

tier one.

**TIER ONE MEDIA PULSE:
HOW AMERICANS REALLY
CONSUME NEWS**



2,000

U.S. Adults

BREAKING: NEWS

For years, we've watched long-standing news systems shatter: layoffs shrinking newsrooms, publishers slashing budgets, and cultural rifts dividing audiences. Trust in these institutions as a whole eroded. Out of that fire, independent journalists — freed or forced to go solo — began rewriting the rules and building a new wave of media on their own terms.

Americans have been rethinking their relationship with news amid all this. **Six in 10 still consider themselves news hounds, while only 10% say they rarely tune in** — but what they're following and where they're finding it is still shaking out.

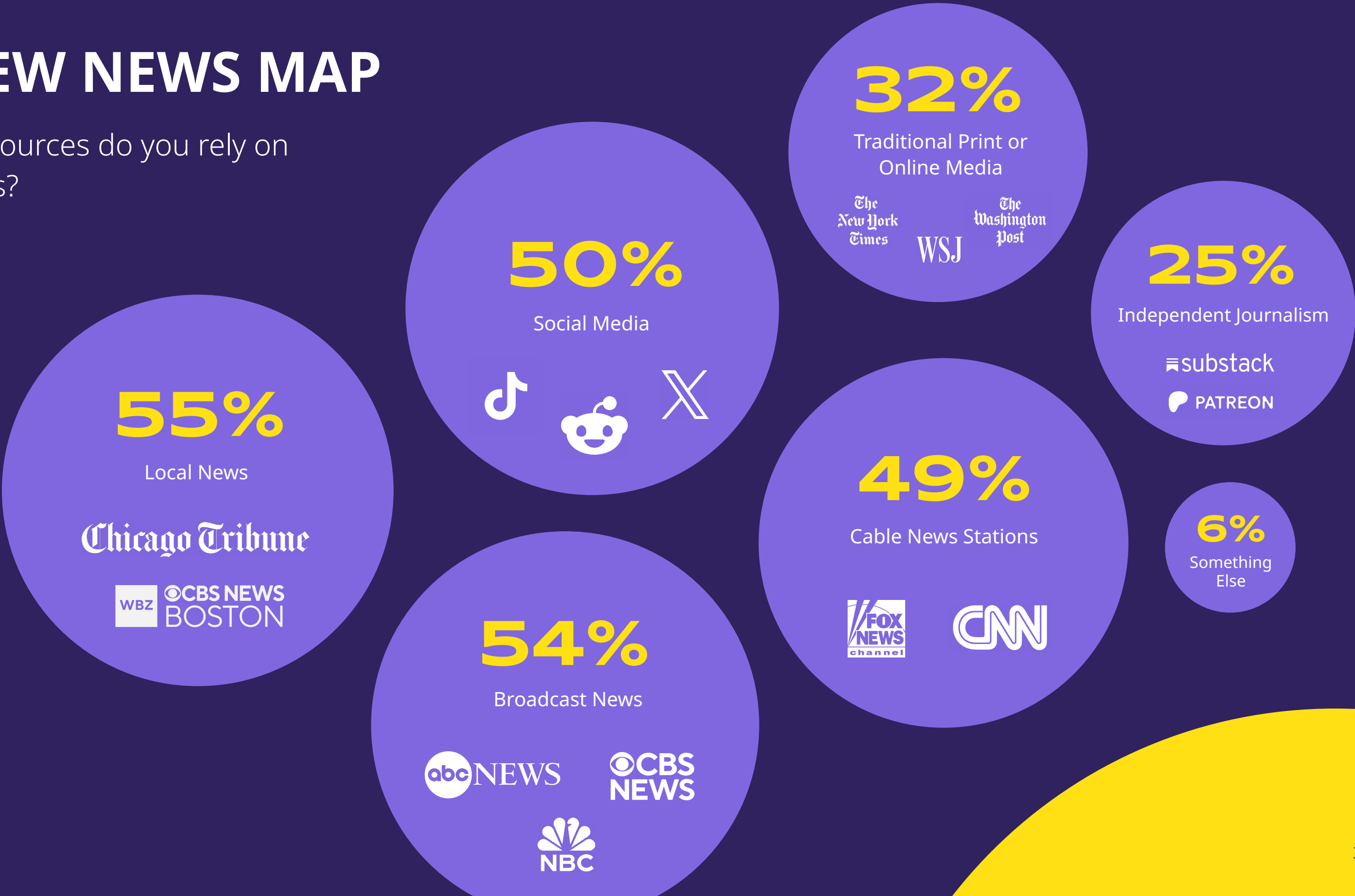
If you're a brand hoping to build real connections in this new, messy media world, it can be hard to know where to show up or how to engage the right people. To find answers, we surveyed 2,000 news readers and watchers (and a few news avoiders) to unpack their consumption habits, explore views on independent media, and map out today's news landscape.

