Memo

2024 State of Media & Readership Report

Introduction

Attention is an increasingly scarce resource, but the past year showed us that news still matters and readership proves it.

Memo publishes its annual State of Media & Readership report because in 2024, it's no longer enough for communicators to know what news published. We need to know what was read.

When you know what the public is choosing to read, you can deliver messages in more resonant ways. When you see how consumers engage with product coverage, you get deeper insight into the customer journey. When you pinpoint where an article is in its readership lifecycle and when readership is reaching a boiling point, you can nip a crisis in the bud.

In this report, Memo analyzes over half a million articles to uncover what people read about over the past year, when they read it, what we can learn from major brand mishaps, and so much more.

We hope these actionable, readership-backed insights can help inform your media strategy in the year ahead as they do for so many Memo customers.

Key Term to Know

Readership / readers = the number of unique visitors to an article.

Memo measures readership from publishers' on-page analytics, not via monthly web traffic, potential reach formulas, social proxies, or other inaccurate estimates.

Memo is the first platform to partner with publishers to report the true performance, power, and value of earned media coverage. Learn more.

Key Takeaways

1. **Conflict, change, and bad news generally attract readers**. That said, the Super Bowl and a budding romance between Singer-Songwriter Taylor Swift and NFL Tight End Travis Kelce climbed to the top of readership charts, making the NFL perhaps the *only* winner of 2023.

2. **Consumers read when they are ready to buy**. Product coverage drawing the most readers is aimed at consumers proactively evaluating devices and with high purchase intent.

3. **An article receives 76% of its readership within the first 3 days of publication, on average.** For topical news, readership is even more concentrated in the first 3 days (86%) and 95% of their readership within the first week.

4. **Commentary on social issues rose to the top of most-read CEO coverage.** While CEO profiles dropped to the bottom of the list. No wonder they're hard to pitch.

5. While AI was undoubtably one of the hottest topics of 2023, **most of the AI buzz was generated by a select few**.

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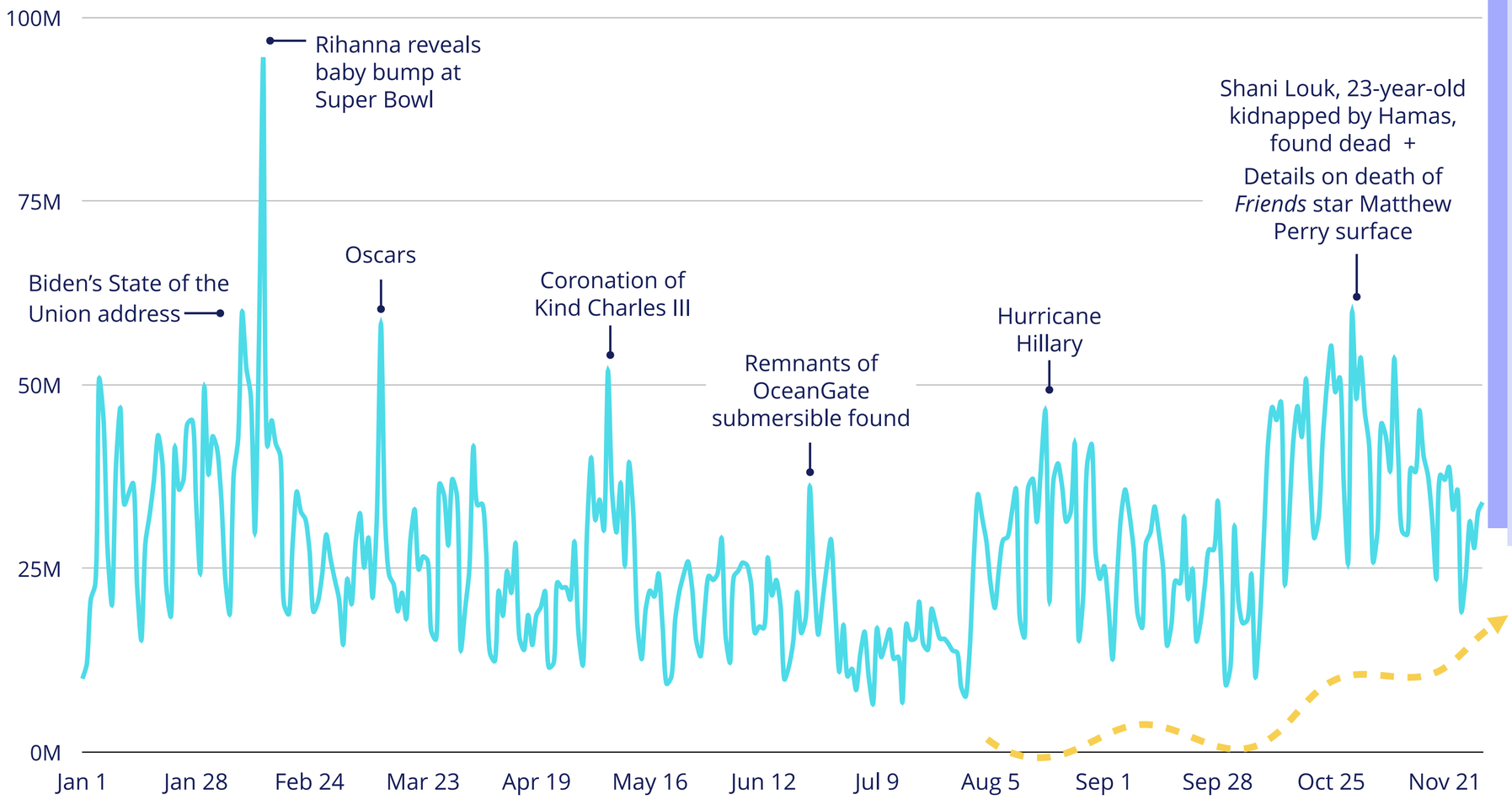
Biggest Readership Moments of 2023

What peaked peoples' interest in 2023? A lot of celebrity news, tragedy, and politics. Here are the moments that attracted the most readers in 2023:



Most-read Topics Ranked

These were the people, events, and themes that drew the most readership throughout 2023.

