

Robert Kenny

International Online News Consumption

16 January 2012

Introduction

The internet is radically altering patterns of news consumption. It is:

- Widening the reach of existing news organisations, for instance bringing their reporting to a global audience
- Introducing new online-only news providers, such as Yahoo News and the Huffington Post
- Enabling 'crowd sourced' news, via social media platforms.

This note explores the impact of cross-border news provision and of online-only news providers, looking across the 30 countries with the largest online population. This analysis is based on Doubleclick Ad Planner data, from Google.¹ Note that one key limitation of this data is that it does not include figures for Google News, which is therefore excluded from the analysis. (In the US, Google News was rated a top 10 news site by both Nielsen and Hitwise).²

Our key findings are:

- The news sites with the largest global reach are predominantly online only sites
- However, in most individual countries most of the leading news sites are newspapers. The US, China, Brazil and Russia are key exceptions
- Few sites have significant cross-border reach, at least in the largest internet markets. Yahoo and the BBC (and likely Google News) are key exceptions. The BBC is a top 10 news site in 7 out of the 30 largest internet markets

Robert Kenny
rob@commcham.com

¹ See page 10 for a description of methodology

² Journalism.org, [Navigating news online](#), 9 May 2011

Types of news sites

We have categorised news websites into four categories: online only; newspaper sites (including magazines); broadcaster sites (TV and radio); and news agency sites. If we look at the top sites measured by reach³, we can see that online only sites dominate the *global* ranking:

Figure 1 : Type of news sites ranked by reach, global and ten largest internet markets

	Global	China	USA	Japan	India	Brazil	Germany	Russia	UK	France	Nigeria
1	news.yahoo.com	news.qq.com	news.yahoo.com	dailynews.yahoo.co.jp	Indiatimes.com	globo.com	bild.de	news.yandex.ru	bbc.co.uk	actu.orange.fr	news.yahoo.com
2	news.qq.com	news.baidu.com	msnbc.msn.com	asahi.com	news.yahoo.com	terra.com.br	spiegel.de	news.mail.ru	dailymail.co.uk	lefigaro.fr	bbc.co.uk
3	bbc.co.uk	news.ifeng.com	huffingtonpost.com	mainichi.jp	ndtv.com	folha.uol.com.br	nachrichten.t-online.de	ria.ru	news.yahoo.com	lemonde.fr	sunnews online.com
4	msnbc.msn.com	news.sina.com.cn	cnn.com	iza.ne.jp	connect.in.com	noticias.uol.com.br	welt.de	kp.ru	guardian.co.uk	news.yahoo.com	vanguardngr.com
5	news.baidu.com	news.sohu.com	nytimes.com	excite.co.jp	ibnlive.in.com	ultimosegundo.ig.com.br	focus.de	vesti.ru	telegraph.co.uk	leparisien.fr	punchng.com
6	news.sina.com.cn	xinhuanet.com	foxnews.com	jiji.com	bhaskar.com	estadao.com.br	sueddeutsche.de	novoteka.ru	thesun.co.uk	lexpress.fr	thenation onlineng.net
7	cnn.com	news.163.com	abcnews.go.com	nikkei.co.jp	intoday.in	noticias.yahoo.com	n-tv.de	utro.ru	news.sky.com	nouvelobs.com	saharareporters.com
8	huffingtonpost.com	people.com.cn	washingtonpost.com	news.live-door.com	webdunia.com	noticias.r7.com	nachrichten.yahoo.com	infox.ru	mirror.co.uk	lci.tf1.fr	tribune.com.ng
9	globo.com	huanqiu.com	usatoday.com	news-post-seven.com	hindustantimes.com	clicrbs.com.br	zeit.de	lenta.ru	independent.co.uk	liberation.fr	cnn.com
10	news.sohu.com	chinanews.com	latimes.com	nikkei.com	bbc.co.uk	veja.abril.com.br	faz.net	newsru.com	metro.co.uk	ladepeche.fr	thisdaylive.com

Key	Online	Newspaper	Broadcaster	Agency
-----	--------	-----------	-------------	--------

There are two reasons for this: the cross-border success of Yahoo, and the success of online-only sites in the two largest national markets, China and the US. However, the Chinese sites have domestic reach only. For instance, news.qq.com (the news site of Tencent QQ) is second only to Yahoo in its news reach, but has only trivial traffic outside China.

Aside from the online providers, there are also three broadcasters in the top 10 global news sites: The BBC, CNN and Globo (of Brazil). In all three cases their reach, like news.qq.com, is primarily domestic, but the BBC does garner 22% of its traffic outside the UK. We discuss the BBC in more detail below.