Where Is the Data From?

Tier One partnered with Regina Corso Consulting to survey 2,000 U.S. respondents, reflecting census data across age, gender, region, education, and income. We conducted the survey between August 5-7, 2025.

THE NEW NEWS MAP

Which three sources do you rely on most for news?



A Fragmented Feed

These numbers show that even with the media world changing fast, traditional outlets remain a cornerstone. Local stations and newspapers are top sources, followed closely by broadcast news.

But social media isn't far behind. Half of respondents — and nearly two thirds of respondents under 40 — rely on it as a main way to stay informed. Independent journalism is also making moves, with one in four counting it among their go-tos. The result? A scattered landscape where no single source dominates Americans' news appetite.

News vs. Noise

No source is a clear leader right now. That means brands' news and media strategies have to be sharper — spray-and-pray just leads to watered-down content that fails to connect. To reach the right eyes, you need to be deliberate about where you show up and focus your efforts. Success comes from aligning your message with the platforms your audience actually visits and trusts.

The Gen Z + Millennial Go-To

Social Media

63%

These cohorts are also more likely than older generations to turn to independent platforms and traditional online and print outlets.

The 55+ Fave

Local News

67%

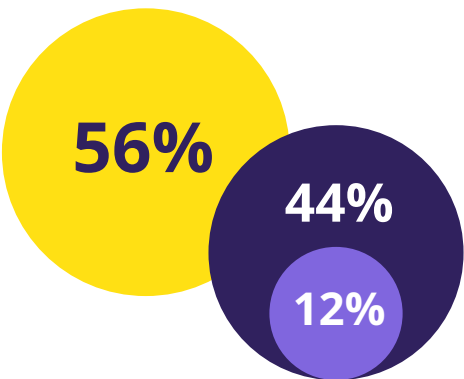
This audience is more likely than any other age group to get their updates from local, broadcast, and cable news.



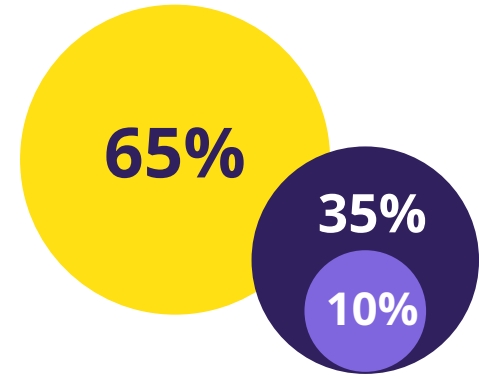
OFF THE BEATEN PRESS

Are you familiar with these independent newsletter platforms?

Patreon

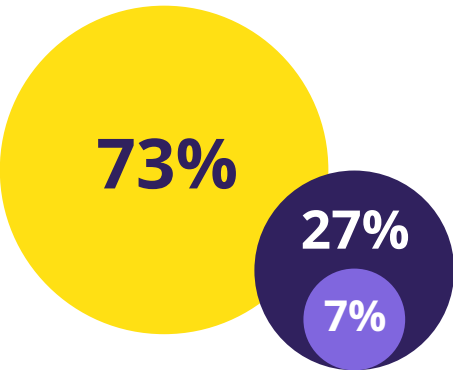


Substack

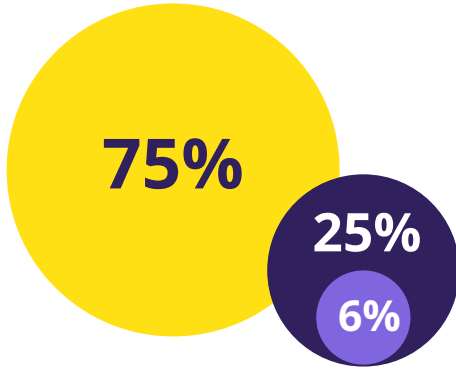


- Not that familiar/never heard of
- At least somewhat familiar
- Current subscriber

