Illustration 46: Percent Agreement with the Statement "DSA only protects stories related to government policies." (n = 364)**



Over half of DSA aware respondents agree or strongly agree that reporters feel the greatest impact from the law. Looking at differences in educational experience, only high graduates were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement.

**Illustration 47: Percent Agreement with the Statement "Reporters feel the most impact from DSA." (n = 364)**



Bangladesh news consumers are mostly unaware of DSA and its impact on news reporting. As we have seen, news consumers globally are less concerned with the mechanics of how the news is produced. In Bangladesh this appears to include the potential impact of DSA on news reporting. Among the 31% of news users who are aware of the news, their opinion on the efficacy of the law may be at first surprising. Most (66%) found that DSA had made Bangladeshi media stronger. Many see the role of government as beneficial. If we return to the overall public opinion scores for "job approval", government agencies were the only public institutions to see a significant improvement in the public's opinion of their performance in recent years. News consumers' attitudes toward the DSA likely reflect a halo effect of government performance rather than a detailed understanding of the law or its impact on the quality of news reporting.

Many news users who are aware of DSA see a need for more control over "fake news" on the internet and believe that government policy and regulation can contribute to an improvement. At the same time, these DSA-aware news users also see the potential for DSA to impact how news media and news reporters report the news. Among the more educated, awareness of DSA and its impact was much higher at 55%. These more educated and media savvy news consumers were much less likely to see a benefit in DSA and much more sensitive to the impact on news reporting and individual news reporters. In summary, most news consumers are unaware of DSA. Those who are aware see the potential for government policy and regulation to improve the fake news situation online. But among the most news savvy consumers, those with higher levels of education, they also recognise that there is a cost to the quality of news reporting and the impact on news reporters.





# Findings

## **Media Usage and Fake News Behaviour**

Overall media usage in Bangladesh is similar to many developing countries. Television is the dominant news provider, followed increasingly by online sources and finally newspapers. Radio which plays an important role in some regional markets, such as Nepal, is not a factor in Bangladesh. But this news media mix is steadily changing, shifting toward more digital sources, especially among younger, more educated news consumers. There is some evidence that the shift to online sources has accelerated during the pandemic.

## **Main Source of News, Total Respondents**

Within this news media mix, Bangladeshi news consumers consider themselves both regular recipients of "fake news" and well prepared to determine what is credible and what is not. Over three quarters of news users were confident in their ability to recognize and deal with "fake news" items. Almost half of the news users in the survey felt they had experienced an example of "fake news" in the month prior to the survey, April 2021. Focus groups with news consumers in this same period also suggested that the amount of "fake news" has increased in part due to the pandemic. In quantitative and qualitative findings Bangladeshi news consumers relied on two tools to verify the news. First, news consumers confronted with doubts about a news item might share the item with friends, family or colleagues who were closer to the news in question. Second, news consumers have developed a set of cross verification habits with other media to look for consistency in news reporting. When cross verifying a news report, two media outlets stood out as "news outlets of record": Prothom Alo for newspapers and Somoy TV for television broadcasts. When in doubt, consumers cite checking these for verification.

## **Media Trust**

The research looked at media trust first as it relates to type of news coverage. In focus group participants had indicated that all news was suspect. The quantitative research showed just how much doubt news consumers had about different types of news. Across the ten types of



news surveyed, respondents uniformly found all types most likely to be only "somewhat trustworthy", the middle point on a five-point scale. News consumers tended to find news that lends itself to live video presentation, such as "news on natural disasters", breaking news, and sports news more trustworthy than other types. News associated with local reporting tended to fare less well. News users found local news, agricultural news, and news on market prices to be less trustworthy. Rural news users who accounted for 76% of respondents tended to find most news categories marginally less trustworthy than their urban peers and these three "local" categories were found to be much less trustworthy.

Focus groups had alerted the research to the important role that video news, especially live broadcasting plays in building trust and credibility. Over seventy percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "TV news reports with live video are most reliable". Other news reporting techniques that respondents agreed contributed to news credibility included expert contributors, surveys and infographics, transparency around reporting methods and balanced points of view.

