

# The Emerging Digital Divide in News Consumption

## : *Digital News Report Australia 2017*

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# Background

## Growing dependence on smartphone for internet access

88% own a smartphone (95% in 18-34, 78% in 65-75) (Deloitte, 2017)

20% only access the internet through a mobile phone or internet dongle with data allowance (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2017)

## A bridge or a barrier to overcome the digital divide?

*“The surge is helping to close a looming digital divide stemming from the high cost of in-home Internet access, which can be prohibitive for some.”*

*(Mobile Internet Use Shrinks Digital Divide, The NY Times, 2009)*

**However**, there is a usage gap among those who exclusively rely on smartphones to access the internet (Mossberger, Tolbert & Franko, 2012; Napoli & Obar, 2015; Park & Lee, *forthcoming*; Tsetsi & Rains, 2017)

# Background

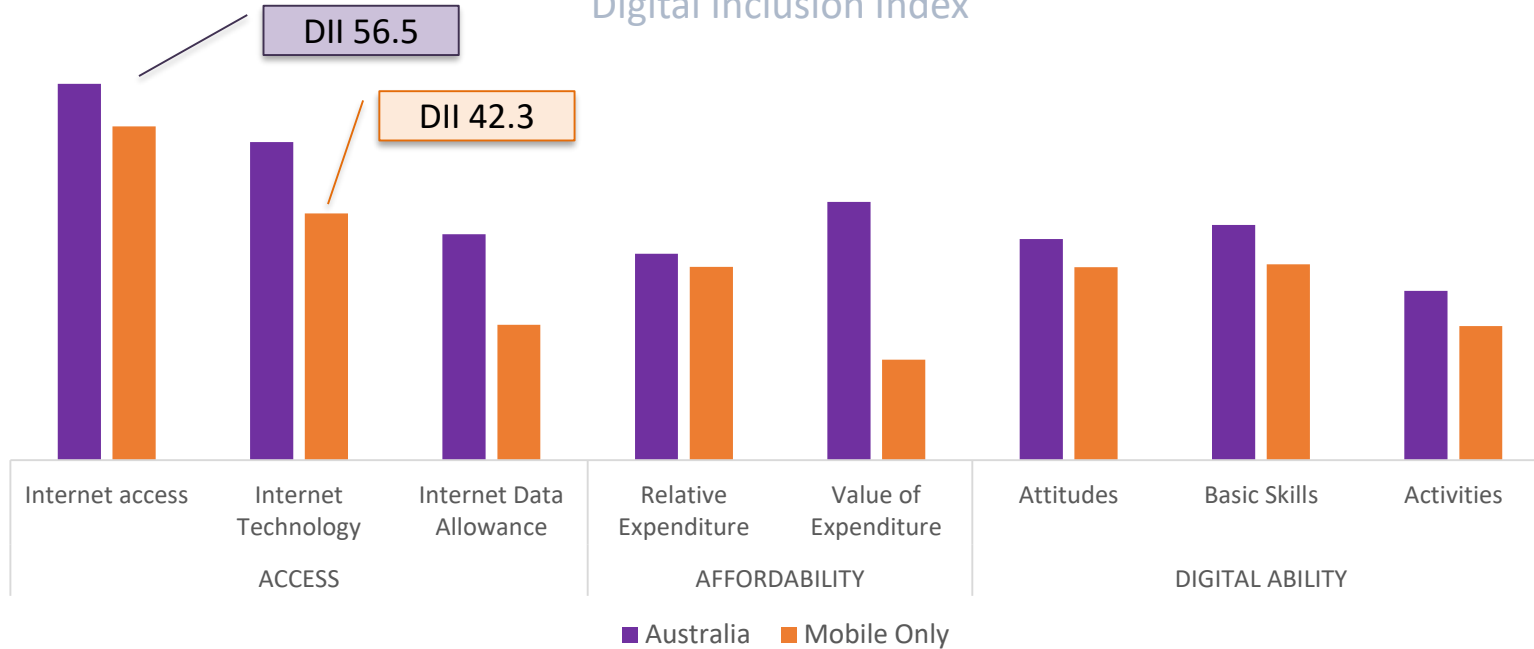
**Mobile-only users:** Those who only access the internet via mobile phones or dongles, often called ‘smartphone-dependent’