1. Donald Trump
2. Israel-Hamas War
3. Climate Change
4. Russia-Ukraine War
5. COVID

June and July drove the lowest readership of the year, making up less than 0.5% of the articles in our macro news cycle dataset.

Conflict and chaos attracts readers in droves

A politician facing a slew of legal battles and removal from the presidential ballot in some states, another voted in and voted out as Speaker of the House in the same calendar year, a new King in the UK assumes the throne, two wars, Covid and climate change continue to wreak havoc, economic turbulence, all on the eve of an election year.

If we break it down by quarter, 2023 was filled with **conflict and chaos** — or at least that's what people read about. Bright spots included the Super Bowl and a budding romance between Singer-Songwriter Taylor Swift and NFL Tight End Travis Kelce, making the NFL perhaps the *only* winner of 2023. In fact, **in the last 3 months of the year, more people read about Taylor and Travis than climate change**.

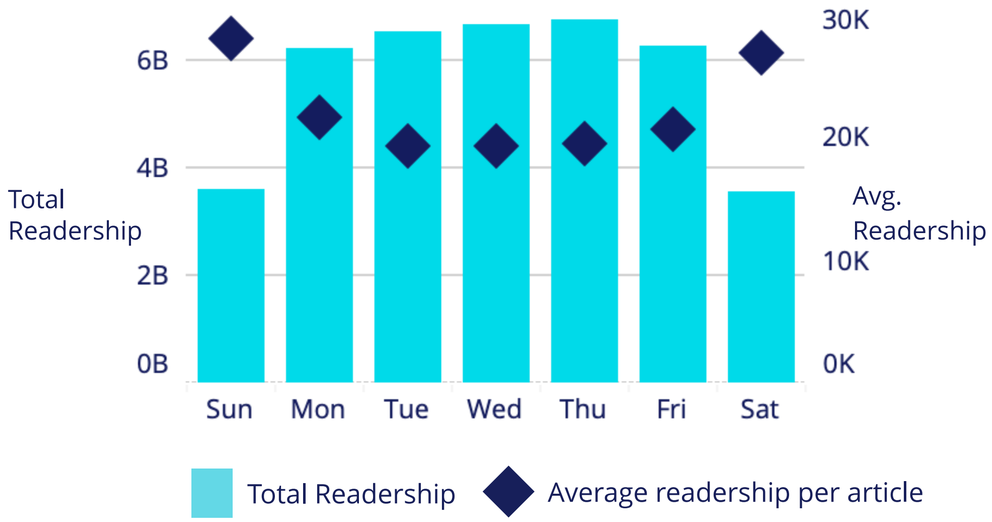
	Jan.-Mar.	Apr.-Jun.	Jul.-Sep.	Oct.-Dec.
1	Donald Trump (400M readers)	Donald Trump (284M readers)	Donald Trump (403M readers)	Israel Hamas War (773M readers)
2	Super Bowl (297M readers)	Russia Ukraine War (167M readers)	Climate Change (226M readers)	Donald Trump (218M readers)
3	Russia Ukraine War (209M readers)	Climate Change (157M readers)	2024 Election (158M readers)	Taylor Swift & Travis Kelce (120M readers)
4	Speaker Kevin McCarthy (183M readers)	Inflation/Recession (125M readers)	Russia Ukraine War (127M readers)	Climate Change (112M readers)
5	Climate Change (180M readers)	King Charles' Coronation (122M readers)	COVID (94M readers)	Speaker Kevin McCarthy (105M readers)

Busiest News Days of the Week

In general, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are the days readers are consuming the most news.

Although aggregate readership drops over the weekend, the typical article published on a Saturday or Sunday actually receives *more* readership on average, indicating audiences are still engaged.

Total & Average Readership by Day

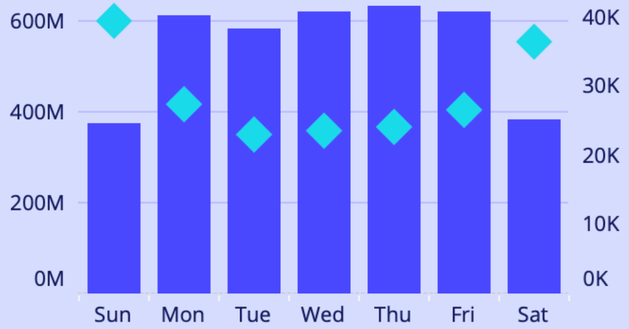


The takeaway: don't despair if a story you pitched lands over the weekend; it might work to your advantage.