Ghost



Beehiiv



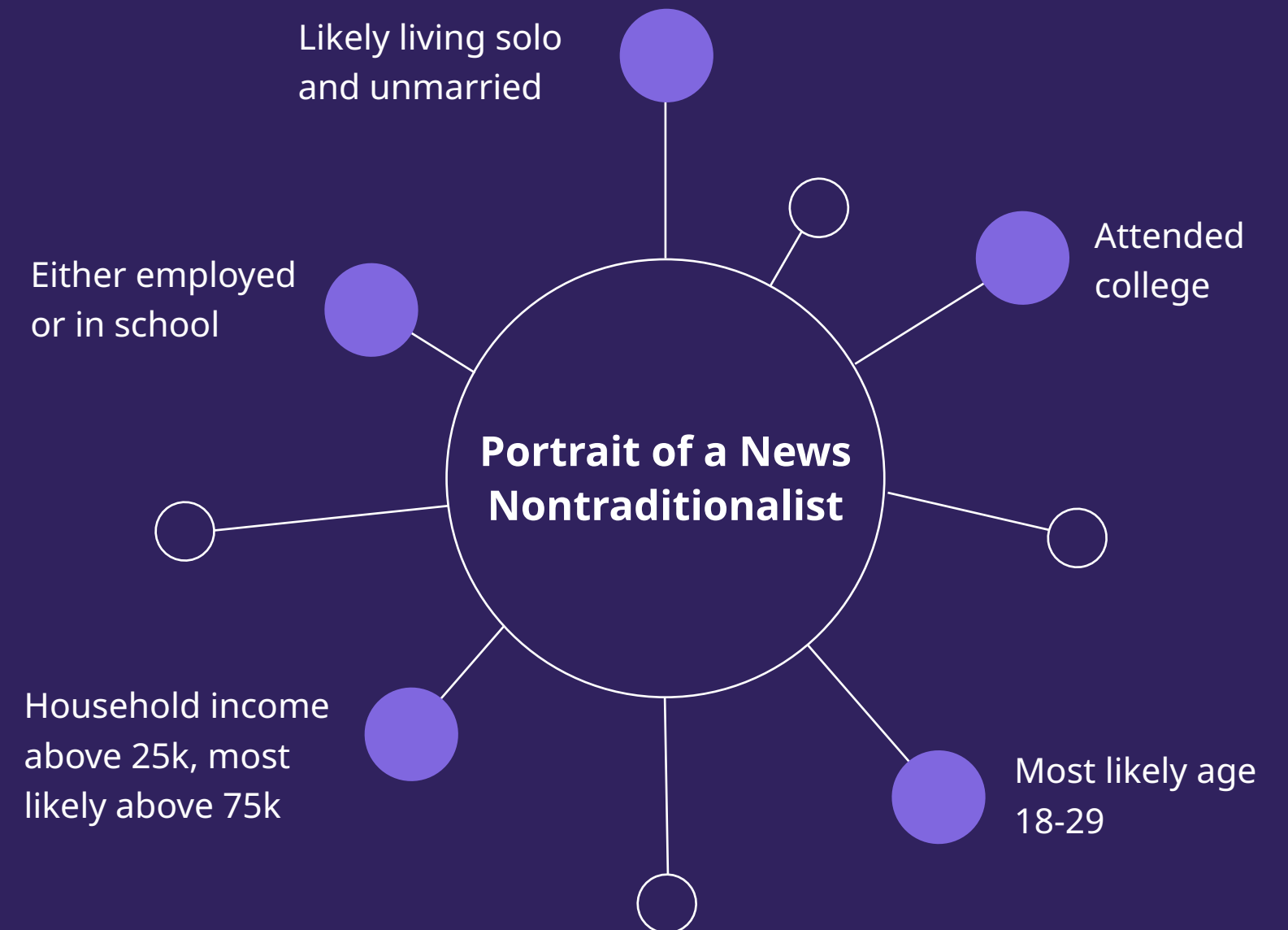
Not Just Niche?