## **Growing concern about the digital divide among mobile-only users**

- Usage gap caused by technological limitations of mobile devices and the smaller volume of content optimised for the small gadget
- Affordability issue: Increasing data-heavy internet content & less affordable data cost  
*Half of smartphone users in Australia regularly exceed their data allowance of their already costly mobile subscription and are paying extra data* (Deloitte, 2017)
- Especially, mobile-only use is correlated with socioeconomic factors  
*Younger, lower income and less educated users, are more likely to be mobile-only users* (Pew Research Centre, 2014; Thomas, 2017; Park & Lee, *forthcoming*; Tsetsi & Rains, 2017)

# ADII comparison 2017

## Digital Inclusion Index



# Device gap & news consumption

## Some findings on news consumption with device gap

- Users with multi-devices are more likely to use mobile devices for news  
(Chyi & Chadha, 2012)
- Mobile-only users are less likely to access news/information content than social activity (Tsetsi & Rains, 2017)

## Understanding news consumption in the context of smartphone-only users

- *Are there differences in news consumption among news consumers who mainly access news on their smartphones, but have different levels of access to other devices?*

# *The study: Digital News Report Australia*

- Global project at the Reuter's Institute for the Study of Journalism
  - Australian partner News & Media Research Centre
- Online survey of news consumers conducted by YouGov in 36 nations (N > 70k)
- Data collection: Jan to Feb 2017 (Asia/Oceania 7, America 6, Europe 23)
- A quota sample based on countries' Census data (gender, age & region)
- Data weighted based on a quota to be reflective of the population
- Longitudinal survey designed to capture all aspects of news consumption