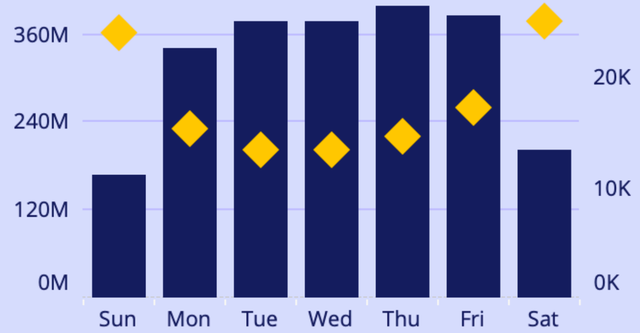
Daily Readership Trends By Publisher Vertical

Readership by Day & Pub Type

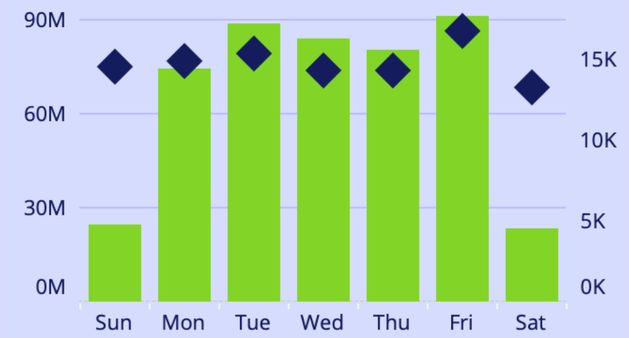
Entertainment



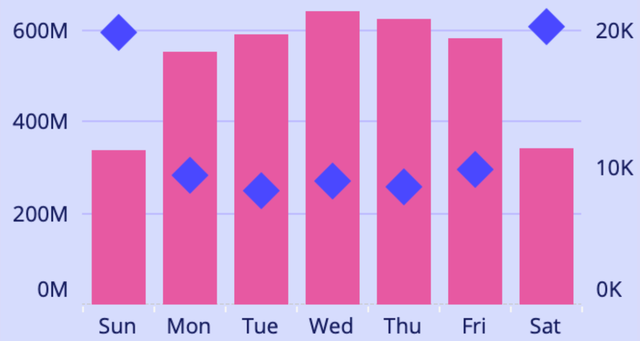
Tech & Science



Automotive



Business & Finance



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When does an article's readership peak?

To illustrate when an article receives the majority of its readership, we pulled a random sample of 1,110 articles across national and local news sites, lifestyle and entertainment outlets, political news, celebrity news, business and financial press, and more.

The majority of an article's readership happens in the first couple days of publication. This means communicators should prioritize responses and correction requests immediately. By two days post publication, readership has already dropped off.

Percent of Article Readership Reached by Day After Publication

(average trend from sample of 1,110 news articles)

Key Takeaways

- An article receives 76% of its readership within the first 3 days of publication, on average.
- Readership typically peaks on the day of publication or the day after before quickly dropping off.
- For topical news, readership is even more concentrated in the first 3 days (86%) and 95% of their readership within the first week.
- **The lesson:** Communicators weighing responses or correction requests need to act quickly to capture readership

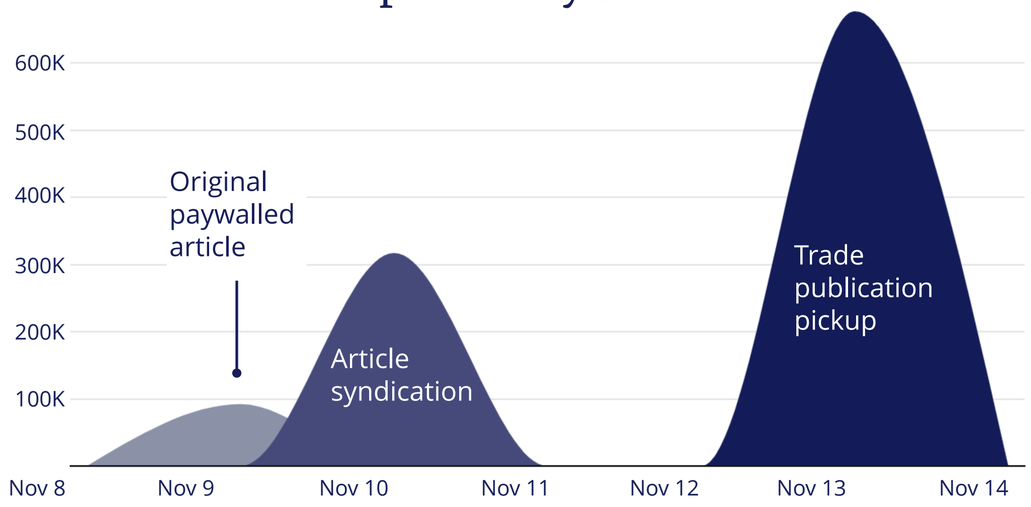
[See the full analysis]

Paywalled News & the Impact of Syndication

The lifecycle of a paywalled article: Just because a story breaks behind a paywall doesn't mean it won't reach a wider audience.

To see how, look to this example from the automotive industry: a paywalled reporter at a national paper wrote a story about electric vehicles on Nov. 9, receiving 92,000 readers. The story was re-published to 2 non-paywalled syndicators, accruing an additional 320,000 readers. A few days later, an auto news site covered the reporter's findings, driving 667,000 additional readers.

Readership of a Story Over Time



+25%
average bump in readership from syndication

+15%
bump when the original source is non-paywalled

+35%
bump when the original source is paywalled

What is the impact of syndication to mass-reach aggregators like MSN and Yahoo! News? On average, an article receives 25% more readers when syndicated to MSN or Yahoo! Sites.

