

**Louisa Compton, Head of News & Current Affairs and Sport and Specialist Factual, Channel 4—supplementary written evidence (FON0067)**

**House of Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee inquiry: The future of news: impartiality, trust, and technology**

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to your committee’s ongoing inquiry into the future of news on 5 March 2024. I welcome the Committee’s interest in this area.

There are two areas that I said I would come back to the Committee. I’m sorry that it has taken a little time to provide these answers.

**Research on levels of audience trust in C4 news**

You asked whether I, or my fellow panellists from ITV and Channel 5, had any research or data that we might be able to share with the Committee that shows a breakdown in how different demographics trust us as a news provider.

The table below is taken from the 2023 Ipsos Brand Tracker. In response to the question *“how much do you trust each of the following broadcasters to report the news accurately and fairly”*, over two thirds of respondents said that they trusted C4 News.

Research by the Reuters Institute found that C4 news, alongside the BBC and ITV, is in the top three most trusted news sources in the UK with 54% of respondents saying that they trusted C4 news, as opposed to 16% who do not trust it. This compares with 55% trust/26% don’t trust for BBC News. Of all the news providers included in the survey, only the FT had a lower “don’t trust” score than C4 News.

**Q8c - How much do you trust each of the following broadcasters to report the news accurately and fairly? - Trust (Net)**

Demographic	% that say they Trust a great deal/ to some extent that Channel 4 News report the news accurately and fairly
Male	67%
Female	68%
Adults with Children	75%
Adults without Children	65%
16-24	58%
25-34	70%
(16-34)	65%
35-44	72%
45-54	69%
55-64	68%
65+	67%
ABC1	71%
C2DE	64%
White	68%
Ethnic Minorities	68%
Disability	65%

What struck me the most about this data is the lower trust rating for C4 News amongst younger audiences. I asked my colleagues in the research team to look into this in more detail, and when you break the data from the same Ipsos survey down by demographic, it shows that younger people tend to have less trust in television news services in general.

The Reuters Institute 2022 Digital News Report found that under 35s are the lowest-trusting age groups, with only a third (37%) of both 18–24s and 25–34s across all markets saying they trust most news most of the time, compared with nearly half of those 55 and older (47%). Young people also increasingly choose to avoid the news, with substantial rises in avoidance among social natives since we last asked this question in 2019. Across all markets, around four in ten under 35s often or sometimes avoid the news now, compared with a third (36%) of those 35 and older.

Demographic	% of <b>16-24s</b> that say they Trust a great deal/to some extent that ..... report the news accurately and fairly	% of <b>16-34s</b> that say they Trust a great deal/to some extent that ..... report the news accurately and fairly
BBC News	72%	73%
ITV News	61%	65%
Channel 4 News	58%	65%
Channel 5 News	50%	57%
Sky News	62%	65%

This is why it is important that C4 News is able to reach young audiences, with its trusted and duly impartial content. It’s also why I suggested the idea of introducing a kitemark, to help to signpost PSB news content online.

At Channel 4, we have a specific remit to reach younger audiences and as I mentioned in my evidence to the Committee, in news and current affairs we are delivering our content in a range of different ways to reach these audiences in ways that resonate most with their content viewing habits. As such, C4 News has established its position as one of the UK’s leading digital-first news resources. Our digital content had over 1.2 billion views in 2023 – up 57% year on year.

C4 news has:

- 12.6 million social followers across all channels
- Over 30 million views per month on YouTube, up 25% year on year. 43% of the audience is under 35.
- 500m views on TikTok, which is the fastest growing social platform for us having seen an incredible 412% year on year growth. 62% of the audience for C4 News content on TikTok is under 35.

Our digital coverage also brings audiences over to our linear C4 News coverage. Of the young audience, 27% started to watch the long form C4 News after discovering C4 News on social media.

As I mentioned in the Committee session, we remain committed to delivering C4 news content to younger audiences over these platforms.

### **Age-blocking of C4 News content on YouTube**

However, as well as bringing significant benefits to audiences and to us as a source of trusted news, we are facing some issues as we aim to deliver our content to audiences in new ways.

In my evidence to the Committee, I spoke about my concerns about YouTube taking a one size fits all approach when it comes to its age gating policy. I mentioned that 41 of our C4 News reports have been age- restricted by YouTube since 7 October.

All of these reports (most of which cover the conflict in Gaza) were complied to Ofcom standards and most have been broadcast on Channel 4 News to a pre-watershed audience. However, although they were cleared by ITN's compliance team to comply with Ofcom's rules for a 7pm broadcast, they were age-gated by YouTube when we uploaded the reports onto their platform with little or no clarity as to why. This means that in order to view the content on YouTube, a user is required to confirm that they are over the age of 18, otherwise the content is blocked.

Our data shows that age-gating has a huge impact on reach. This policy is therefore limiting access to duly impartial sources of news online.

You asked me to share a few examples to illustrate the point. I have done so below. My colleagues in the policy teams at C4 and ITN are speaking with their counterparts at YouTube to seek advice on this issue from Ofcom, in the context of the journalistic exemption that forms part of the new Online Safety Act.

In the meantime, my colleagues at C4 News and I are continuing to seek greater clarity from YouTube about how to avoid our content being age-gated going forward. This is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed. The content life cycle in news is very short, and any delay in people being able to see our content makes it less relevant to audiences.

### **Examples of C4 news content that was age-gated by YouTube**

All contain following warning board - "The following content may contain graphic or violent imagery. Viewer discretion is advised".

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSoNI5ghkck&rco=1>

This report by our International Editor Lindsey Hilsum ran on Channel 4 news at 7pm, pre-9pm watershed. It was age restricted by YouTube after reaching just under 400,000 views on its platform. We believe that it would likely have received over a million views had it not been age restricted. This content had been complied to meet Ofcom's editorial standards and ran on Channel 4 News. It contains images of rescues of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. It remains unclear to the C4 News team why it was age restricted on Graphic and Violent content terms by Youtube.

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNvvq5BwmBE&t=20s>

This video is of the single deadliest day in Gaza, when some 700 people were killed. It was also broadcast pre-watershed on C4 News, but was age restricted by YouTube after having received just over half a million views. There is a warning of distressing

images in the text and in the video commentary. However, the images are carefully selected by Channel 4 News editorial staff with legal and regulatory compliance oversight. Any extreme images have been pixellated and corpses have been blurred for sensitivity. The footage contains important testimony and imagery and includes uplifting scenes of rescued injured.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJBKTuIn54E>

I understand that YouTube has determined that this video, reported by our Foreign Affairs Correspondent, Secunder Kermani, and broadcast on C4 News pre-watershed, shows someone's "point of death" and therefore violates their community guidelines. However, a closer inspection of the opening images in this video demonstrates how Channel 4 News carefully uses sections of images and storytelling to highlight matters of high public interest from the West Bank. The video shows what appears to be a young man being shot dead. However, the video is moved to still frames before any shooting takes place and the aftermath images are carefully selected. We would not show a point of death. However, we do feel that it is vitally important to continue to tell these stories in our reporting. The video warns of distressing scenes from the outset. As a result of being blocked by YouTube on its platform, the video received only 159k views before viewing abruptly halted.

In sharing these examples, I hope to illustrate to the Committee the impact that age-gating has on our ability to ensure that impartial, trusted reporting from conflict areas is not always easily accessible on digital platforms, despite having been aired – pre-watershed – on a public service broadcasting television channel.

I hope that this additional response is useful to the Committee as part of your ongoing inquiry. If you need anything further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

*28 March 2024*