The situation with local news outlets was also foreshadowed strongly in the focus groups. In these groups the proliferation of low-quality local news outlets - websites, social media pages and newspapers - has caused news consumers to be especially doubtful of local news reporting and reporters. Asked to agree or disagree with the statement that most local reporters take bribes related to reporting, over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Bangladesh's complex local news market serves over three quarters of the country's news consumers. The challenging economics of local news media, the increase in print and online local news outlets, the low level of local reporting skills and the low pay for news reporting in local markets all contribute to the low quality of local news reporting and the resulting low levels of trust held by local news consumers. Given the tendency of rural news users to rate all types of news less trustworthy than their urban peers, the lack of trust created by the local market situation appears to have bled over into news users' opinions of all news.

The research also looked at media trust as it relates to individual news brands. In this case, the role of news providers of record stood out. Among the dozens of television news providers cited in the survey, Somoy TV stood out as the most trusted, likely related to the channel's strong use of live feeds in their news reporting. Among newspaper readers, Prothom Alo stood out. Both institutions were also regularly cited by focus group users as places they used to verify questionable reporting. Online only news portals presented a more complicated situation. BDNews24.com was cited as the most trustworthy among a long list of other online only providers that included Facebook pages of well-known online commentators among many other sources.

### **Internal and External Influences on Media Credibility**

Bangladesh news consumers have decades of experience with corporate or government ownership/control of news media. The research looked at external and internal influences and the role news users expect that they play in news reporting. Over one in four news users saw



the government's impact on news reporting to be either overwhelming or significant, substantially more than the impact of advertisers. Among internal influences, the research looked at the financial and political interests of editors, reporters, and media owners. Among total respondents the political interests of media owners were seen on par with the role of government in news reporting. These points together underscore the impact that government and political influence has on news reporting and the broad recognition of this role among Bangladesh's news consumers.

## **Media Literacy and the 2018 Digital Security Act (DSA)**

Based on a series of questions related to detailed knowledge of the Bangladesh news industry, the research evaluated news users' media literacy. From a news professionals' point of view, the findings were discouraging. Out of ten questions, the median number of correct answers was three. Questions were all fact-based such as "Most media outlets in Bangladesh are for profit businesses (correct answer)". In hindsight the research learned that media literacy measured in this way reflects the perspective of the media professional, not the reality of the media consumer. Much of the academic research reviewed supported a similar conclusion, that news consumers' literacy is more related to how they process the news than to how the news is made. Bangladeshi news consumers appear to be no different, with most consumers unable to answer more than a handful of questions about how the news is made and published.

Bangladeshi news consumers' lack of awareness about the mechanics of the news industry appears to include the potential impact of DSA on news reporting. News users were not broadly aware of DSA. In fact, less than one in three were aware of the law. This awareness did vary with the respondents' level of education. Over half (55%) of respondents with some university experience were aware of the DSA. Among those respondents who were aware of DSA many found the law to be beneficial, making Bangladesh media stronger by reducing the amount of fake news. These DSA-aware respondents also acknowledged that the law would impact news reporting on some government related stories and would be a special burden on reporters.

While at first surprising, the results need to be reviewed in the context of current Bangladeshi public opinion. In recent years IRI<sup>13</sup> has conducted an annual review of the public's opinion of the "job approval" for a variety of public institutions, including the media and the government. Looking at the change in this rating between 2015 and 2019, we see that the media has declined in the public's opinion more than any other public institution, while the government has seen an overall improvement in its rating. The Bangladeshi news consumer sees a growing problem with fake news online and sees the government as an institution that has credibility to fix the problem. They are aware of the potential for DSA to impact reporting accuracy and thoroughness as well as the increased burden on individual reporters. But these potential impacts have yet to noticeably undermine the news stories they read daily.