This readership boost is particularly impactful for paywalled news sites: originally paywalled articles see a whopping **35% boost**.

The lesson: don't discount a paywalled reporter if they have a history of widening readership through syndication.

Crisis Comms: Lessons from the Brand Culture Wars

Following their decisions to work with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney, Bud Light and Nike found themselves in crisis. Soon after, Target faced similar calls for boycott over Pride merch. Then it was Chick-fil-A for hiring a head of DEI, and the list continued to build.

But **Bud Light's news cycle received 4x more coverage and 7x more readers than all of the other brands combined**. Why did Bud Light suffer more than its peers?

Bud Light was much slower to respond than Nike, with a vague statement nonetheless. Throw in celebrity commentary, declining sales, and departing leadership, and Bud Light became the poster child for 2023's brand culture wars, creating a halo of follow-up coverage for months to come.

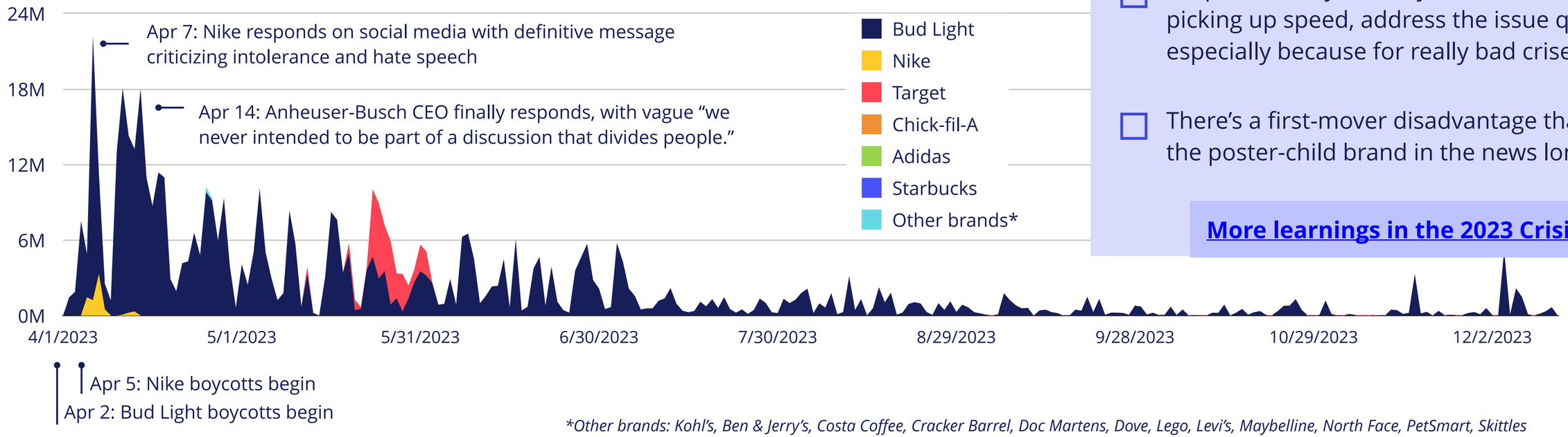
3 Lessons Learned from Bud Light

Here's what readership tell us about managing a crisis:

- ☐ Stay consistent. Brands that back up their decisions and don't waver fair better.
- ☐ Respond swiftly. When you see readership picking up speed, address the issue quickly, especially because for really bad crises....
- ☐ There's a first-mover disadvantage that keeps the poster-child brand in the news longer

[More learnings in the 2023 Crisis Index]