³ Number of unique visitors per month. Note that we have only taken the leading news site for a particular brand in a given country. For instance, in Japan we have included dailynews.yahoo.co.jp (the leading site by reach), not headlines.yahoo.co.jp (the second largest). As a result asahi.com moves up to the second slot. In practice there will likely be heavy overlap between the reach of the two Yahoo sites

As we look at individual countries, the picture changes significantly – in particular newspaper websites become far more important in many markets. A national newspaper site may have high reach in its own market, but be insignificant on a global scale, given limited cross-border reach. In each of the UK, Germany and France newspaper sites have seven out of the top ten spots. Newspaper sites seem to do particularly well where the press is primarily national rather than local, since the newspaper sites are less fragmented as a result. (This is likely one of the reasons for the relatively poor showing of newspapers in the US for example).

Conversely, in Russia and China online news sources dominate, with seven and five of the top spots respectively, possibly because of greater trust in new media outlets than traditional ones.

National origins of news sites

We looked at the national origins of the top sites by country. Clearly online news remains a largely domestic business. In all markets local providers take the great majority or all of the top ten spots:

Figure 2 : Origin of news sites ranked by reach, ten largest internet markets

	China	USA	Japan	India	Brazil	Germany	Russia	UK	France	Nigeria
1	news.qq.com	news.yahoo.com	dailynews.yahoo.co.jp	Indiatimes.com	globo.com	bild.de	news.yandex.ru	bbc.co.uk	actu.orange.fr	news.yahoo.com
2	news.baidu.com	msnbc.msn.com	asahi.com	news.yahoo.com	terra.com.br	spiegel.de	news.mail.ru	dailymail.co.uk	lefigaro.fr	bbc.co.uk
3	news.ifeng.com	huffingtonpost.com	mainichi.jp	ndtv.com	folha.uol.com.br	nachrichtent-online.de	ria.ru	news.yahoo.com	lemonde.fr	sunnewsonline.com
4	news.sina.com.cn	cnn.com	iza.ne.jp	connect.in.com	noticias.uol.com.br	welt.de	kp.ru	guardian.co.uk	news.yahoo.com	vanguardngr.com
5	news.sohu.com	nytimes.com	excite.co.jp	ibnlive.in.com	ultimosegundo.ig.com.br	focus.de	vesti.ru	telegraph.co.uk	leparisien.fr	punchng.com
6	xinhuanet.com	foxnews.com	jiji.com	bhaskar.com	estadao.com.br	sueddeutsche.de	novoteka.ru	thesun.co.uk	lexpress.fr	thenationonlineng.net
7	news.163.com	abcnews.go.com	nikkeibp.co.jp	intoday.in	noticias.yahoo.com	n-tv.de	utro.ru	news.sky.com	nouvelobs.com	saharareporters.com
8	people.com.cn	washingtonpost.com	news.livdoor.com	webdunia.com	noticias.r7.com	nachrichten.yahoo.com	infox.ru	mirror.co.uk	lci.tf1.fr	tribune.com.ng
9	huanqiu.com	usatoday.com	news-postseven.com	hindustantimes.com	clicrbs.com.br	zeit.de	lenta.ru	independent.co.uk	liberation.fr	cnn.com
10	chinanews.com	latimes.com	nikkei.com	bbc.co.uk	veja.abril.com.br	faz.net	newsru.com	metro.co.uk	ladepeche.fr	thisdaylive.com
Key		International	Domestic							

Yahoo and the BBC are the key players having cross-border success. As might be expected, all the cross-border sites have local language editions. It is worth noting that Yahoo's cross-border success is one of branding and news distribution, not of news production. It has limited news gathering capability and relies heavily on redistribution of local news content produced by traditional media suppliers.

Looking only at the top ten sites by countries does somewhat understate the importance of cross-border news. There is likely a 'long tail' of international sites that get traffic in any given market which may in aggregate be important, but which may individually not rival the key domestic news providers.

Some smaller markets with an international orientation and many English speakers can have highly international news consumption. For instance, in the Philippines five⁴ of the top ten sites are non-domestic.

⁴ Yahoo, CCN, BBC, New York Times and the Huffington Post

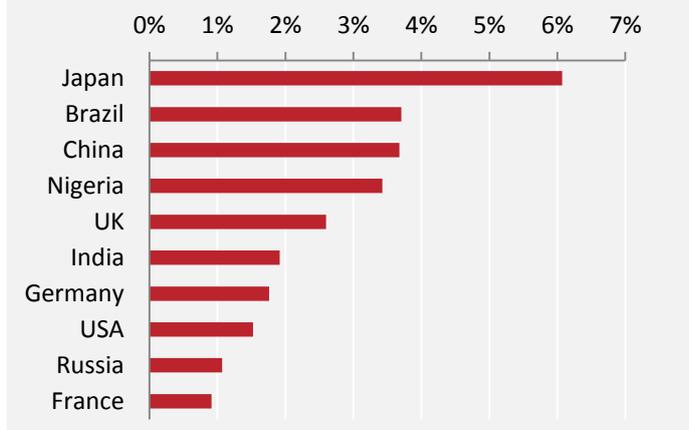
The importance of news traffic by country

Countries differ in where they get their online news, but also in how important a part of internet consumption it is. In Japan news is 6% of page views, in France and Russia it is less than 1%.

