

Ofcom + Bakamo

BBC News: A social media intelligence study 2019

Two-thirds of people in the UK use social media as forums for unfiltered conversation. In 2019, it was Ofcom's view that the use of social media would continue to grow, and it would be important to pay attention to the content and nature of discourse online. So, in 2019 Ofcom commissioned Bakamo to conduct *Social Listening* to observe the changes in real people's views and perceptions of BBC News.

Bakamo designed for Ofcom an in-depth study that explored the significance of BBC News to real people and analysed perceptions by observing how they shared BBC News stories online. We drew on our experience of harnessing big data, our traditional qualitative analysis skills, and systems theory underpinnings to go beyond stated motivations and understand how BBC News stories were shared and how sharing met sharers' needs.

To begin, we harvested relevant discourse from a range of social media platforms for the year preceding the study, using two separate search strategies. First, using a URL query to understand how users shared and used material published by news agencies, allowing us to compare attitudes towards BBC News with news agencies. Second, we used keyword searching to gather conversations specifically about news providers.

To quantify, we established the volume, reach and degrees of engagement different news providers saw in the UK, revealing that while BBC News was considered a credible source, other news agencies had greater reach and were amplified to a greater degree through voluntary sharing by real social media users.

As the basis of thematic analysis, we collected the 25 most engaging articles in each news category and identified the top stories from each news agency. From there, we constructed nine themes that represented the most engaging BBC News articles and were surprised to see that the less controversial themes had higher engagement than controversial political content. For example, while *Politics* news, especially Brexit-related, was most shared, *Science* news attracted the most likes and comments.

To establish perceptions, we coded, examined and analysed 750 comments about BBC News and its programmes. We looked at people who explicitly discussed BBC News and found that while political topics were contentious and divided opinion, the BBC in general was valued for offering human interest, international news, investigative journalism, and quality documentaries.



The majority of people who shared BBC News articles did not comment on the news source, implying trust in the BBC's reliability. However, some did discuss the reliability of the BBC, and we recommended that the BBC develop for more content on British identity issues to safeguard the representation of its entire audience.

Ofcom received and published the report [BBC News: A social media intelligence study](#) (summary report [here](#)).

Please contact [James MacGregor](#), Managing Director at Bakamo Public, for more information.