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<sup>13</sup> National Survey of Bangladeshi Public Opinion, Centre for Insights in Survey Research, August 1 - September 15, 2019





# Recommendations

## **Reward quality and build platform**

The steadily expanding role of digital news sources will likely continue to undermine the quality of news reporting for all but the largest news outlets. The traditional costs of providing the news in print or on television has always created a barrier to entry that has supported some level of journalistic professionalism. But consumers' greater access to digital news sources will mean greater demand for digital content which will drive more low-cost news providers. The almost zero cost to creating online news will increasingly create a pool of "news" that has no requirement to meet any standard of professionalism. While this low-cost news may not be "fake news", it will continue to place pressure on more high-cost journalistic news providers, likely lowering quality for all but the largest news outlets. In short, the amount of questionable news provided to Bangladesh's news consumers is likely to continue to grow, placing an increasing burden on consumers' traditional news verification habits.

In the rapidly digitizing news media environment, two recommendations stand out. First developing industry wide programs to encourage and reward high quality, journalistically sound digital news reporting. These programmes should start with focused training on digital reporting and distribution practices for current and potential journalists at all levels from high school through to mid-career journalists. Second, a national level online journalism association to promote quality business and reporting practices could help with training as well as national recognition especially for quality online reporting. Bangladesh has seen a variety of national bodies established as recently as August 2021, but national participation appears thin. Similar groups in other regions, such as the Indonesian Association for Cyber-media (AMSI) and the North American Online News Association (ONA) have been instrumental in mid-career training, establishing local digital business practices, and working with the government on digital media regulations. Both have also created well respected awards for digital journalists to promote professionalism and innovation.



## **Support fact-checking**

As the amount of low quality digital "news" content grows, traditional "trust, but verify" techniques will begin to fray. Developing tools and techniques to support existing verification behaviour will increasingly be necessary. Bangladesh has seen the launch of a few "fact-checking" efforts in recent years. University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) has launched "Fact-Watch.org" (<https://www.fact-watch.org>) a member of the International Fact Checking Network. Some international agencies have also launched similar services, such as Agence France-Presse (AFP) Bangla language fact-checking service (<https://factcheckbangla.afp.com/list>). But neither appear to have the depth or support to handle the amount of questionable material available on digital platforms. Developing industry wide support and visibility for fact-checking services should enhance media trust for participating outlets throughout the industry.

## **Enhanced transparency of media industry**

The ability of the news industry alone to reduce the role of politics and government in news reporting is small. News users agree that transparency in news reporting and journalism methods contributes to news trust. News organizations can begin to build on this understanding by enhancing the transparency around reporting decisions impacted by either government laws, such as DSA, or other advertiser or ownership considerations. Guidelines like those created by the "Trust Project" ([thetrustproject.org](http://thetrustproject.org)) could be developed for Bangladesh media to encourage transparency around ownership, advertiser influence and reporting decisions driven by government regulations. This type of transparency creates a cost but is incorporated directly into individual news reports which are the starting points for news consumers to develop trusted relationships with news brands.

## **Support campaign in media**

DSA's impact on news reporting appears to still be hypothetical to the minority of news users who are even aware of the law. News reports on the impact of DSA have not made an impact on the national news audience, probably because they have most to do with how the news is created, a subject in which most news users are uninterested. To raise awareness of DSA, the news industry will need to develop a campaign to link internal decisions related to DSA directly to the quality and thoroughness of the news provided. In many ways, a DSA awareness campaign would be one aspect of the larger effort referenced above to make government, advertiser, and political influence on news reporting more transparent.

As the amount of digital content grows, Bangladesh, like other countries, will need to develop a more robust regulatory framework to govern content, commerce, personal security, and many other online factors. All these future regulations have the potential to further undermine the quality of news reporting and overall news media trust. The news industry with the support of international development agencies and parliamentarians should develop

an advisory service for Bangladeshi lawmakers to help make the highly technical process of regulating online activities clearer and more in line with Bangladesh's constitutional guarantees to freedom of speech and expression. Parliamentary workshops, training sessions, legal templates and regulatory processes can all provide the government a roadmap for future legislation that may impact the news industry.