# NEWS

## Australian sample

Initial respondents **2202**

News consumers **2004**

Online news consumers **1506**

Mainly access news via smartphone  
(36% of news consumers) **567**

- own a smartphone plus one or more devices **458**

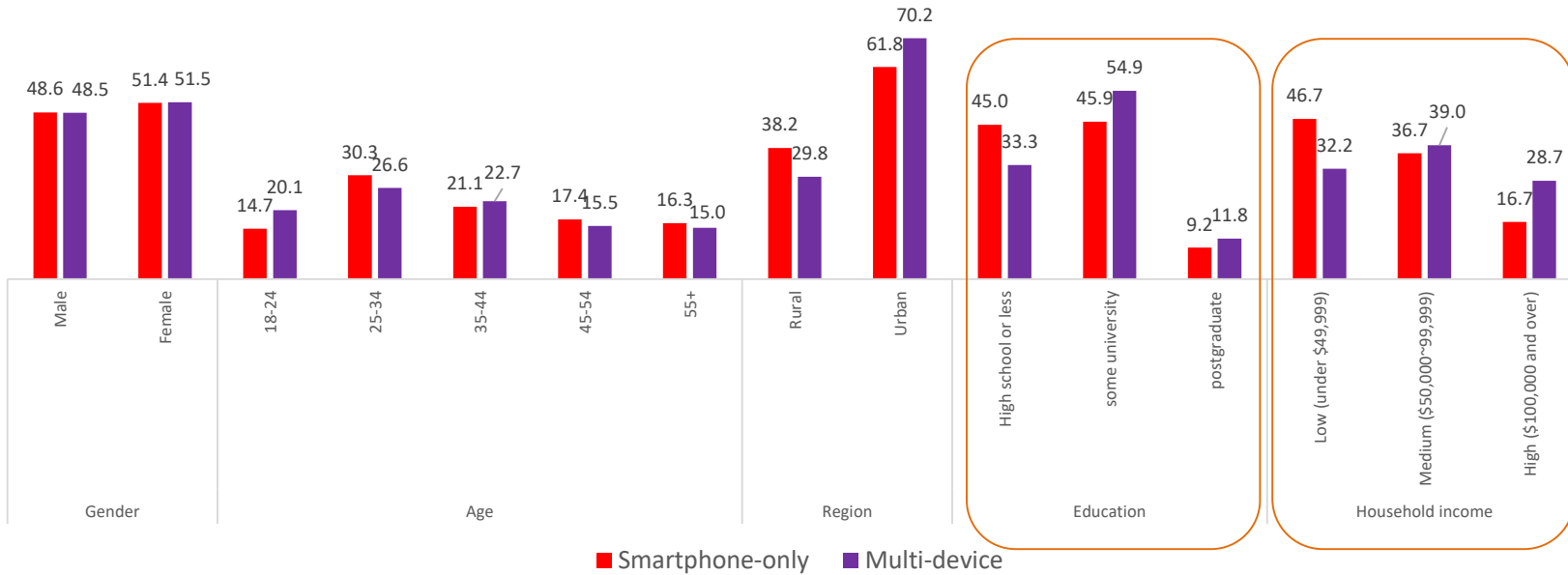
- own a smartphone only **109**

# Variables used for comparison

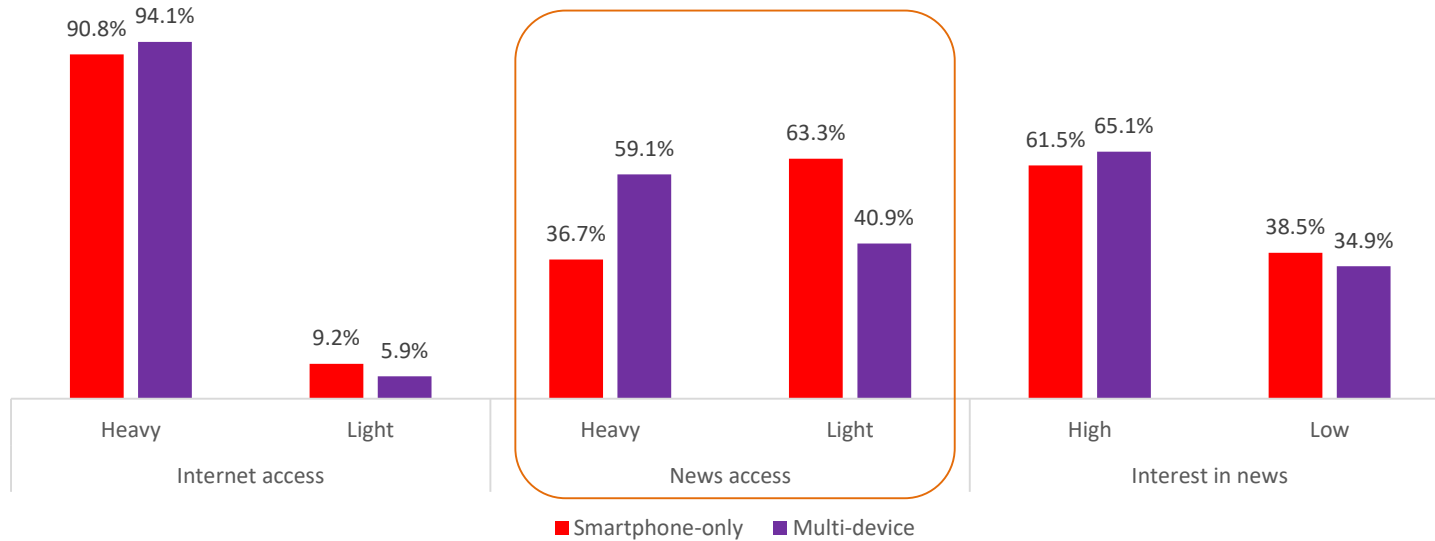
- Demographics: gender, age, education level, household income
- Frequency of internet access
- News consumption
  - Frequency of news access and interest in news
  - Diversity of news brands and location
  - News source and engagement
- Attitude towards news media
  - Trust in news
  - Belief in news media independence from political/government and commercial influence
  - perceptions of news media and social media in distinguishing fact from fiction



