



Reflecting Ireland

News & Social Media

June 2023



permanent tsb

An insight into consumer behavioural change in Ireland

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Executive summary

Ireland is a nation that is strongly engaged with news and current affairs. The majority engage daily and believe it is important to stay abreast of what is going on in the world. However, our consumption of news can negatively influence our emotional state, particularly among women. This negative impact can result in a disengagement from news media.

With the use of social media firmly established, the ways in which generations consume news has shifted. Older generations primarily consume news through traditional media with younger generations turning to digital and social channels as their primary source for news. Trust in media sources is a priority, with traditional media holding more credibility than digital. Fact-checking is now becoming a norm for younger generations.

Outside of news, our experience of social media is mixed. We are almost equally likely to say we spend too much time on social media as we are to say the time we spend is 'just right'. In addition, one third say it has a negative impact on our wellbeing.

From our findings, we also find that the mood is recovering, but slowly and measured. We saw a further, albeit slight, uplift in sentiment from the previous quarter that Ireland is moving in the right direction. Economic outlook concerns continue to ease, but we still have some way to go.

From a personal situation perspective, there has been a further decrease in those who feel their financial situation is worse than 12 months ago, however, people are not feeling particularly better off compared to this time last year. The outlook for the next 12 months is slowly recovering, but people are remaining realistic.

Our relationship with news

- We are daily consumers of news with 7 in 10 consuming at least once a day. Men and those aged over 55 are the most frequent consumers of news.
- TV (67%) and radio (53%), both traditional media, are the two most popular sources of news, followed by digital sources: online news websites (49%), Google (42%) and Facebook (41%).
- Irish people have the most trust in national radio (74%). Social media was the least trusted source for news with TikTok receiving the lowest trust endorsement (13%).
- We experience more negative emotions than positive when consuming news, with pessimism being the most dominant emotion (almost 1 in 5 report feeling this).
- Two-thirds of us have fact checked news. This habit is more common among those aged 18-24, a group more likely to use social media for news, versus those over the age of 55.
- Protection against misinformation is a key priority for Irish people with 84% considering this important. AI is seen as a threat to ascertaining fact from fiction among 7 in 10 people.

How we use social media

- Almost 9 in 10 (89%) of adults in Ireland use social media, with 44% saying they spend too much time on social platforms. Women (47%) and those aged 18-24 (69%) are most likely to report this feeling.
- Of those who use social media, a third (33%) believe that it has a negative effect on their mental wellbeing.
- Two-thirds (67%) of social media users in Ireland use social media within the first hour of waking up in the morning, and 71% of social media users are online within an hour of falling asleep at night.
- Overall, 18% of people have been the subject of harassment online. Those aged between 18-24yrs (34%) and 25-34 (32%) are significantly more likely to report such an experience.
- 86% of the population agree with the idea that children spend too much time on social media.

The Reflecting Ireland research was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+ in the Republic of Ireland. Interviews were carried out between 8th of May – 21st of May, 2023.

A nation highly engaged in news and current affairs

People in Ireland are very enthusiastic about news and current affairs. Most of us (7 in 10) check the news on a daily basis with a majority doing so several times a day. We value feeling well-informed and believe it's important to keep up-to-date with current affairs.

4 in 10
check the news several times a day



1 in 2
say it's very important to keep up-to-date



Men and older adults are most engaged

A third of us say we are very interested in news and current affairs. This rises to 43% among men, significantly higher than women at 24%.

It is also higher among those aged 55+ (49%), three times those aged 18-24 (16%). Men and those aged 55+ are most likely to say that keeping up to date with news and current affairs is personally very important to them at 55% and 62% respectively, compared to a national average of 47%.

Keeping up-to- date

Over two thirds (69%) of young Irish adults aged 18-24 don't believe it is very important to keep up to date with news and current affairs. Just 1 in 6 (16%) in this age group are very interested in news.