### **Multi-tiered training**

To close, Bangladesh's news consumers have seen their trust in media decline steadily over many years. As a result, news consumers have developed news verification habits that are broadly used by both sophisticated urban news readers and more basic rural news viewers. Bangladesh news users as a result have developed an almost instinctive media literacy that combines "show me" live journalism from TV news outlets and a "trust, but verify" backup list of reliable media brands that verify the facts of a questionable news story.

Bangladesh media trust and behaviour is very consistent with the experience of other countries. Building trust is a complex process that involves many factors that include but are not limited to reporting quality. The facts alone do not create trust. Bangladesh's media industry will need to adopt a multi-tiered effort of training, acknowledgement, and encouragement to promote news reporting and news media that enhances media trust. This effort will need to provide a special focus on digital journalism as well as local news reporting and media. In many ways, building media trust shares the same complexity as climate change. The solutions will require steady micro-actions and improvements over a long period of time.





## Conclusion

Bangladesh's news consumers have seen their trust in media decline steadily over many years, though the savvier consumers see media trust eroding even more quickly in the most recent years. As a result, news consumers have developed news verification habits that are broadly used by both sophisticated urban news readers and more basic rural news viewers. Bangladesh news users as a result have developed an almost instinctive media literacy that combines "show me" live journalism from TV news outlets and a backup list of reliable media brands in print and on TV that can be relied on to verify when the facts reported just are not believable.

The recent drop in media trust levels is the result of a combination of factors. The long tradition of politically motivated corporate ownership laid the groundwork for news users' experience of different versions of a similar story. Bangladesh news users have become articulate observers of many different types of news manipulation - "eye washing" diversions, missing follow-up stories, varying news facts. Almost half of respondents claimed to have experienced some version of "fake news" in the month prior to the survey. The rapid development of online news and opinion sources has added to the ambiguity of what is actually happening, further undermining media trust.

The proliferation of media outlets in TV and online has not only added multiple new sources of news and opinion but has also made the media field much more competitive, but less financially stable. Traditional media outlets, mostly newspapers and TV, must now compete against a rapid 24 by 7 news cycle driven by social media where facts are less interesting than sensational details, whether true or not. Traditional media outlets are reportedly forced to cut professional corners resulting in lower quality, more mistakes and as a result lowered expectations and appreciation from all news consumers.

Media behaviour is following very closely models of digital transition that have occurred around the world. Younger and more educated news consumers have adopted online news sources often at the expense of TV viewing and newspaper readership. As bandwidth in Bangladesh continues to increase these younger under 25-year-old news consumers will no longer differentiate between print, TV and online. Expectations will rise and the number of potential competitors and "comparable" news outlets will increase. As this shift continues, the



news environment will become even more complex, likely undermining existing news verification behaviour among news audiences and accelerating the decline in news trust.

Finally, government regulation has also contributed to the decline in news media trust. News users are less aware of particular laws or their potential impact. For the most part that is for the lawyers. But when a trusted local voice - writer, editor, news producer, reporter - leaves the scene suddenly, departing for a foreign broadcaster, or removed from the scene entirely, audiences take notice. A trusted source is no longer available. They may not know why, but the impact is lowered credibility and trust for all media.

There is no formula to rebuild media trust to where it was "before". At least four levels of issues require attention - the news user, the journalist, the media industry, and government. Looking for solutions will require a clear definition of the problem(s) and then specific initiatives to address these problems.

During our interviews, media executives all lamented the low levels of media literacy among Bangladesh's news users. Based on both this survey of media literacy as well as the media literacy research published by MRDI in 2020, news users are mostly not "literate" about the regulations, processes, and practices of Bangladesh's news industry. This illiteracy they share with news consumers in India, the UK, the US, and Brazil. But news users have developed a series of verification techniques for the stories that are most important to them. Helping news users to navigate the increasingly complex media universe should improve their confidence in using news media. But at least based on the feedback in the past 18 months, the definition of news literacy is still not well defined. From the news user's standpoint, it is not the details of media regulations, processes, and practices. These are the inputs to reporting the news, news users even the more educated are not interested or concerned with the how, only with the output - the news.