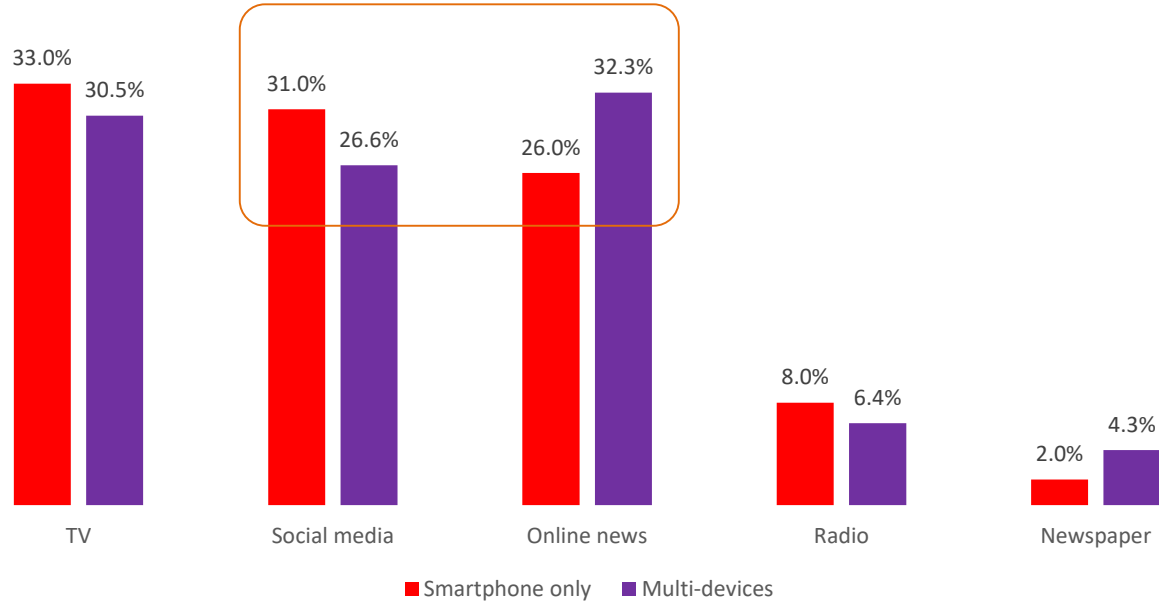
# Demographic differences



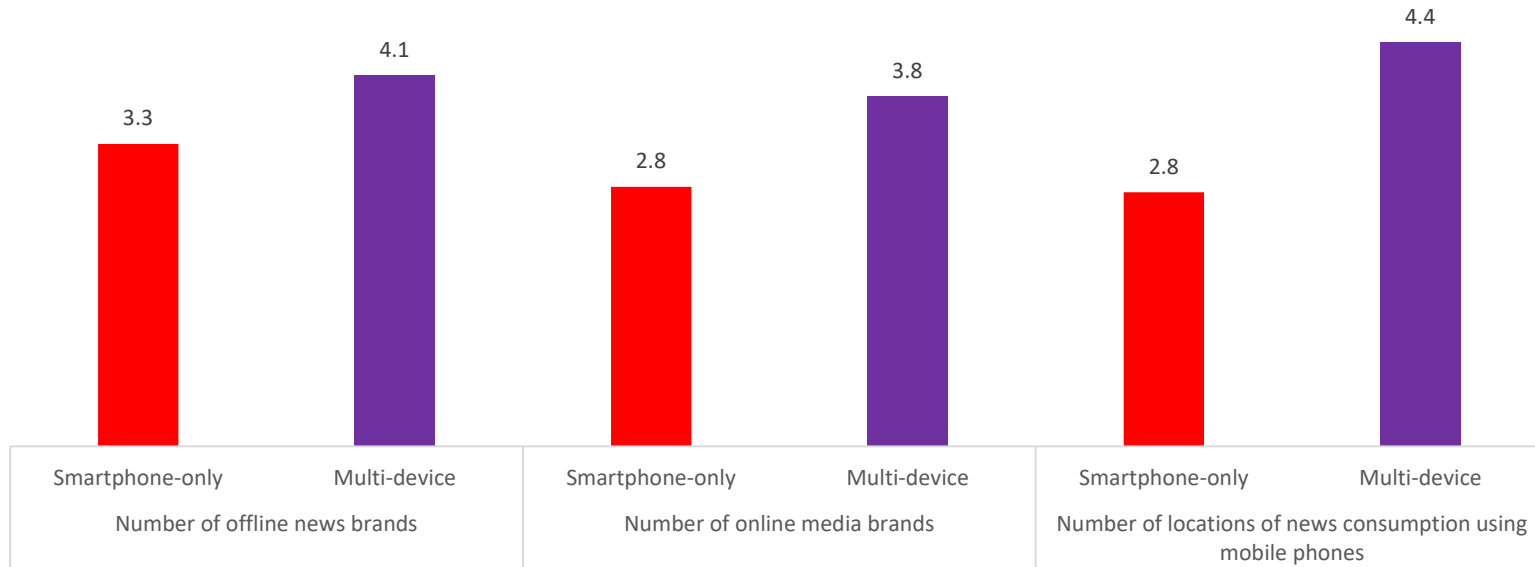
# Internet access, news access and interest in news