Readership of 2023's Brand Culture Wars

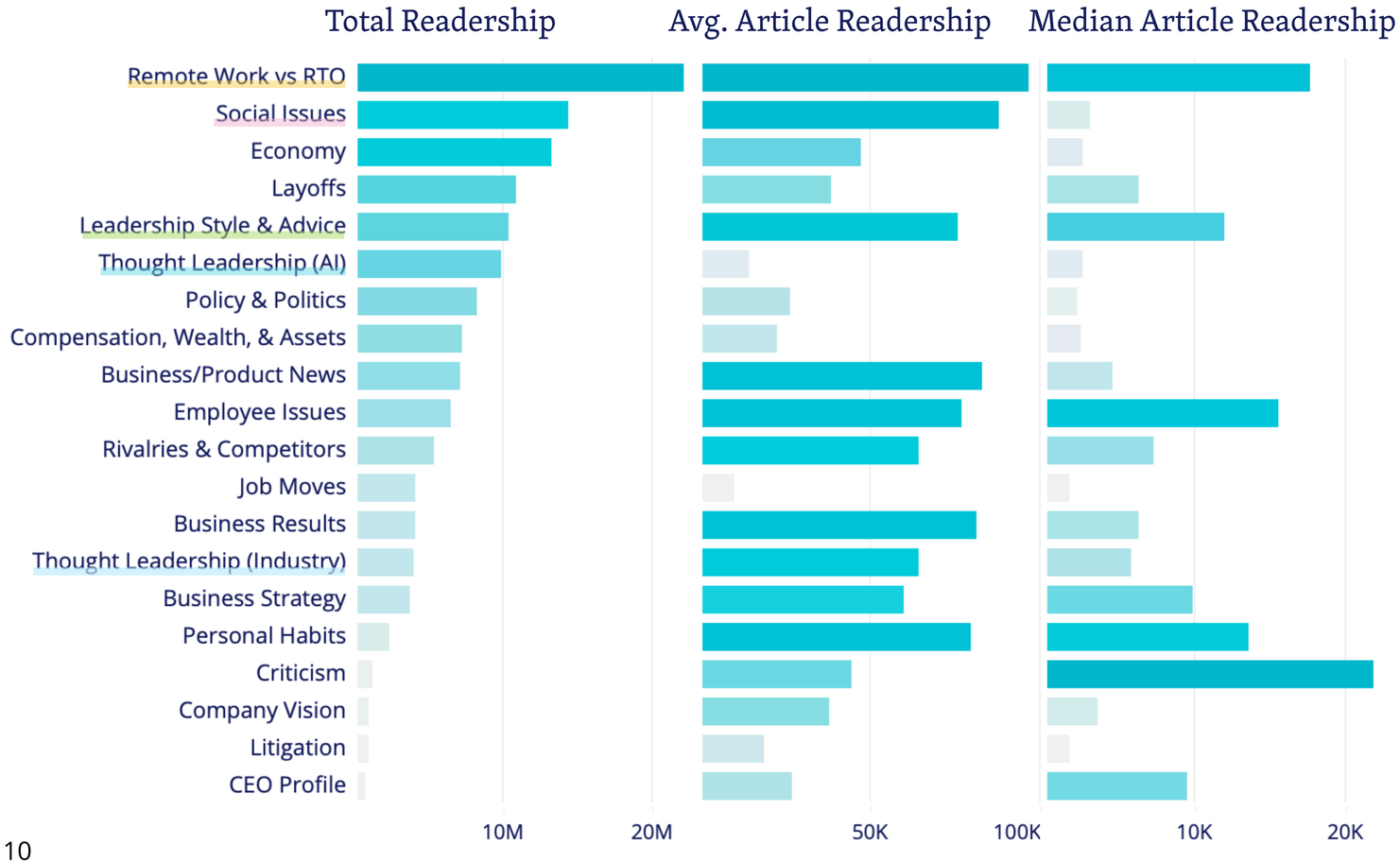


*Other brands: Kohl's, Ben & Jerry's, Costa Coffee, Cracker Barrel, Doc Martens, Dove, Lego, Levi's, Maybelline, North Face, PetSmart, Skittles

Readership of CEOs in the News

Whether via savvy thought leadership or from commenting on unfortunate business issues, CEOs were all over the news in 2023. Here are the headlines that captured readers' interest throughout the year, with two big caveats: all coverage of Elon Musk and recent coverage of Sam Altman's ousting were removed due to these being readership outliers.

Readership by CEO Headline Topic



CEOs commenting on **Return to Office (RTO) and/or remote work** continued to be among the most-read topics for business leaders (96.5K readers on average in '23 vs 91K in '22).

Social issues emerged as a hotly read topic among CEO news this year, with exceptionally high average readership. This includes CEOs responding to politicized issues such as Pride month merchandise, increased theft in stores, and ESG initiatives.

Leadership style & advice also continues to draw in readers (76k readers on average in '23 vs 70k in '22), especially narratives around CEOs walking a mile in their employee and customers' shoes.

CEOs discussing AI was one of the most-read topics in 2023, surpassing total readership on thought leadership related to leaders' respective industries. (On average, however, broader **industry thought leadership** continues to draw in readers.)

The lesson for executive comms: the public cares about where your CEO stands on the societal and technological issues of our time.

Spotlight: What (and who) are shifting CEO narratives?

Here's a CEO narrative that is capturing the public's attention: Starbucks, Ford, Airbnb all had CEOs who "ate their own dog food" in the past year—meaning they walked in the shoes of their employees or customers to better understand their own products and business. And readers took notice.

Starbucks's new CEO Laxman Narasimhan spent six months working alongside baristas, and the coverage across national, business, and consumer press received over **766,000 readers**.

Ford CEO Jim Farley took a three-day road trip in the automaker's electric F-150 pickup truck, acknowledging that charging the vehicle presented some challenges. The resulting coverage received a whopping **1.9 million readers**.

Airbnb's Brian Chesky became his ultimate customer, spending six months in the company's rentals. The interview he gave about the experience ultimately received over **384,000 readers** across the original outlet and the story's syndication.

In a time when CEOs are living under a microscope—and under fire for high compensation, workforce reductions, employee strikes, and how they're responding to hot-button social issues—stories of leaders rising through the ranks and proving their empathy with customers and employees are helping shift the narrative.

Reporters Driving CEO Readership

Memo launched the first and only readership-driven media database in 2023. Here are eight reporters on our radar for getting high readership on CEO news:

1. Paolo Confino, Fortune*
2. Chip Cutter, Wall Street Journal
3. Matt Egan, CNN
4. Emily Glazer, Wall Street Journal
5. Sarah Jackson, Business Insider*
6. Aislinn Murphy, Fox Business*
7. Marcel Schwantes, Inc.com
8. Jane Thier, Fortune*

**Readership is amplified by syndication to non-paywalled sites such as Yahoo! News, AOL, etc.*

Learn more about Reporter Intelligence

Spotlight: Lessons in Layoffs

Much of what goes into a layoff decision is beyond control for a comms team. But if you have the unfortunate responsibility of drafting a layoff comms plan (or advising company leadership on the mechanics of a layoff round), **here are some actions that made layoff narratives (and readership) much, much worse.**

Did you know? Over 50% of in-house comms pros are not prepared for a restructure or layoffs should they arise. Despite being one of the most common crises of 2023, layoffs/restructures ranked second lowest in the crises that comms teams plan for. See the full State of Crisis Comms survey.