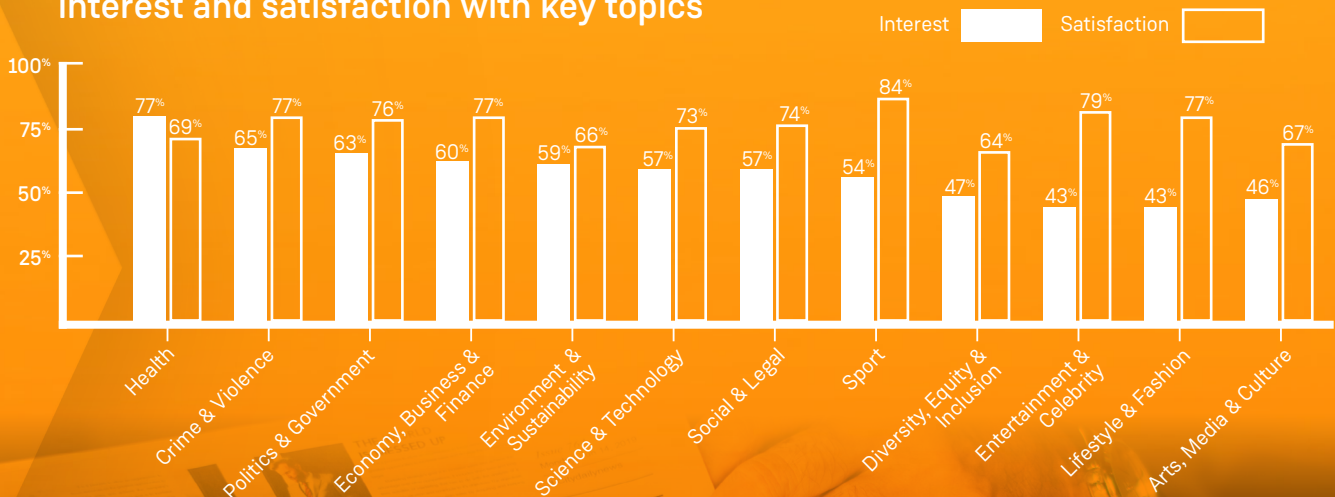


What's on the agenda?

Eight out of ten (81%) believe news media has a powerful effect on public opinion. Two thirds of us feel the news covers what is important to us, and over half (55%) feel our news needs are well met.

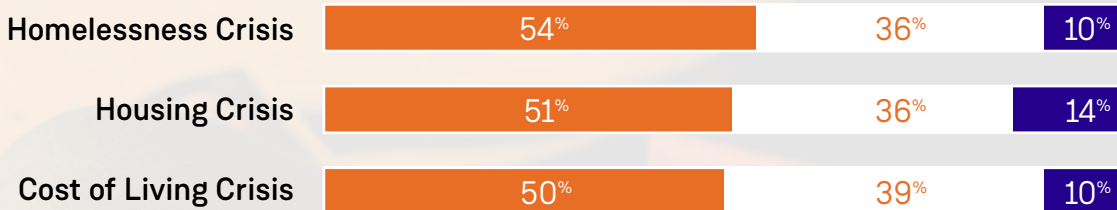
News topics that interest us most include health (77%), crime and violence (65%), politics and government (63%) and economy, business and finance (60%). We are broadly satisfied with the level of coverage given to topics that interest us. Exceptions include health, where 8 in 10 of us are interested but only 7 in 10 find coverage satisfactory. Environment and sustainability, of interest to 6 in 10, sees lower levels of satisfaction with coverage relative to other news topics.

Interest and satisfaction with key topics



Where we would like to see more coverage

While two in three feel the news covers what is important to them personally, not quite as many (53%) feel the news is representative and inclusive for all. At least half feel there should be more coverage of societal challenges facing us including homelessness (54%), housing (51%) and the cost of living crisis (50%). Over a third believe there is too much coverage of UK and US politics (35% and 39% respectively). We like to see more coverage of topics that impact us closer to home.



The news landscape is becoming more digital

Although TV and radio still dominate, 3 of the top 5 news sources most commonly used in Ireland are digital. These include online news websites, google searches and Facebook. We live in a world where we can access news 24/7 from a variety of sources and multiple devices. Technology has pushed the boundaries of how news is delivered. We have come to expect it to be available immediately, in an engaging way, in easy to process bite-sized chunks and at no cost.

The path to breaking news begins with Google

In a world where there are multiple platforms to choose from, the preferred route to a breaking news story is to begin with a google search (33%), follow up with TV (23%) and then radio (20%). Google is the preferred starting point as it is seen to offer the widest range of perspectives.

A generational divide in how we make sense of the world

At each end of the age spectrum we turn to different sources to keep up-to-date and informed about news. For those aged 55+ the most commonly chosen sources are TV (86%), radio (64%), online news websites (49%), newspapers (40%) and google searches (38%). Those aged 25-44 include google searches and Facebook as well as TV, radio and online news websites in their repertoire.

Nearly

1 in 2

18-24 year-olds use TikTok as their preferred news source

Almost

4 in 10

adults now use TikTok, higher than Twitter ⁽¹⁾

About

1 in 2

users are concerned about data privacy and safety on TikTok

There is an emotional toll to consuming news

Over half (52%) report feeling emotionally downbeat after watching, listening to or reading the news, with pessimism and anxiety the most commonly felt emotions. Two thirds agree the news can negatively impact their mood, six times as many as disagree. Over 6 in 10 (61%) feel overwhelmed by bad news and almost as many (57%) feel powerless in the face of it. Over half (52%) believe news media tends to take a very negative view, three and a half times as many as disagree.