**News User Implications:** The news industry needs to develop a more audience focused definition of media literacy that reflects how news users use the news, not how news providers create the news. This measure should also reflect the substantial differences in news usage segments defined by education and age.

News users particularly in local markets see journalists as vulnerable to cutting professional corners to earn a living. The demand for communications has increased with the lower costs to produce media. Every media, company, government agency and bureau all need to communicate. As a result, the most financially vulnerable local news outlets often cannot pay for trained journalists, lowering professional standards and undermining media trust.

**Journalist Implications:** With the demand for communications increasing, a focused effort to expand access to journalism and media management training should increase the supply of trained media professionals. But for this expanded media training to be successful, national efforts are required to implement the minimum standard wage established for Bangladeshi journalists. Media not complying with this standard should be fined, raising the costs of operations until they either comply or cease to operate.



Bangladesh's media industry is over supplied. There are hundreds of newspapers, TV outlets, web news portals and "social media influencers" to draw the audience's attention and too often split a small advertising market. The quality and professionalism of many of these outlets is low. Many "online news outlets" are actually "fabricating" or manipulating news stories for political, commercial, or religious advantage. To reverse the decline in news media trust, the industry will need to address both oversupply and low quality or "fake news".

**Media Industry Implications:** As a whole, the media industry needs to address the oversupply of news outlets in the market. There are several sub-initiatives to support this. First, creating a national metrics platform that independently measures audience engagement and trust and then working with advertisers to translate these metrics into increased revenue for media outlets. Second, training, developing, and integrating "fact-checking" services into existing news media brands and coverage. University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) has launched "Fact-Watch.org" (<https://www.fact-watch.org>) a member of the International Fact Checking Network, managed by the US-based Poynter Foundation. Agence France Presse (AFP) has also launched a Bangladesh focused fact-checking service (<https://factcheckbangla.afp.com/list>). Developing industry wide support and visibility for fact-checking services should enhance media trust for participating outlets throughout the industry.

Finally, Bangladesh government's recent efforts to solve "fake news" and to control digital media outlets has created uncertainty and control. The combination has led to reporting and broadcasting changes that undermine media trust. Without media trust, the government will find public communications increasingly suspect, undermining national political, social, and economic development.

**Government Implications:** Government will need to clarify and standardise the implementation of media regulations, while at the same time relaxing media control.

Media trust in Bangladesh is eroding due to changes at every level. The research conducted thus far highlights several potential areas of focus that deserve creative solutions. Rebuilding media trust will not happen overnight and will likely not resemble media trust a decade ago. The media industry, academia, civil society, and government need to create a new definition for media trust in the multimedia, digital future and develop the metrics and individual initiatives needed to build toward that future goal.

# Annex

## Questionnaire



# Questionnaire

## Media Trust Survey

We are from [Survey Company Name]. Currently we are working on a project for MRDI concerned with Media Usage and Trust. We are interviewing people across Bangladesh to understand your use and trust of media. We would like to include your opinions in our survey. The survey should take about 45 minutes.

All the information we obtain will remain strictly confidential and your answers will never be shared with anyone other than our project team.

### May we include you in our survey?

Yes. (Continue)

No. (Terminate)

### Screeners:

Have you worked in the media industry as a reporter, editor, producer or media manager in the last 12 months?