Closing offices for virtual layoffs attracted 66% more readers on average.

McDonald's temporarily closing its offices to conduct virtual layoffs led to a flurry of ominous headlines about employees awaiting their fate from home.

Headlines that mentioned the shuttered offices received 66% more readers on average than headlines omitting that detail.

Rescinded job offers with layoffs looming resulted in over 13x more readers.

When Flexport, a freight logistics startup, laid off 20% of its workforce in early 2023, readership was minimal (under 50,000) compared to more well-known companies. But when the company's founder was reinstated as CEO, he rescinded dozens of job offers, stating "I have no idea why more than 75 people were signed to join."

The resulting coverage received over 687,000 readers...and put Flexport on the map for all the wrong reasons.

First-hand accounts of aggrieved employees drew millions of eyes.

Four out of the top 10 most-read layoff articles in 2023 were first-hand accounts of employees criticizing how layoffs were handled. These include people on parental leave or who found out about their termination inappropriately.

Employers can't always make exceptions for workers' unique circumstances. But honest, consistent, and empathetic communication about layoff decisions reduces the room for conflicting narratives.

Product PR and the Consumer Journey

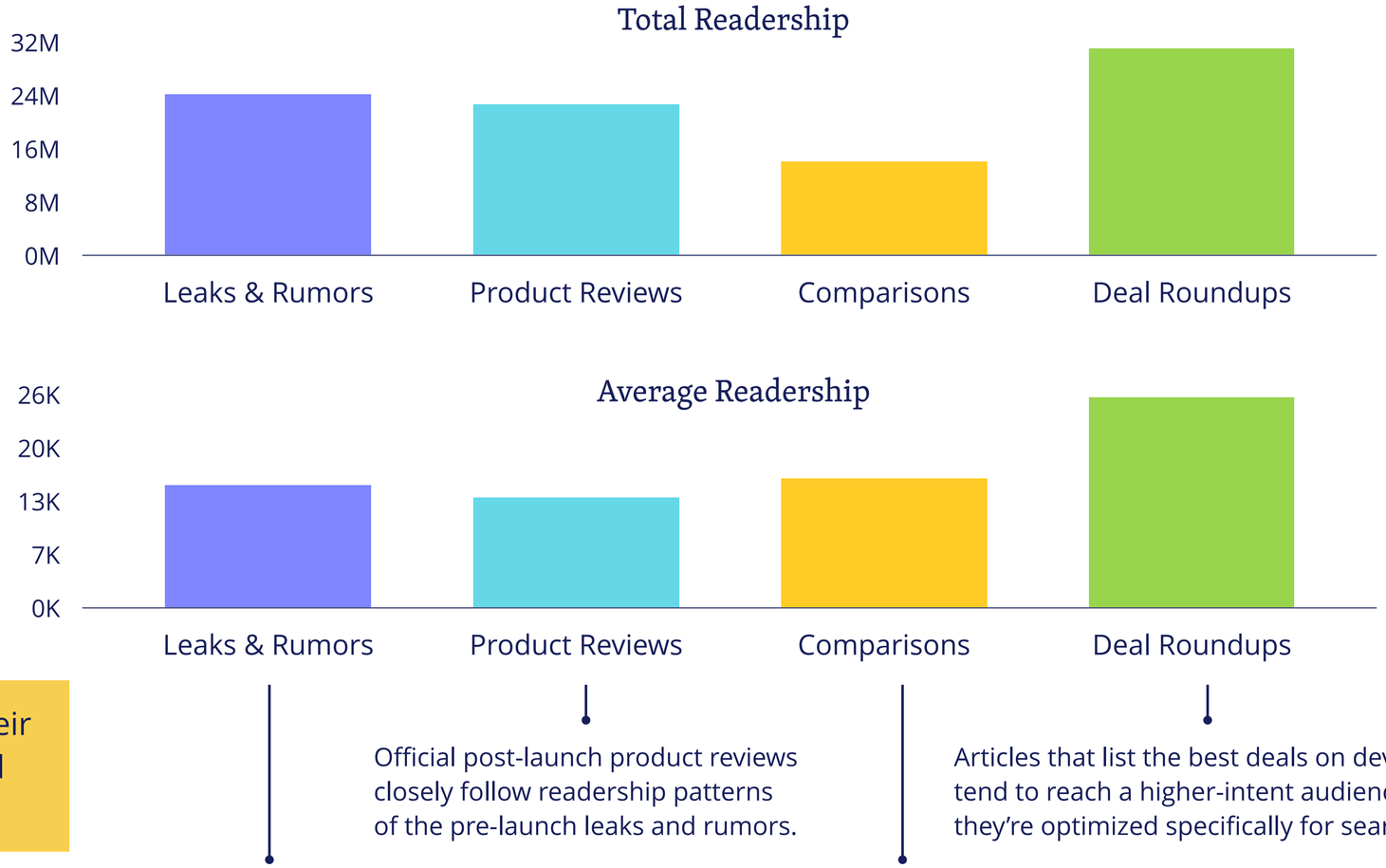
When it comes to product PR, media coverage is traditionally viewed as a top-of-the-funnel / awareness-building stage of the consumer journey. Readership, however, tells a different story.