Any metric involving page views needs to be used with caution – for instance, they do not accurately reflect time spent watching online video. However, there are reasons to believe that these differences in news traffic percentages may reflect more general national differences in news consumption.

Of over 30 countries examined by the OECD, Japan was second only to Iceland in newspaper readership per capita, and conversely Russia has the lowest newspaper readership of all.⁵

Figure 3 : News traffic as a percentage of country total



⁵ OECD, *The Evolution of News and the Internet*, March 2010

Importance of international traffic to news sites

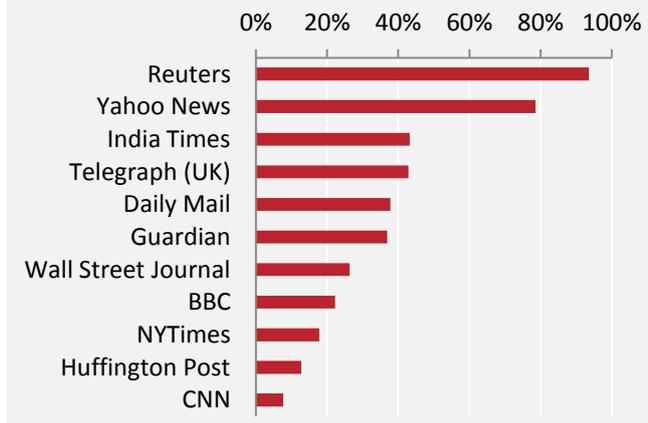
For most sites, international traffic is a relatively unimportant - the great majority of sites get less than 10% of their page views from overseas markets. However there is wide variation and some important exceptions.

As we have noted, Yahoo has an important global presence, with roughly half of its traffic coming from Japan alone. Reuters, with a long international history, also is far bigger outside its home market (the UK) than inside it.

Other news sites that do well internationally are those associated with large expatriate populations, such as the India Times. Generally speaking UK sites have relatively large overseas audiences, in part because of historic ties to the Commonwealth countries, but also because there is a large pool of ex-UK English speakers. English is the largest language block online, with almost 570m users. Chinese is second with 510m, with Spanish a distant third with 160m.⁶

In particular, UK sites are able to pick up potentially substantial audiences in the US. The reverse is less true – ex-US English speakers (at least native speakers) are a relatively small potential incremental audience for US news sites. This has driven different strategies. For example both the Guardian and Daily Mail have more actively courted international traffic than any US newspaper.

Figure 4 : Non-domestic traffic as percentage of total, selected brands



⁶ Internet World Stats, [Internet World Users By Language](#), figures as of May 31 2011

Case Study: The BBC

The BBC has a long international history. The BBC World Service (then the Empire Service) began broadcasting overseas in 1932, and today offers service in 28 languages.⁸

In addition the core BBC service has expanded internationally, offering TV channels in over 100 countries.⁹ The BBC World News channel is available in 300m households globally.¹⁰

Finally there is a British diaspora that is already familiar with the BBC. As a result it is a strong international brand, and the BBC's website is an important source of news in a number of markets.

The BBC is the leading news site in its domestic market, but is also a top ten site in markets as diverse as Nigeria, the Philippines, Canada and India.

However, in global terms some of these markets are small, and these leading positions don't necessarily translate into a material traffic contribution. The consumption of news (measured by news site page views) per online user varies dramatically. It is almost 30 times higher in the US than in Nigeria for example, perhaps because many internet users in Nigeria depend on mobile devices and cybercafés.¹¹ In practice online news is less important in such markets relative to traditional media than in it is in markets making heavier use of the internet.