We've seen the independent media wave building for the past few years as disruptions to traditional outlets — from political upheavals to paywall proliferation — chip away at America's #1 news source. Now, **80% of respondents say it's essential to have media that's independent from mainstream orgs** to drive a healthier information ecosystem. But our data shows that familiarity with specific independent newsletter platforms is still relatively low, so we don't see this movement going primetime quite yet.

Indie Insiders

While subscriber numbers may still be relatively low, independent media audiences are incredibly high-value for brands. They're committed, engaged, and willing to pay for the news they want: **In 2025, Substack reached 5 million paid subscribers, up from 3 million just a year ago.** However, these platforms might not be the best place for a quick news hit yet. Since readers say they're suited for more in-depth stories, we see this space as ideal for sharing long-form narratives, data-backed research, and expert thought leadership.

(Subscriber data from [Substack](#))

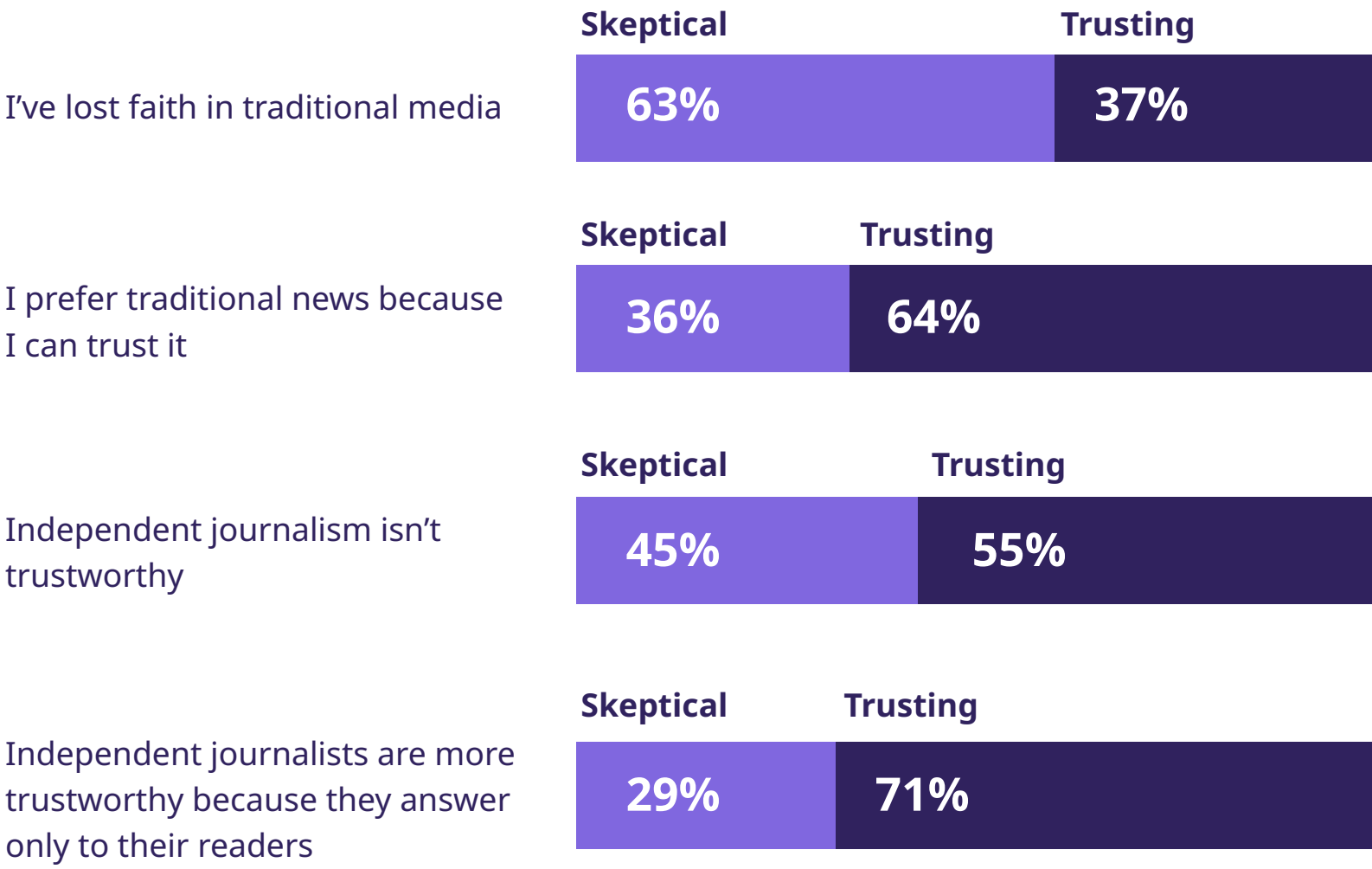


87%

of respondents who currently subscribe to independent media say it's the best source for in-depth and investigative stories



EVERYONE'S GOT TRUST ISSUES



Old Habits, New Headlines

We see a complicated picture of trust in the media depicted in this data. Many Americans feel traditional news has failed them on major stories. But they still need a reliable way to stay informed, and legacy outlets have their reputations to fall back on.

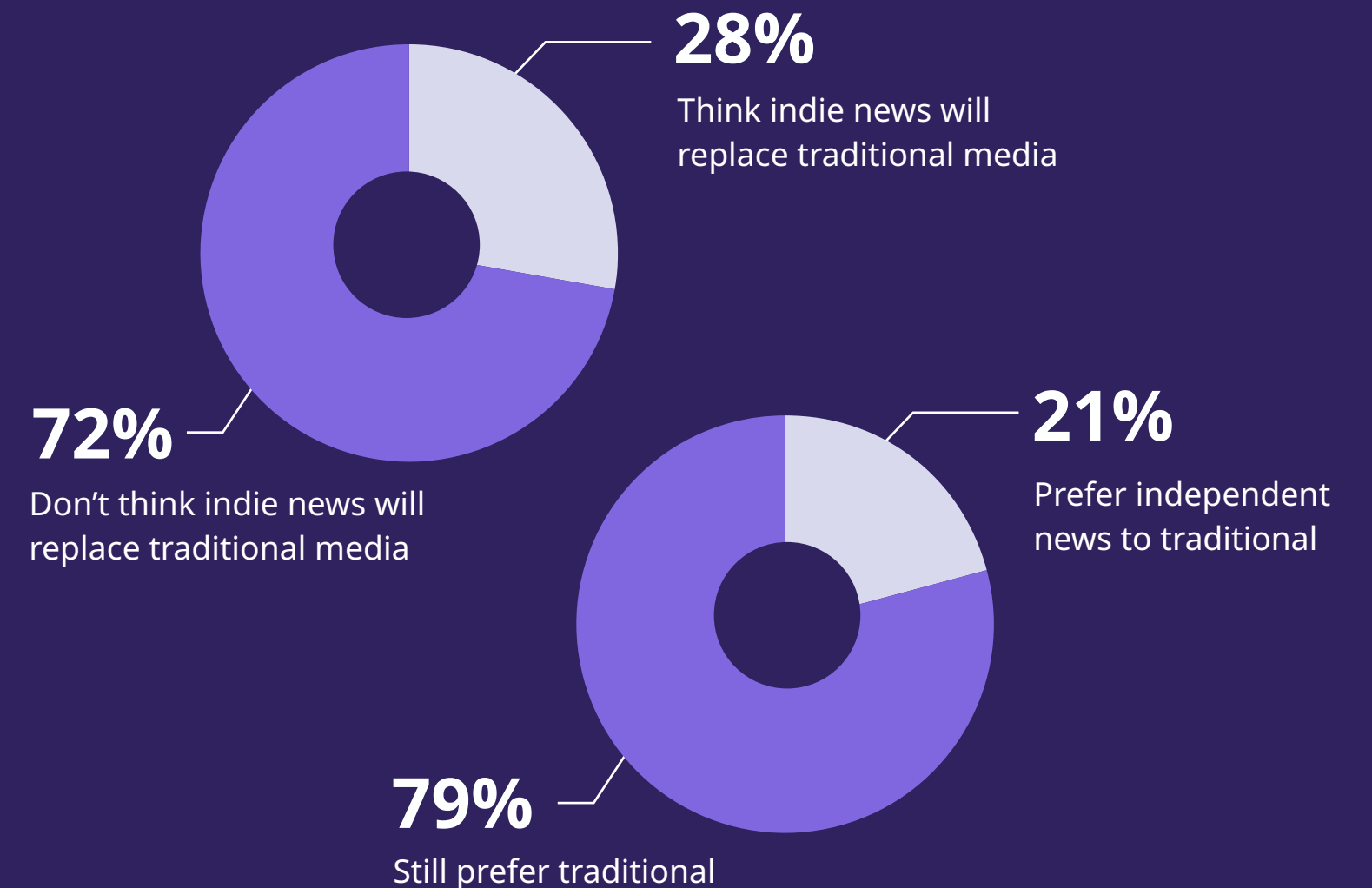
On the flip side, audiences appreciate the value in independence — journalists that don't have to answer to a by-the-book publisher or news outlet have more freedom to speak truth to power. But they haven't earned Americans' overall confidence just yet. Some might still view these reporters as lone voices with opinions that speak louder than facts.