6 in 10 feel overwhelmed by bad news

Women more likely to say news negatively impacts their mood

While over 1 in 3 (31%) report reducing their exposure to news in recent years, this rises to almost 2 in 5 (38%) among those that feel downbeat as a result of the news. Women are more likely than men to feel the news has a negative effect on their mood, to report being overwhelmed by bad news and to feeling powerless in the face of it. Women are less likely than men to check the news on a daily basis, and over a third (35%) say they are consuming less news in recent years, compared to 27% of men.

	Negative mood after seeing, hearing or reading news	Feel overwhelmed by the amount of bad news	Feel powerless after having seen, heard or read the news	Consume less news in recent years than used to
Women	57%	70%	63%	35%
Men	45%	52%	52%	27%
Average	52%	61%	57%	31%

Emotional Reaction

Those feeling emotionally downbeat as a result of the news are more likely to say they have cut back on news in recent years (38% vs. 31% on average), as are women compared to men and those aged under 44.

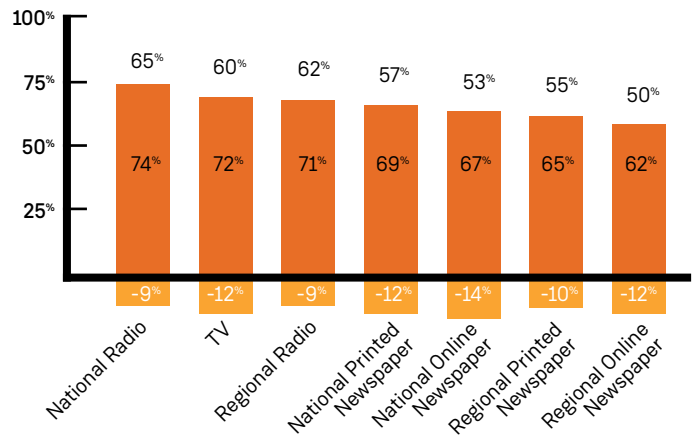
Those who say they are consuming less news are twice as likely to strongly agree that watching/reading/listening to the news sometimes negatively impacts their mood versus those who are consuming the same/more (24% v 12%). They are also significantly more likely to say they feel overwhelmed by the amount of bad news (28% v 17%), and to say they feel pessimistic after consuming news (24% v 17%).

We believe that trust is key

It is personally very important to 8 out of 10 of us that we can trust our news to be accurate, fair and balanced. For over half of this group it is extremely important. There is a pattern by age group ranging from 7 in 10 among those aged 18-24 to 9 in 10 among those aged 55+.

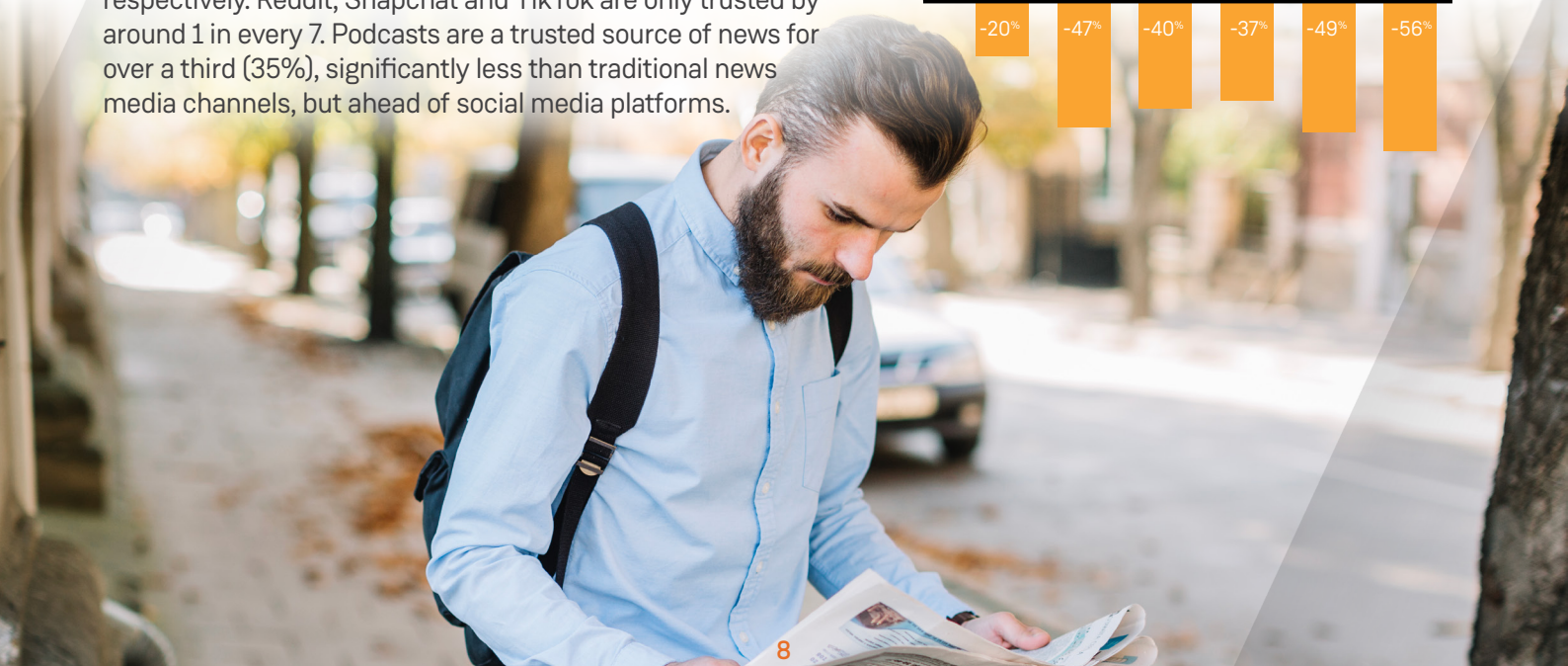
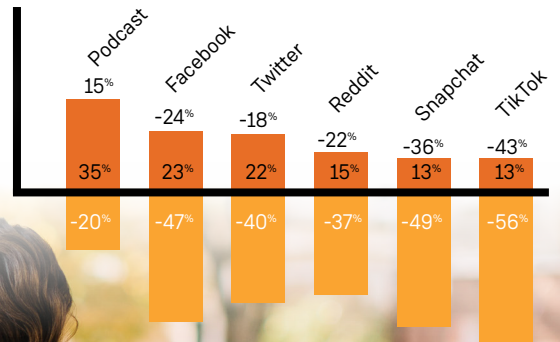
Traditional media is most trusted

