

Latest research shows trust in local reporting soars

ND NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

The latest research commissioned by the North Dakota Newspaper Association shows the difference in trust between local news sources and social media.

Original reporting by local newspapers, television and radio stations garnered five times the trust of people surveyed compared to social media posts not tied to original local reporting.

In a demographically weighted survey conducted by outside research firm Coda Ventures, 75 percent of people said they trust local news coverage, compared to just 16 percent for social media.

"These results are not exactly surprising," said NDNA Executive Director Cecile Wehrman, "but they're very stark when showed side by side."

This is important information for individuals, companies, and state and local agencies to know when they exclusively use social media to "tell their own story."

NDNA regularly conducts surveying to keep a pulse of where citizens are on a variety of issues related to newspapers and government transparency.

Other key findings include:

1. People strongly favor keeping newspapers as the independent publisher of public notices. 80% say newspapers, as an independent third party, should keep publishing public notices. Only 20% say government should be the only source. Incidents such as the recent disclosure about the North Dakota Legacy Fund rewriting minutes is just the latest example of why setting up government entities as the only archive of public notices is problematic.

3. Government websites have limited reach. Only 36% of people surveyed visited a government website for notices in the past year, so about two-thirds never did. When people actively look for meeting or notice information, printed newspapers (39%) and newspaper websites (32%) lead, ahead of government websites (23%).

4. For state programs, people want to hear through local media, and they want spending disclosed. 92% say access to information about state programs (housing, health, education) is important, and 59% say very important. Their preferred channel is the local newspaper (58%), then local TV and state agency websites (50% each). 81% want government to disclose how much it spends on local media versus out-of-state tech platforms. 55% say most of that money should go to local media, and only 7% favor Facebook/Google or similar digital platforms.

"Advertising over the past few years related to the Primary Residence Income Tax Credit, placed by the North Dakota Insurance Commission in newspapers, is one example of how successful newspapers can be in making people aware of benefits to which they are entitled," said Wehrman.

In addition, the study found 85 percent of North Dakotans access printed or digital editions of North Dakota newspapers every month.

Newspaper readers also continue to get younger, with 78 percent of readers now under the age of 65. That's up 2 percent from the 2024 survey.

In fact, said Wehrman, readers age 18-34 now account for more than a third of the newspaper audience. More newspaper readers in that 18-34 age group still prefer printed newspapers though digital versions are gaining -- with 36 percent of those readers accessing print editions compared to 34 percent for digital editions.

The survey also affirmed the continued likelihood that newspaper readers are more likely to vote in both state/federal and local elections when compared to the general population of all North Dakota adults.