Where News Goes Next

As news orgs, platforms, and publishers navigate this shifting landscape, we see a clear call-to-action: build trust, cut through the noise, and meet audiences where they are. For brands, the smart move now is to establish relationships with trusted voices across all areas of the media landscape. Independent journalists bring authenticity and loyal followings, while traditional outlets offer that institutional credibility many audiences still rely on.

Curiosity Meets Caution

Independent media subscribers aren't ready to give up on traditional news:



HOW TO BE HEARD

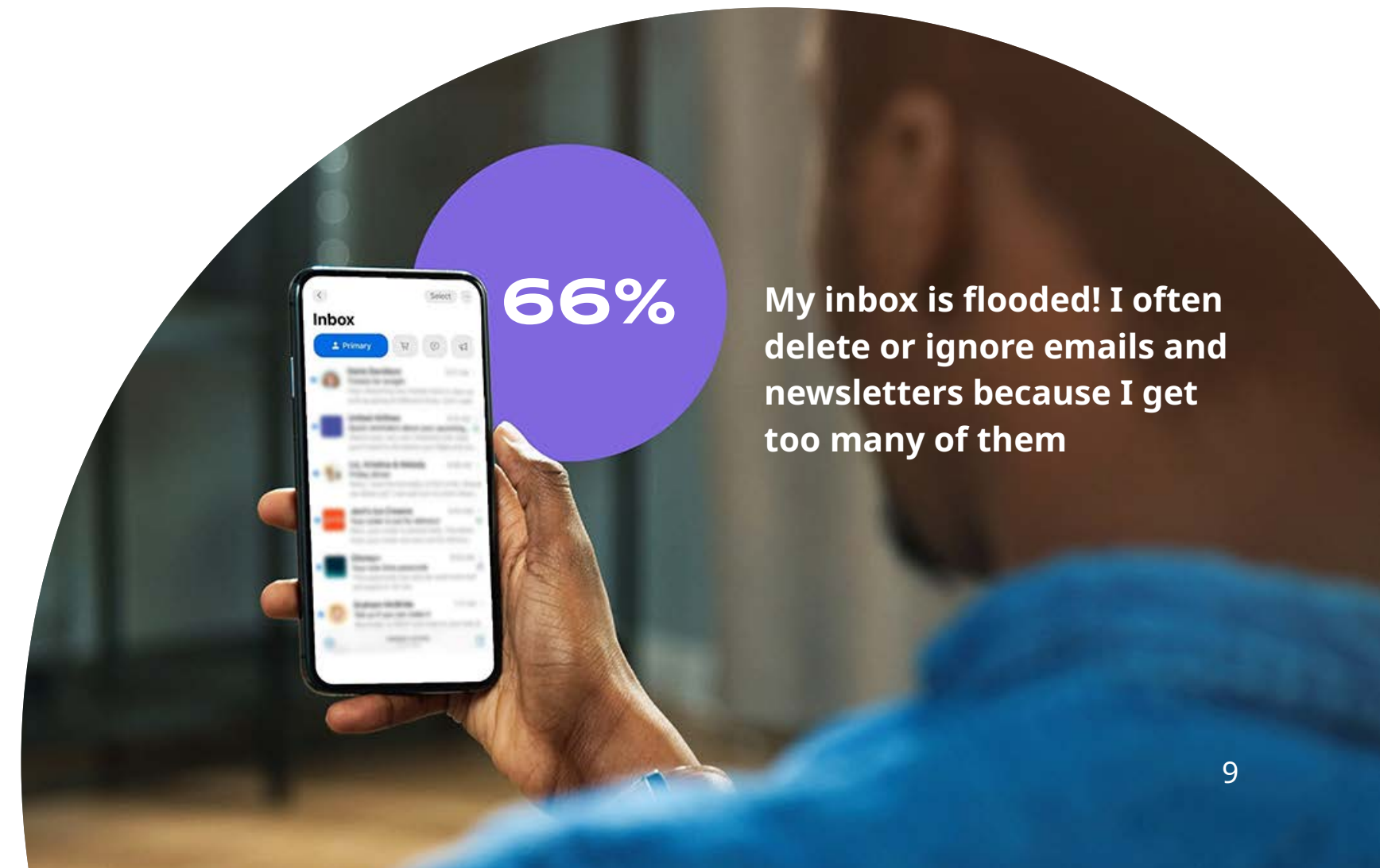
Every headline, share, and scroll is a chance for a brand to make its mark. But everyone is fighting for attention in a crowded space: endless announcements, too many platforms, and no clear home base for news. Indie media's momentum is catching on, and our survey makes it clear people want something different. The way forward is just messy.

In a fragmented landscape, you have to show up in more than one place — a quote in a business outlet here, a reshare from an industry influencer there, maybe your own company newsletter — just to stay in the conversation. The real challenge now? Knowing when, where, and how.

Could Your Blog Be Your Secret Weapon?

With media fragmenting, building direct audience relationships through owned content becomes more valuable. Educate, don't just promote. Provide context, data, and genuine insights to help audiences navigate the noise.

The key is staying agile. Know who you're talking to, understand the trends, and don't be afraid of change. The ability to shape stories for where they'll land will help you stand out, whether that's quick hits for social, deep thinking for indie reporters, industry insights for trade press, or a solid success story for traditional news. And never underestimate how far a strong relationship — and a little goodwill — can go.