We trust radio the most to deliver news that is accurate, fair and balanced. National radio is trusted by almost three quarters (74%) closely followed by regional radio at 71%. TV enjoys a similar level of trust at 72%. Approximately two thirds trust newspapers as a news source, particularly printed versions, both national (69%) and regional (65%). Online editions are also trusted by most at 67% for national newspapers and 62% for regional.



Social media is used by many but trusted by few

Few of us trust social media as a source of news. In fairness, social media platforms were not designed with this purpose in mind. However as we spend more time on them, we treat them as a source of news, albeit not a highly trusted one. Facebook and Twitter are trusted by just over 1 in 5, at 23% and 22% respectively. Reddit, Snapchat and TikTok are only trusted by around 1 in every 7. Podcasts are a trusted source of news for over a third (35%), significantly less than traditional news media channels, but ahead of social media platforms.



The democratic role of media

We typically see national media channels as more effective at holding government and the public service to account compared to regional media. Over half of us trust national media channels including TV and radio (58%) and national newspapers whether printed (55%) or online (53%) to keep government transparent and accountable. Almost half of us trust regional media including radio (50%), printed newspapers (46%) and online editions (44%) to do so. We also trust google searches and, to a lesser extent, podcasts.

Where social media falls down

Social media platforms lack trustworthiness as a news source and are also seen as ineffective at encouraging transparency and accountability. TikTok and Snapchat perform worst in this regard with over 4 in 10 (44%) rating them ineffective. This is followed by Facebook and Reddit at just under 4 in 10 (38%) and Twitter at just over 3 in 10 (35%).

Protecting ourselves from misinformation

The vast majority, 84%, feel it is vital that we protect ourselves against misinformation. Seven out of ten (69%) feel this is becoming harder with the rapid development of artificial intelligence. Older adults feel most concerned about this:

% agree:	18-24 age group	55+ age group
It is vital that we protect ourselves against misinformation	77%	93%
The threat of AI makes it harder to know what is true	63%	78%



*based on net effectiveness, i.e. effective minus not effective

Fact-checking is now part of how we consume news

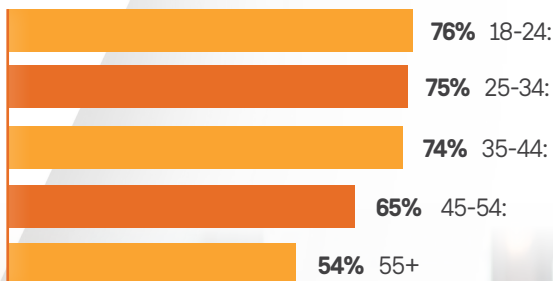
Traditional news media channels – TV, radio and newspapers – fact-check news and verify sources as part of their business model. With social media, anyone can upload video, imagery or commentary. News has become democratised.

