

UKOM Insights

Local News

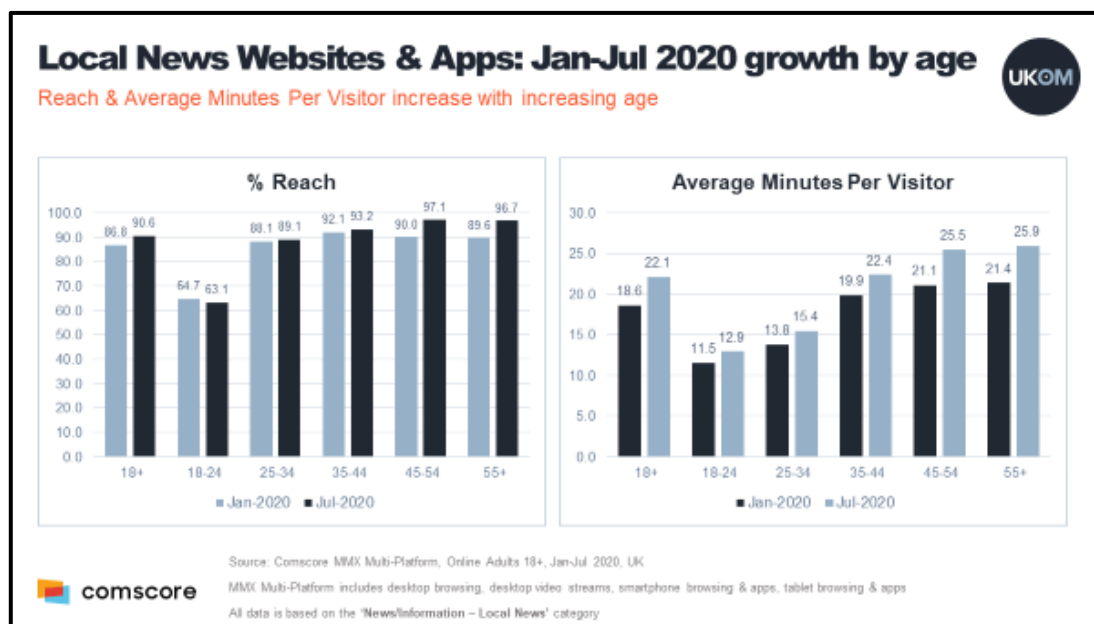
A recent article from the Press Gazette* highlighted how millions more people have sought out local news online during the pandemic. The need for regional news and localised services in current circumstances makes sense given that different areas of the UK are having different and frequently updated guidelines, regulations and restrictions imposed by the government. This month, UKOM looks at the online usage of local news websites and apps and their growth under Covid-19 conditions.

The chart below shows that both audience and time spent visiting sites classified by Comscore under the category 'Local news' increased among the UK adult online population between Jan and July 2020. In March, category reach among online adults surpassed 90% for the first time whilst monthly minutes increased by 25% to over 900 million at the start of the pandemic with levels remaining high.

Category: Local News	Jan-2020	Jul-2020	% Change
Total Unique Visitors/Viewers (000)	39,061	41,198	5
% Reach	86.8	90.6	4.3
Total Minutes (MM)	727	909	25
Average Minutes per Visitor	18.6	22.1	18.6

Source: Comscore MMX Multi-Platform, Adults 18+, Jan-Jul 2020, UK

However, reach and consumption of local news still varies considerably by age. Less than two-thirds of 18-24s visited local news websites in July 2020, compared to over 95% of over 45s. Among those who did visit, 18-24s spent on average only 12.9 minutes - half the time of those aged over 45 who spent over 25 minutes.



The lower reach is not because young people do not read content from online news publications. In July 2020, 93.6% of 18-24s visited sites and services classified by Comscore as 'General News'.

In addition to having higher levels of reach and time spent among older audiences, it was over 55s who contributed mostly to the growth of all metrics which the local news category experienced during the pandemic. Between Jan and April, the first full month of lockdown, an additional 1 million over 55s visited regional news sites, contributing to a 48% increase in minutes, whereas for 18-24s unique visitors and time spent declined. This audience growth could be explained by the fact that older audiences were more at risk from the virus and were more likely to be shielding so may have felt more isolated. Clearly local news online would have been a valuable source for the elderly given they were most impacted by lockdown – some of whom may not have been able to get to the shops to buy their local paper. Encouragingly, the category seems to have retained many of the visitors it gained during April as reach and time spent has since remained high despite the easing of lockdown.

Even before the pandemic, the data shows that young people were not visiting local news brands online to the same extent as older audiences. There is likely to be a variety of possible hypotheses. For example, 18-24s may get regional news from social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, they may use mobile apps which have a more national or global news focus or they may just be less interested in the local community.

While not an online source of local news, "Nextdoor" is a popular neighbourhood social networking brand which also increased all metrics between Jan and July, with usage peaking at the height of the pandemic to over 4 million unique visitors in April 2020. Despite being a social network and having its own mobile app, it is again older audiences who are most likely to use the brand and Nextdoor hasn't attracted younger audiences to the same extent. Reach in July among 18-24s was only 1.6% compared to 12.5% among 55+. As seen in the local news category, reach of Nextdoor increases for each of the older audience segments and the 55+ now account for over 50% of brand visitors. During April when Nextdoor had over 4 million users, only 0.8% of 18-24s used the service compared to 15.2% of over 55s.

Whilst the data indicates that during a pandemic such as Covid-19 usage of online local news and community services increases, 18-24s do not visit regional news sites online to the same extent as other age groups. It will be interesting to see what happens to the category now areas of the UK have different rules and regulations– especially given younger people are now being impacted by the virus. It is probably no coincidence that Leicester Mercury had its highest online audience of the year in June when the city and suburbs of Leicester were placed into a local lockdown. As always, UKOM will keep an eye on the category and provide updates with any new insights.

Notes on Data:

All data is based on UKOM industry standard and development level approved Comscore MMX Multi-Platform data based on Jan 20 – Jul 20. Comscore MMX Multi-Platform includes desktop browsing, desktop video streams, smartphone browsing & apps, tablet browsing & apps. All analysis is undertaken on 18+ UK adults.

All data is based on the '**News/Information – Local News**' category from Comscore.

*<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/millions-more-look-out-local-news-online-during-pandemic-figures-show/>