- Yes (thank and discontinue)
- No (continue)

### Q1. Do you use any media to get the news?

- Yes (continue, to question #3)
- No (skip to #2, then discontinue)

### Q2. Why don't you use any media to get the news?

(after answer, thank and discontinue after this question)

- I don't have access to any media
- I can't afford to pay for media
- I rely on my family and friends for the news
- I don't trust the news I get in the media
- I don't have time for the news
- Other reason

## **Media Behavior:**

### **Q3. What is your main source for the news?**

- National Newspapers
- Local Newspapers
- Television
- Radio
- Online news portals
- Facebook or other social media
- Family and Friends

### **Q4. How often on average do you get the news?**

### **Q5. On an average day, do you read a printed newspaper or journal?**

- Yes (continue to #6 - 8)
- No (skip to #9)

### **Q6. If yes, how much time do you spend reading newspapers on an average day?**

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to less than 30 minutes
- 30 to less than 60 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

### **Q7. On a typical day, how many different newspapers do you read?**

- One only
- 2
- 3 or more



**Q8. Please tell us what newspaper you trust the most to provide the news?**

[Open-ended, single answer. Code according to the following list.]

- Prothom Alo
- Kaler Kantho
- Ittefaq
- Daily Star
- Jugantor
- Inqilab
- Janakantha
- Bangladesh Pratidin
- Sangbad
- Samakal
- Other .....

**Q9. On an average day, do you watch the news on television?**

- Yes (continue to #10 - 12)
- No (skip to #13)

**Q10. If yes, how much time do you spend watching news on television on an average day?**

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to less than 30 minutes
- 31 to less than 60 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

**Q11. On an average day, how many different television channels do you watch to get the news?**

- One only
- 2
- 3 or more

**Q12. Please tell us what television station, either Bangladeshi or international, you trust the most to provide the news?**

[Open-ended, single answer. Code according to the following list.]

- Ekattor
- Jamuna
- Channel 24
- Somoy
- NTV
- Channel i
- ATN
- Maasranga
- DBC
- Independent
- BTV
- Other .....

**Q13. On an average day, do you read online news sources to get the news?**

- Yes (continue to #14 - 17)
- No (skip to #18)

**Q14. If yes, how much time do you spend reading online news sources (either on social media, messaging apps or a website) on an average day?**

- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to less than 30 minutes
- 31 to less than 60 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- More than 3 hours



**Q15. If yes, how much time of your time reading news online do you spend reading or viewing the news on Facebook or other online social media on an average day?**

[Accept messaging apps like Facebook Messenger, Whatsapp, Viber, ... as social media. The total should be no more than the amount stated for ALL online news sources in #14.]

- I do not use Social Media
- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to less than 30 minutes
- 31 to less than 60 minutes
- 1 hour to less than 2 hours
- 2 hours to less than 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

**Q16. On an average day, how many different online news sources do you read to get the news?**

- One only
- 2
- 3 or more

**Q17. Please tell us what online news source you trust the most to provide the news?**

[Open-ended, single answer. Code according to the following list.]

- bdnews24
- banglatribune
- barta24
- banglatribune
- priyo
- jaagonews24
- newsbangla24
- bbcbangla
- risingbd
- websites of my favorite newspapers
- websites of my favorite TV stations
- Facebook accounts of my favorite online commentators
- Other .....

**Q18. In 2018, Parliament passed the Bangladesh Digital Security Act in relation to the publication of digital news and information. Are you aware of the DSA and its impact on digital news and information?**

- Yes (continue to #19)
- No (skip to #20)

**Q19 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree", please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

[1 - Strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree]

- Q19.1 DSA has significantly reduced the amount of fake or unreliable news on digital platforms.
- Q19.2 Online news outlets do not accurately report the news to avoid breaking DSA rules.
- Q19.3 DSA only protects stories related to government policies
- Q19.4 Reporters feel the most impact from DSA.
- Q19.5 DSA has made Bangladesh media stronger.

**Q20. For each kind of news below, please choose which type of media you trust the most to provide the news?**

Answer categories [National Newspaper, Local Newspaper, Television, Radio, Online News Portals, Facebook/Social Media].