Figure 5 : Rank of BBC amongst news sites by country⁷

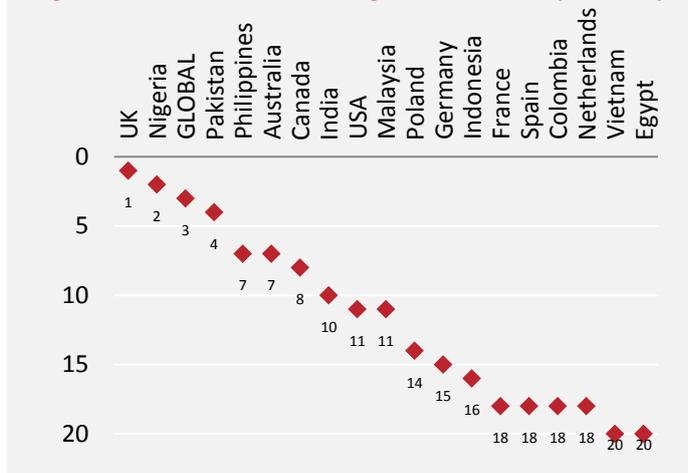
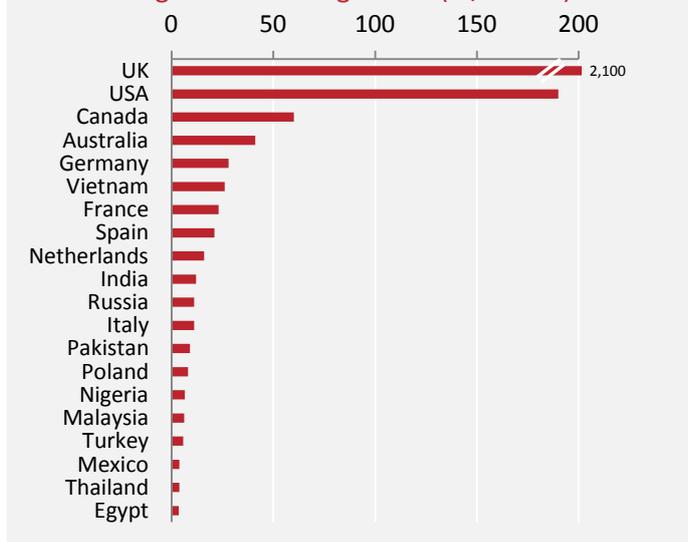


Figure 6 : BBC Pageviews (m/month)



⁷ Amongst 30 largest internet markets, where BBC has a top 20 position in that market

⁸ BBC, *About BBC World Service*

⁹ BBC Worldwide, *Annual Review 2010/11*

¹⁰ BBC, *BBC World News announces deal to broadcast programmes on new TV4 News channel*, 12 January 2012

¹¹ Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2011 – Nigeria*, 18 April 2011

Consequently, though the BBC is important as an online news source in these countries, these countries are less significant to the BBC in terms of traffic. Conversely Germany is the Corporation's 5th largest source of traffic, though the BBC is ranked a relatively low 15th amongst news sites there. Of course the BBC is not a commercially driven organisation, so the absolute number of page views may be of less significance than the contribution traffic in a particular country makes to the Corporations' societal goals.

Methodology

This analysis is based on Doubleclick Ad Planner¹² data, from Google. This is a powerful tool, reporting reach (number of distinct visitors) and page views for websites, with the ability to report traffic both at a global and a country level. It also categorises sites by type (for instance, news, reference and so on). It is capable of measuring the overlap in audience between one or more sites. It also has the great virtue of being free.

It does have some limitations. It does not report traffic for google.com sites, its reporting of overlapping audiences appears to work better for small rather than large groups of sites, and its categorisation of sites is not infallible. That said, by some margin it is the most powerful free tool for understanding international web traffic.

We downloaded November 2011 data from Ad Planner for the top 1000 sites globally and for the 30 largest national markets measured by number of internet users. We then used Ad Planner's categories to identify news sites, and analysed the data to pull out the top news sites by country, and the top countries by site for leading international sites.

For major markets and sites, a manual check was done to confirm that sites were in fact news sites, and a check was also made against leading news sites (where such information was available) in key markets to ensure these had been included in Ad Planner's news category. Based on this check, the list of news websites was refined and the analysis rerun. Note that these manual checks were not exhaustive, and undoubtedly some miscategorisations remain.

There is an important measure of subjectivity in this analysis. Some sites that contain news (and may have been so categorised by Google) may nonetheless not have their usage primarily driven by news. AOL is an example. We have excluded it on the basis that most of the traffic to this site will not be news related. Where appropriate and practical we have included news subdomains (for instance news.sina.com.cn) but excluded their parents (sina.com.cn in this case) on the basis that though the latter may include news content, the bulk of news consumption will take place in the subdomain. An exception is bbc.co.uk where we have used the parent domain (though a news subdomain exists).

¹² <http://www.google.com/adplanner/> Registration required

We have excluded social news sites such as dihatt.com.br in Brazil. These include some news-relevant articles, but also much material that is closer to blogs or general interest articles.

We have excluded ISP landing pages that may contain news, but have included news subdomains if the site has them (for instance, nachrichten.t-online.de).

If you feel we have made mistakes in our categorisations, please let us know at rob@commcham.com .

About Communications Chambers

Communications Chambers is a growing association of leading experts in the fields of telecoms, media and technology. We advise on issues of strategy, policy and regulation. Our members have worked at senior levels in industry or in regulators, in addition to having many years of consulting experience.

Our members have substantial international experience, having worked across Europe, the US and Asia.

Website: www.commcham.com

Twitter: [@commcham](https://twitter.com/commcham)