My inbox is flooded! I often delete or ignore emails and newsletters because I get too many of them

A person wearing a blue shirt and headphones is operating a professional video camera mounted on a tripod. The camera is black with various cables attached. The background is blurred, showing warm, out-of-focus lights. A yellow circle is visible on the left side of the image.

“Americans want something better when it comes to trusted news sources, but they don’t necessarily know where to find it.

This data reveals a public that’s skeptical of traditional news, intrigued by new models, but still navigating where trust really lives in the modern media ecosystem.”

Kathy Wilson, Co-Founder and Managing Partner

“This is a defining moment for the future of journalism. Consumers are open to new voices and new models. But those models have to earn attention and trust, not just offer an alternative. **Independent journalism has the momentum, it now needs the message.**”

Marian Hughes, Co-Founder and Managing Partner

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU TELL YOUR STORY?

Tier One is a women-owned full-service integrated marketing agency working with innovators across AI and tech, digital health, financial services, clean energy, and more. We're a team of news fanatics and trendspotters dedicated to helping our clients become category leaders through agile programs, award-winning creative, and data-driven strategies.

The deep connections we build with our clients allow us to act quickly, decisively, and in sync to seize opportunities that drive their business and marketing goals forward.

Get connected at wearetierone.com/contact-us

tier one.