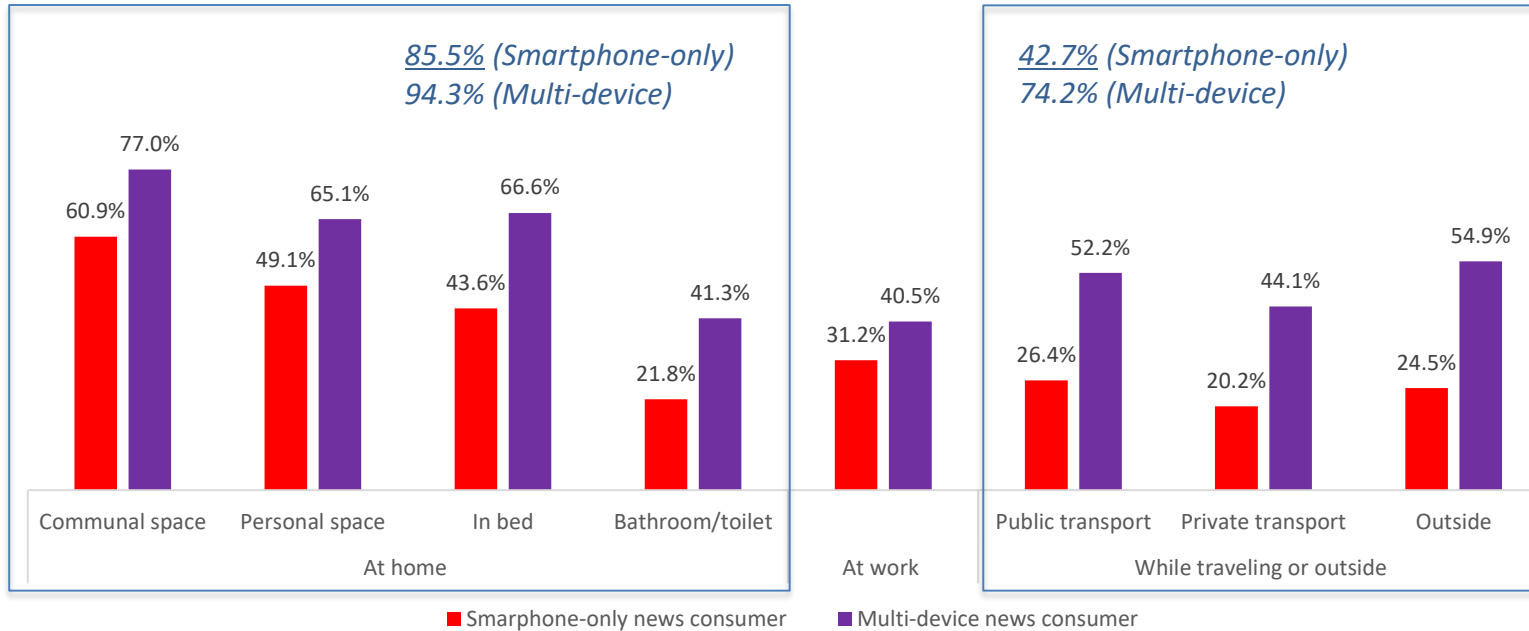
# Main sources of news



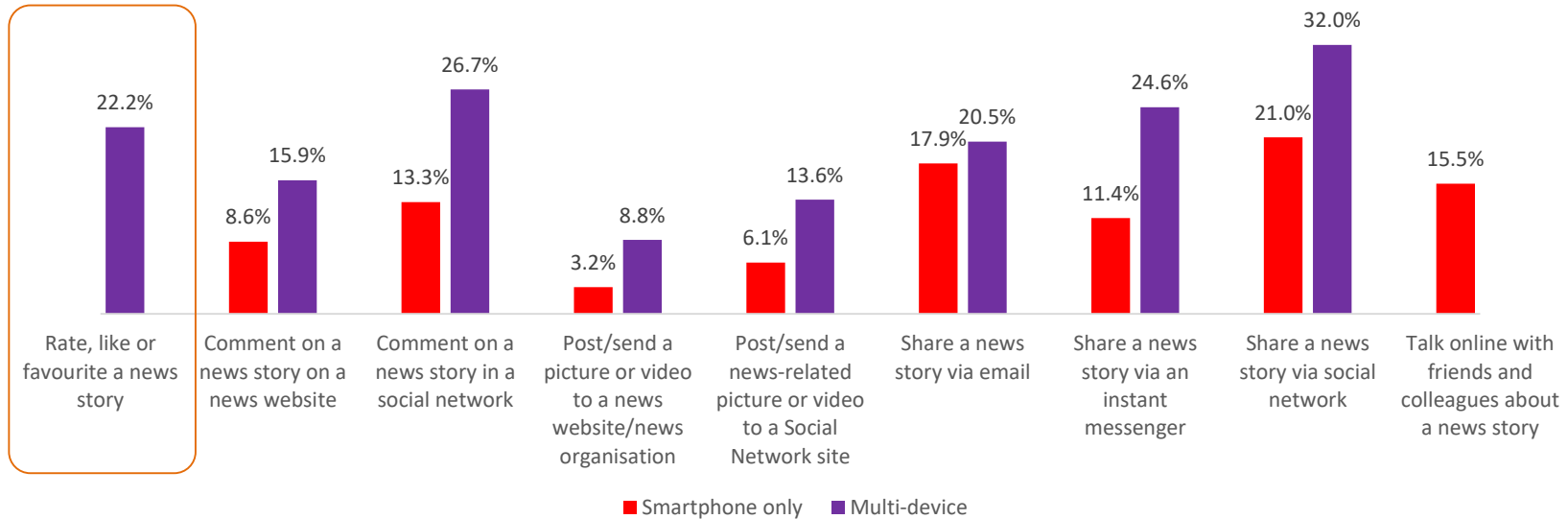
# Diversity of news brands and locations of news consumption