- Q20.1 National Political News
- Q20.2 Local News
- Q20.3 News about traffic, roads and accidents
- Q20.4 Public Health News
- Q20.5 Sports News
- Q20.6 Breaking News
- Q20.7 Business News
- Q20.8 Agricultural News
- Q20.9 News about prices in the market
- Q20.10 News about natural disasters



**Q21 For each type of news below, please indicate how trustworthy you find your preferred news source.**

[Preferred news is the response of Q3]

Answer categories [Completely trustworthy, mostly trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, rarely trustworthy, never trustworthy]

- Q21.1 National Political News
- Q21.2 Local News
- Q21.3 News about traffic, roads and accidents
- Q21.4 Public Health News
- Q21.5 Sports News
- Q21.6 Breaking News
- Q21.7 Business News
- Q21.8 Agricultural News
- Q21.9 News about prices in the market
- Q21.10 News about natural disasters

**Q22. Many people are concerned about unreliable or "fake" news. Are you confident that you can recognise an unreliable or "fake news" story when you see one?**

- Yes (continue to #23)
- No (skip to #24)

**Q23. Which of the following types of unreliable news stories have you experienced in the last month?**

[Please check all that apply.]

- Facts in new stories are manipulated to promote a particular political party or business
- News stories that are clearly false to promote a particular political party or business
- News stories with frequent, simple errors like spelling mistakes, incorrect data or names
- News headlines unrelated to the story designed to get you to click on a link (clickbait headlines)
- News stories that are really advertisements
- News stories that get no follow-up to avoid political or business implications
- News stories that get unbelievable follow-up to divert attention from other news (eye-washing).

- ✧ Stories that present opinion as news
- ✧ None, Not sure

**Q24. When you encounter an unreliable story or an example of fake news, which of the following actions do you take? (Please check all that apply)**

- ✧ I look to other more well established media to confirm the story.
- ✧ I leave a comment on the story or post questioning the facts.
- ✧ I share the story to friends and family and ask if anyone can confirm the facts.
- ✧ I just ignore it and look for more news elsewhere.
- ✧ I read the story carefully to see if the facts make sense.
- ✧ Other .....
- ✧ None of the above.

**Q25 News media may experience different levels of external influence that impact believability of news stories.**

Please rate the external influences on how likely they are to impact a news story. (1 - no impact, 2 - slight impact, 3 - moderate impact, 4 - significant impact, 5 - overwhelming impact).

- ✧ Q25.1 Advertisers in the media
- ✧ Q25.2 Financial interest of the media's owners
- ✧ Q25.3 Financial interest of the media's editors
- ✧ Q25.4 Financial interest of individual reporters
- ✧ Q25.5 Government Agencies
- ✧ Q25.6 The Army
- ✧ Q25.7 Political ideology of the owners
- ✧ Q25.8 Political ideology of the editors
- ✧ Q25.9 Political ideology of the reporters



### **Attitudinal Statements:**

**Q26 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 5 is "Strongly Agree", please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

[1 - Strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree]

#### **A. Attitudinal Themes - Media Channel Trust**

Q26.1 National newspapers are my most trusted source of news.

Q26.2 Television news only broadcasts the opinion of the TV announcers, not the real news.

Q26.3 I can't trust the stories I find on Facebook.

Q26.4 I have to use multiple newspapers and TV channels to confirm the facts of a story.

Q26.5 Breaking news stories online can be misleading.

#### **B. Attitudinal Themes - Trust in News Report Features**

Q26.6 TV news reports with live video are most reliable.

Q26.7 I trust reporting with strong survey data and graphics.

Q26.8 News reports that quote well-known experts are most reliable.

Q26.9 I never trust government sources in a news story.

Q26.10 Most local reporters take bribes to publish or not publish stories.

#### **C. Attitudinal Themes - Trust in Publishers/News Outlets**

Q26.11 All news media have business or political biases in their reporting.

Q26.12 When the news media criticises the government, I feel they are more trustworthy.

Q26.13 Only international news outlets are completely reliable.

Q26.14 My local newspaper is the only source of news for my region and community.

Q26.15 I trust my regular newspaper and TV channel because I am comfortable with their reporting.

#### **D. Attitudinal Themes - Personal Attitudes toward the News**

Q26.16 I only trust reports that I can confirm from my own experience.

Q26.17 I trust news reporters that I know and recognise.

Q26.18 I only trust news media that share my point of view.