The cost is that we cannot take for granted that what we are watching, hearing or reading is true, and that we have to seek out accuracy and depth. Today, those adults who grew up in pre-internet Ireland (pre-1991) are less likely than younger adults to have fact-checked something in the news.

Fact checking has become a normal behaviour for younger adults

In an online world, the lines around what constitutes a news source are blurring. In return for easy, instant and free access to news, it is partly up to the individual to check what is true and what is not. Younger people seem more at ease with this reality. Three quarters of those aged between 18 and 44 have fact-checked something in the news compared to just over half (54%) of those aged 55+.

Fact-checked something seen, heard or read in the news:




3 in 10
of those 55+ have never fact-checked the news

Overall, two thirds have fact-checked something seen, heard or read in the news, rising to three quarters among younger adults. Almost a third (30%) of those aged 55+ have never fact-checked anything in the news, twice as many as those aged 18-24 (16%).

Across the population as a whole, 12% say they would like to fact-check but don't know how, slightly higher among those aged 55+ at 15%.



We are heavy users of social media

For half (48%), a social media app is the first we open when we pick up our phone, far outstripping lifestyle apps (9%), productivity, entertainment or game apps (7% each), news apps (5%) or educational apps (4%).

Half of social media users check in within half an hour of waking up and within half an hour of going to sleep



Over 1 in 5 (21%) check social media straight away after waking up, almost 1 in 2 (48%) within half an hour, and almost 7 in 10 (67%) within an hour. At the end of the day over 7 in 10 (71%) check social media within an hour of going to sleep, almost 1 in 2 (49%) within a half an hour and 1 in 4 just before going to sleep.

The 90/10 split

While 9 in 10 (89%) use social media, only one in ten (10%) post frequently. A third (37%) post sometimes or frequently on social media while two thirds (63%) rarely or never do. Active engagement, indicated by those that frequently post, is significantly lower at 1 in 10 (9%). Twice as many, 20%, never post on social media. The tendency to post varies significantly by age group with younger adults more likely to do so frequently and older adults more likely never to do so.

	Frequently post on social media	Never post on social media
18-24 age group	16%	12%
25-34 age group	14%	12%
35-44 age group	9%	17%
45-54 age group	6%	19%
55+ age group	4%	32%
Average:	9%	20%

Do we spend too much time on social platforms?

There is an almost even split between those who say they spend too much time on social media (44%) and those who say it is about right (46%). Only 10% of people say they spend too little time on social media.

Women are more likely than men to feel they spend too much time on social media

	Spend too much time on social media	Use social media straight after waking up	Use social media just before going to sleep	First app I open when I pick up my phone
Women	47%	26%	31%	54%
Men	40%	15%	18%	42%
Average:	44%	21%	25%	48%

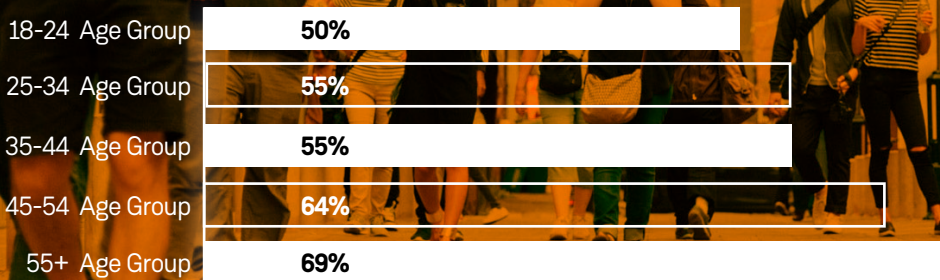
Younger adults are more likely to feel they spend too much time on social media

The degree to which people feel they spend too much time on social media varies significantly with age, from 7 out of 10 (69%) among those aged 18-24 to just over 1 in 4 (26%) of those aged 55+.

We all agree children spend too much time on it

While over 4 in 10 adults (44%) feel they spend too much time on social media, almost twice as many, over 8 out of 10, believe that children spend too much time on it. Of those, 6 out of 10 strongly agree. The pattern varies by age group with older adults more likely to agree strongly.

Children spend too much time on social media these days, % strongly agree:



The effect of social media on our wellbeing

Over half of users feel social media has an effect on their emotions. A third (33%) believe it has a negative effect, while almost a quarter (22%) believe it has a positive effect and 45% believe it has no effect.

Those who say social media has a negative impact on their wellbeing are significantly more likely (vs. those who say social media has a positive or no impact) to say that they spend too much time on social media (65% v 33%).