For consumer electronics – such as laptops, phones, tablets, TVs, headphones, speakers, and so on – **product coverage drawing the most readers is aimed at consumers proactively evaluating devices and with high purchase intent.**

The numbers are particularly astounding when you compare earned readers to what a performance marketing or paid media team is measuring. Here's a closer look:

The takeaway: PR teams are instrumental in getting their products in front of consumers at key consideration and purchase points.

Total and Average Readership by Coverage Type: Consumer Electronics



Before a product is officially announced, highly-read articles about leaks and rumored features are already building awareness.

Official post-launch product reviews closely follow readership patterns of the pre-launch leaks and rumors.

Articles that compare two devices – targeted to consumers weighing specific options – get higher readership on average than reviews.

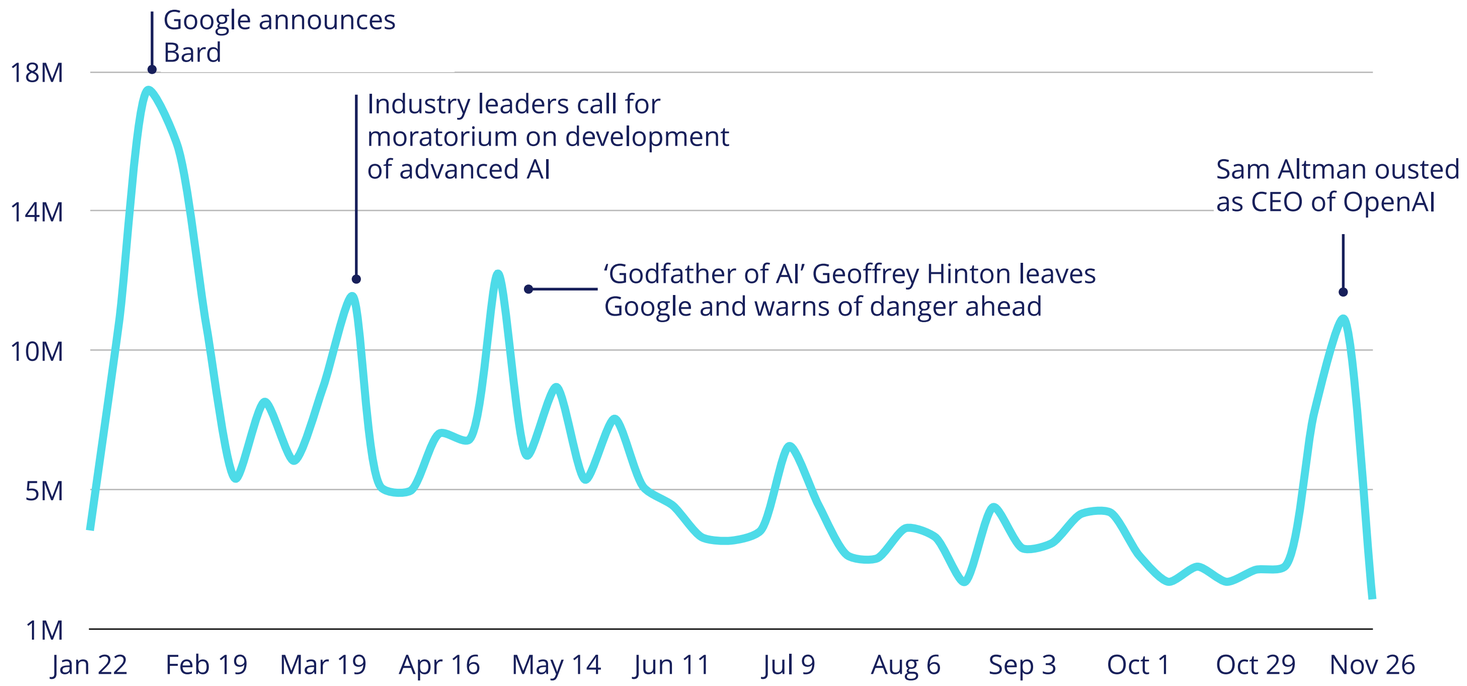
Articles that list the best deals on devices tend to reach a higher-intent audience; they're optimized specifically for search.

Generative AI in the News

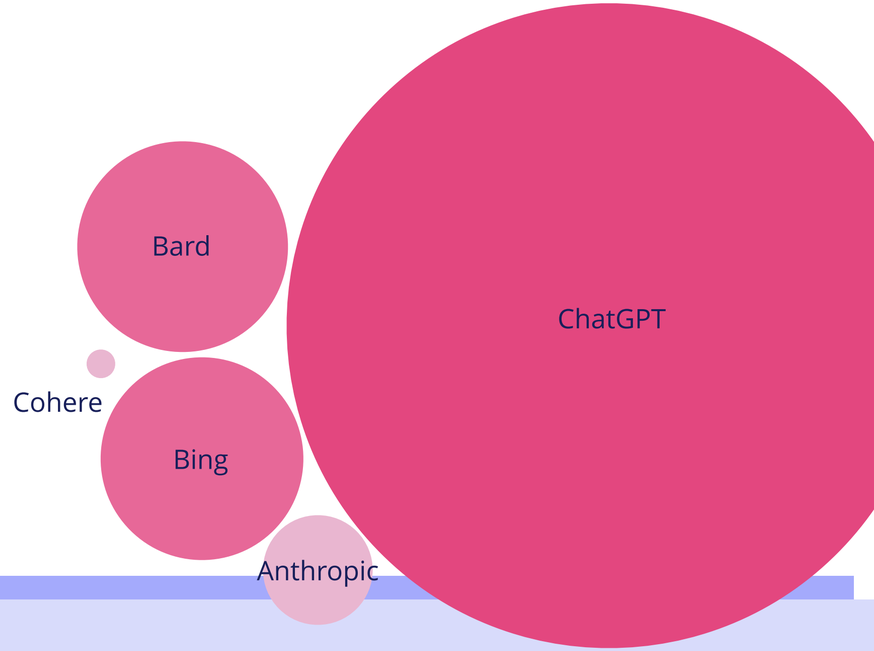
We'd be hard pressed to find a hotter business topic that the public cared about than generative AI in 2023, with OpenAI's chatGPT drawing the most readers.