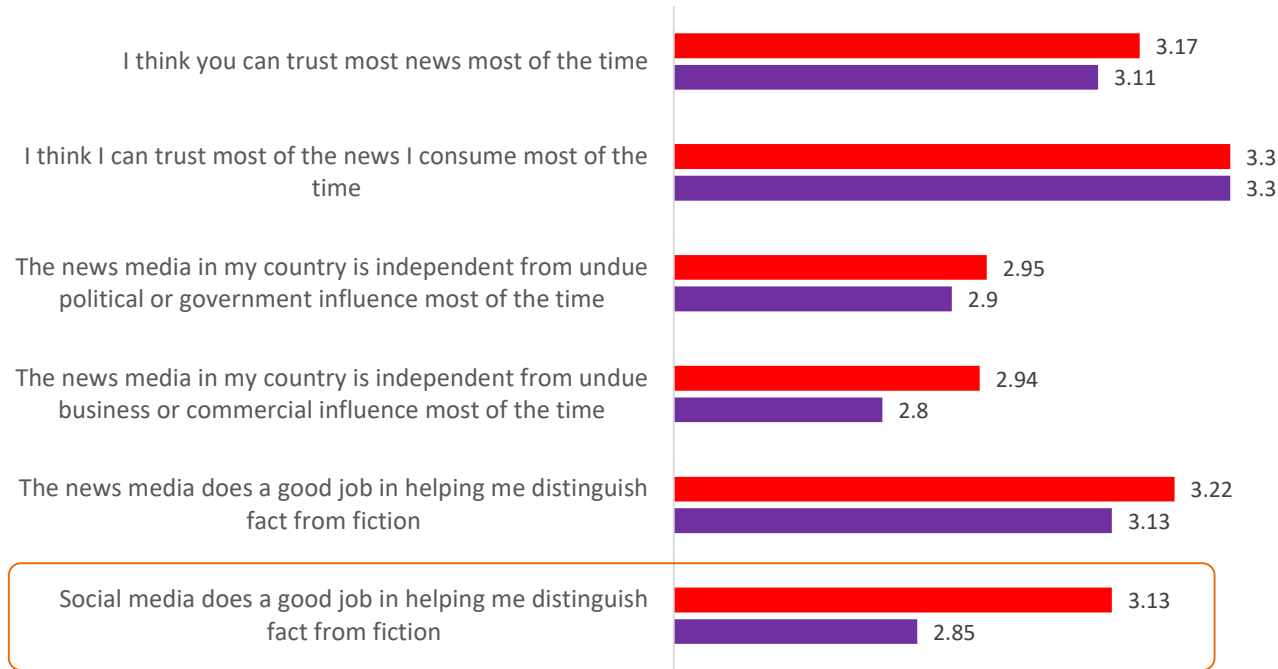
# Locations of online news consumption



# News engagement online



# Attitudes towards news



■ Smartphone-only ■ Multi-device

# Smartphone-only news consumers

- more likely to be in low income households and less educated
- access the internet just as frequently as multi-device users
- less frequent access to news, especially while traveling or outside
- more likely to use social media for news; less likely to access news websites/apps
- engage in more basic participatory activities such as rating and liking a news story rather than sharing or commenting on a news story
- more likely to believe that social media can help distinguish fact from fiction



# Discussion

- Affordability is a key dimension of digital inclusion; social exclusion is closely tied with digital exclusion
- Type of devices/platforms to access the internet influence the online activities
- News divide among digital news consumers is an emerging issue; concerns surrounding a new information gap, participatory gap
- Solutions? Free and secure public wi-fi, unmetered access to health/education/news, mobile content development, subsidy for low income mobile subscribers, etc.