Younger adults feel the negative effects of social media most

While on average 1 in 3 users believe social media has a negative effect, this rises to almost 1 in 2 (47%) among those aged 18-24. Younger adults are also more likely to have been harassed or abused on social media: 1 in 3 of 18-34 year olds compared to under 1 in 5 across the total population and just 1 in 14 among those aged 55+.



1 in 3
18-34 year-olds have been abused on social media

The link between age, level of social media use and impact on mental wellbeing

Younger adults are more likely to be frequent users of social media, to check it straight after waking up and just before sleeping and to believe that they spend too much time on it. They are also more likely to have had negative experiences of it, and to feel it has a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. Older adults are less engaged in social media, and less impacted by its downsides. Research shows that reduced time spent on social media can lead to an increased sense of wellbeing (2).

	Spend too much time on social media	Use social media straight after waking up	Use social media just before going to sleep	Have been harassed or abused on social media	Social media use has a negative effect on mental wellbeing
18-24	69%	37%	49%	34%	53%
25-34	56%	31%	33%	32%	46%
35-44	48%	21%	28%	18%	40%
45-54	36%	16%	18%	16%	26%
55+	26%	10%	12%	7%	16%
Average:	44%	21%	25%	18%	33%

First thing in the morning, last thing at night

Those who check social media straight after waking up or just before going to sleep are more likely to be emotionally impacted by social media either positively or negatively.

Over 1 in 4 (28%) of those who feel the emotional effects of social media check it straight after waking up compared to an average of 1 in 5 (21%). Approximately 1 in 3 of those emotionally affected by it check it just before going to sleep compared to an average of 1 in 4.

The closer to waking up or going to sleep people use social media, the more likely they are to feel emotionally affected.

Social media use in the morning:

	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	No Emotional Effect
Straight away after waking up	28%	28%	12%
15-30 minutes	37%	25%	24%
30 minutes - 1 hour	14%	22%	20%
1 - 2 hours	13%	13%	17%
2 hours +	8%	13%	27%

Social media use in the evening:

	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	No Emotional Effect
Just before sleep	35%	31%	16%
15-30 minutes	31%	23%	22%
30 minutes - 1 hour	20%	23%	21%
1 - 2 hours	9%	14%	18%
2 hours +	5%	9%	23%

The link between emotional impact and social media use: chicken or egg?

A clear link emerges between the tendency to begin and end the day with social media and feeling an emotional effect, whether positive or negative, as a result. This may be driven by a tendency to seek emotional stimulation through social media, or by an emotional effect caused by social media. Whichever the root, most of us are aware of the link between social media and our emotions, and around half of us feel we spend too much time on it.

Taking a look at the national economy

Concerns about economy continue to ease

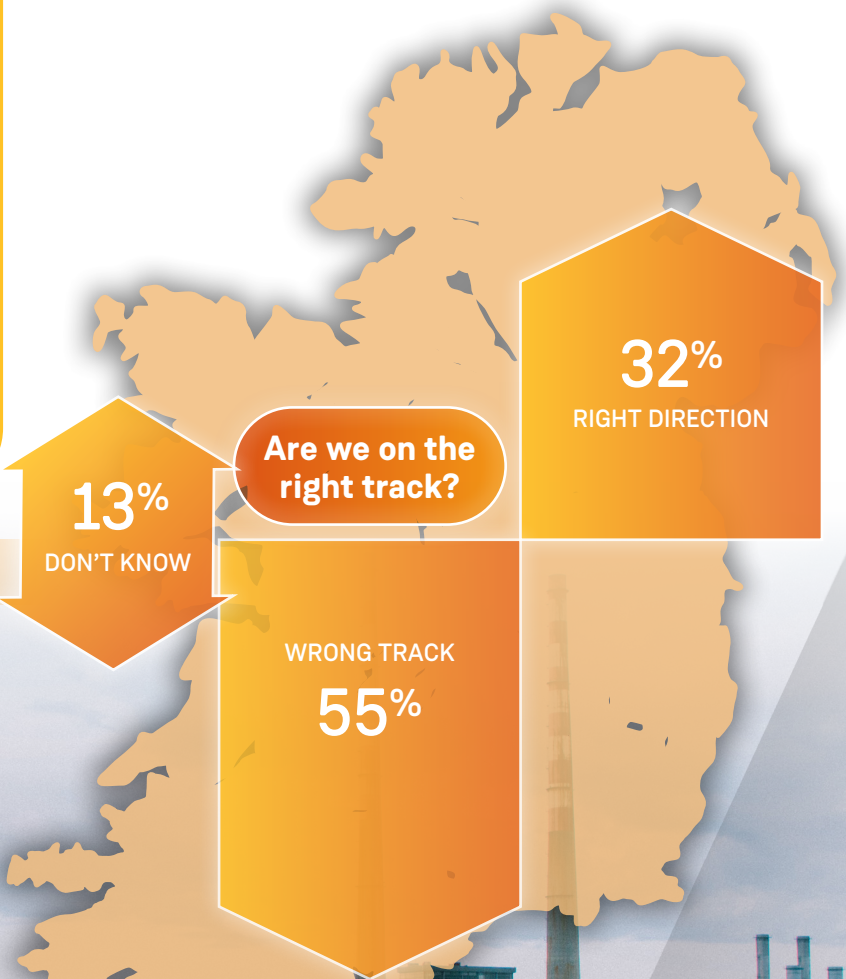
Looking back on the findings from our most recent reports, it is clear that we are seeing a decrease in negativity towards the direction of the economy over the next 12 months. Since it peaked towards the end of last year, those who believe the economy is going to get worse has decreased from a high of 67% in July 2022 to 43% in May 2023. Those who believe the economy will improve in the next year has nearly doubled during the same period, rising from 11% to 20%. Just over three in 10 (31%) believe it will stay the same.