Q26.19 News media that present diverse points of view about a story are more believable.

Q26.20 News media that explain their reporting are more credible and trustworthy.



**News Literacy Questions:** These questions are picked up from the News Literacy survey from late 2019 in order to see how "literacy groups" have changed and how they map to trust.

**I will read out some questions. Please answer them to the best of your ability.**

**Q27. Most media outlets in Bangladesh are:**

- ✧ For-profit companies (correct)
- ✧ Owned by the government
- ✧ Non-profit businesses
- ✧ Supported by grants and subsidies
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q28. If you wanted to get a job as a news reporter in Bangladesh, you would need to get a license from:**

- ✧ The Press Council
- ✧ Information Ministry of Bangladesh
- ✧ Press Institute of Bangladesh
- ✧ News reporters are not required to get a license in Bangladesh (correct)
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q29. News I find on my Facebook page is:**

- ✧ Shown in the order it is posted
- ✧ Only from my family and friends on Facebook
- ✧ Ordered based on a formula that only Facebook knows (correct)
- ✧ From people and companies that I do not know.
- ✧ Don't know/Not sure

**Q30. If you want to complain about any news organisation, where should you go?**

- ✧ To the editor of the media
- ✧ To the owner of the media
- ✧ To Information Ministry



- ✧ To Press Council (correct)
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q31. Which of the following news outlets does not depend primarily on advertising for financial support?**

- ✧ BTV (correct)
- ✧ Prothom Alo
- ✧ Daily Star
- ✧ NTV
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q32. What is the main difference between hard news and a column or opinion item?**

- ✧ Hard news aims to represent the government's point of view about an event.
- ✧ Hard news stories are written by anyone who witnessed the event
- ✧ Hard news is written by famous writers.
- ✧ A column or opinion item is the writer's own point of view (correct)
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q33. One common criticism of the news is that it is not objective. What do people who make that criticism typically mean by it?**

- ✧ The reporter gives only the facts about the story.
- ✧ The reporter puts his or her opinion in the story (correct).
- ✧ The reporter's story relies too much on the opinions of people who are not related to the story.
- ✧ The reporter doesn't make the purpose of the story clear.
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q34. Most people think the news has:**

- ✧ A greater effect on themselves than other people
- ✧ A greater effect on other people than themselves (correct)
- ✧ The same effect on themselves as others

- ✧ Doesn't have any effect on anyone
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q35. What do you think should be the main purpose of the news media:**

- ✧ To make profit for media owners
- ✧ To inform and educate the people (correct)
- ✧ To serve the government
- ✧ To serve owners and media professionals
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q36. If a topic gets a lot of coverage in the news, people who pay attention to the news are:**

- ✧ More likely to think the topic is important (correct)
- ✧ Less likely to think the topic is important
- ✧ Neither more nor less likely to think the topic is important
- ✧ More likely to think someone has sponsored or paid for the increased coverage of the topic.
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Q37. Most news outlets depend on advertising to make money. What is the possible effect of this?**

- ✧ News could encourage people to buy things they don't need.
- ✧ News could emphasize things that aren't really important.
- ✧ Advertisements could distract from important news stories.
- ✧ All of the above (correct)
- ✧ Don't know/Not Sure

**Demographics:**

**Q38, What is your age?**

- ✧ 18 to 25 years of age
- ✧ 26 to 35 years of age
- ✧ 36 to 50 years of age



- 51 to 65 years of age
- 66 years of age or older

**Q39. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**Q40. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- Less than high school (less than 10 years of school)
- High School graduate (10 years of school)
- College graduate (12 years of school)
- Some university, but no degree (less than 16 years of school)
- Four-year university graduate (16 years of school)
- Graduate school (More than 16 years of school)
- Don't know/Not sure

**Q41. What division do you live in currently?**

- Dhaka
- Chittagong
- Barishal
- Rangpur
- Rajshahi
- Khulna
- Sylhet
- Mymensingh

**Q42. Do you live in**

- A metropolitan area
- An urban area
- Rural area