Do you think the economic situation of the country is likely to improve, remain the same, or get worse over the next 12 months?



Are we on the right track?

While also moving in a positive direction, changes in attitudes towards the general direction of the country show a more gradual shift. The number of people who feel we are on the right track has risen from 24% in July 2022 to 32% in May 2023. Those who say we are on the wrong track remain a majority, though that figure has decreased from 63% to 55% over the same timeframe.



How we describe our personal finances

The present day

Our personal financial situation appears to be seeing the slowest change, with the number of people who say they are better off today compared to twelve months ago remaining relatively stable at 16%. Over half (51%) still say we are worse off now versus last year, but this has fallen from 63% in November 2022. Those who say they are in the same situation has also increased to 31% from 21% during that time.

Worse off compared to twelve months ago

63%

November 2022

vs

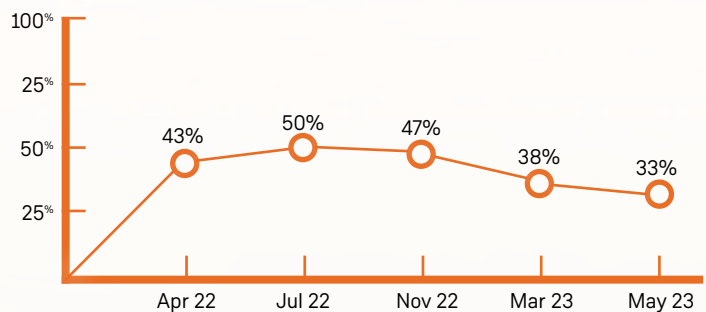
May 2023

51%

Where do we see ourselves in 12 months?

Those who expect to be better off this time next year has seen a steady increase over the last six months. One in four of us now expect to be better off, while those who expect to be worse off has fallen significantly from 47% in November 2022 to 33% in May 2023. A third of us say we expect our situation to remain the same.

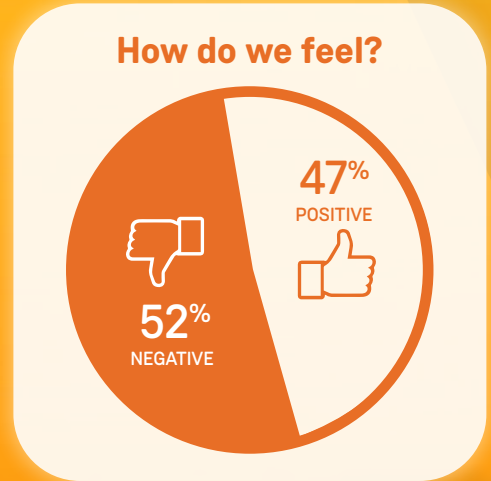
Expect to be worse off in 12 months



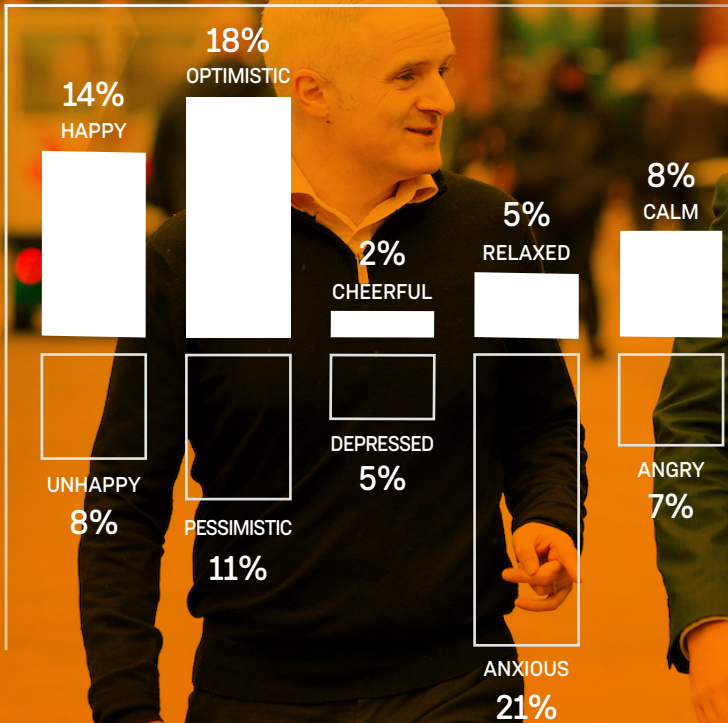
What do we feel about living in Ireland today?

There has been a strong resurgence in positive sentiment about living in Ireland in recent months. While anxiety remains the dominant single emotion at 21%, it may be trending downwards. People are overall more happy (14%) than unhappy (8%), with optimism (18%) also rising against pessimism (11%).

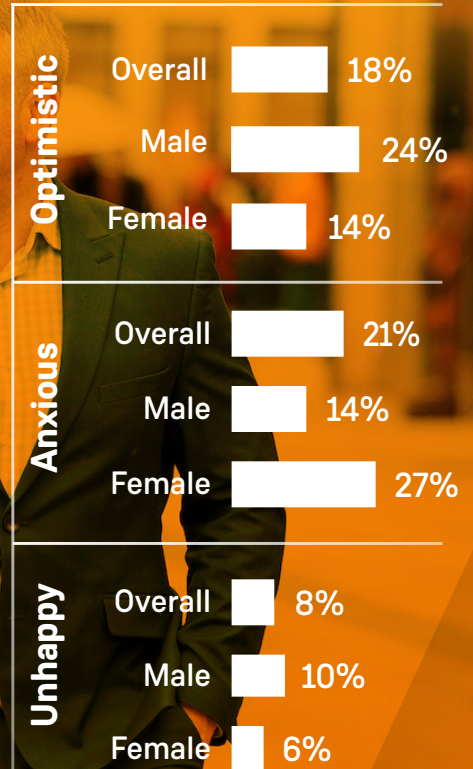
There remains a notable difference between emotions reported by men and women. Nearly 1 in 4 (24%) men feel optimistic about living in Ireland, while only 1 in 7 (14%) women say the same. Women are also nearly twice as likely to report anxiety than men, at 27% versus 14%. Men, however, do report a higher incidence of feeling unhappy (10%) compared to women (6%).



Nation's Emotions



Nation's Anxiety



Reflecting the Nation

A regional view of our relationship with news and social media

Taking a look at regional differences, over a third of people in both Dublin (38%) and Munster (37%) say they are personally very interested in news and current affairs. Those in Munster (37%) are also most likely to report feeling motivated after consuming news. Residents of Connacht and Ulster are the most likely to use social media after waking up (25%) or before going to sleep (30%).

Dublin



News Media:

Often feel motivated after consuming news **32%**
 Very interested in news and current affairs **38%**

Social Media:

Use social media straight after waking up **19%**
 Use social media just before sleep **23%**

Rest of Leinster



News Media:

Often feel motivated after consuming news **30%**
 Very interested in news and current affairs **30%**

Social Media:

Use social media straight after waking up **19%**
 Use social media just before sleep **25%**

Connacht & Ulster



News Media:

Often feel motivated after consuming news **19%**
 Very interested in news and current affairs **23%**

Social Media:

Use social media straight after waking up **25%**
 Use social media just before sleep **30%**

Munster



News Media:

Often feel motivated after consuming news **37%**
 Very interested in news and current affairs **37%**

Social Media:

Use social media straight after waking up **22%**
 Use social media just before sleep **24%**

Methodology

In the ninth edition of Reflecting Ireland, we take a look at the nation's relationship with news, current affairs, and our lives on social media.

References

1. Core Irish Media Report, Quarter 1 2023. Core.
2. Allcott, H., Braghieri, L., Eichmeyer, S. and Gentzkow, M., 2020. The welfare effects of social media. *American Economic Review*, 110(3), pp.629-676.

- An online survey was conducted of 1,000 people in the Republic of Ireland
- Quota controls were set on gender, age, social class and region to mirror the 18+ population profile
- Fieldwork was carried out between May 8th – 21st
- Data weighted to reflect the adult population aged 18+
- The margin of error for this research is +/- 3%

For further information, contact;



permanent tsb

Leontia Fannin
Head of Corporate Affairs & Communications
leontia.fannin@permanenttsb.ie

core Research

Emma Kavanagh
Research Director
Emma.Kavanagh@onecore.ie

b behaviour wise

Claire Cogan
Director
claire@behaviourwise.ie