But it wasn't all good news. The biggest moments of the year included industry leaders trying to slow down development, warnings of danger ahead, and the infamous firing and rehiring of OpenAI's CEO. Of note, 7% of articles made up nearly 50% of readership on the topic. **The takeaway: comms leaders for AI-driven companies need to work extra hard (or smart) to break through the noise with positive AI news.**

Readership of Generative AI News Over Time



Relative Readership of GenAI Brands



Reporters Attracting AI Readership

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3. Cade Metz, New York Times
4. Aaron Mok, Business Insider
5. James Vincent, The Verge

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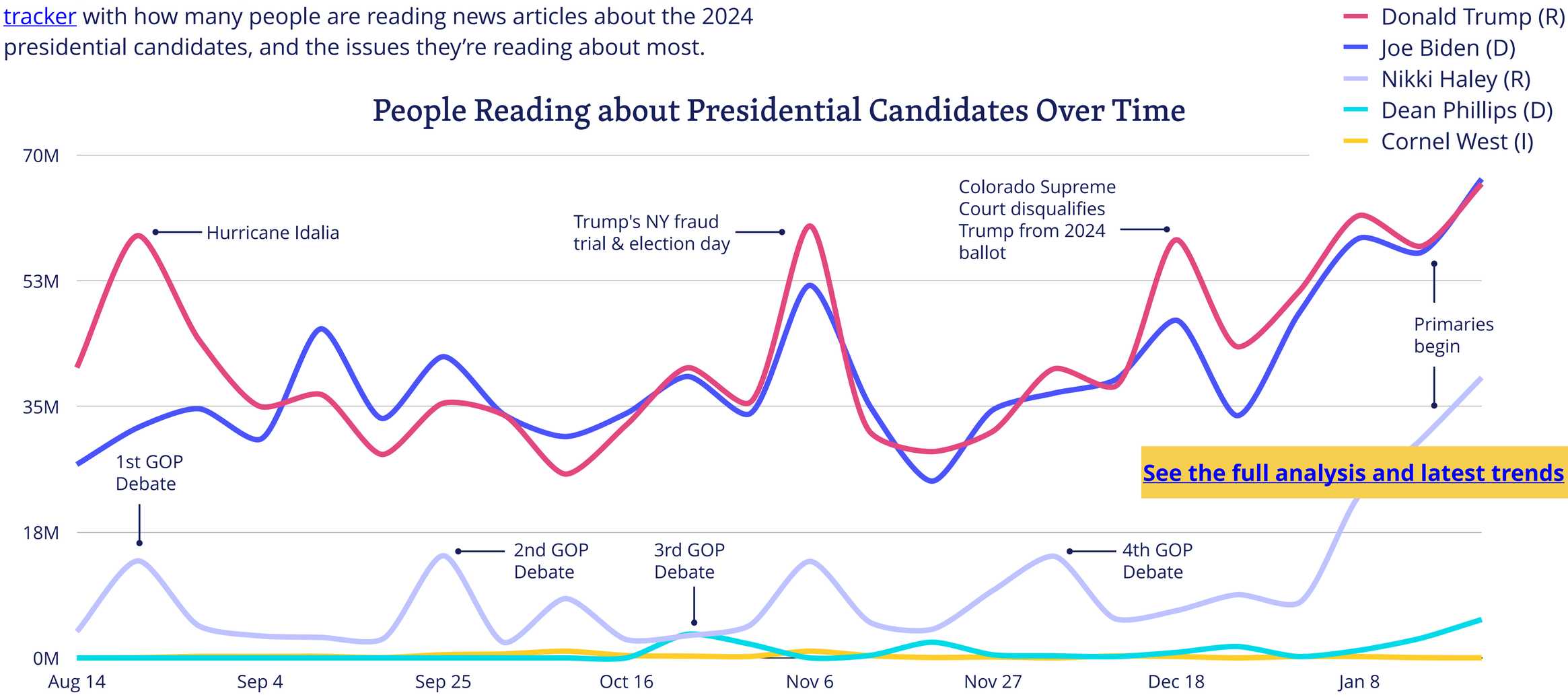
2024 Presidential Race

Leading up to the U.S. presidential election, Memo is publishing a weekly tracker with how many people are reading news articles about the 2024 presidential candidates, and the issues they're reading about most.

People Reading about Presidential Candidates Over Time



See the full analysis and latest trends

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Action Items

- **If you're weighing a response to breaking news or requesting a correction, act quickly to capture readership**. An article receives 76% of its readership within the first 3 days of publication, on average. For topical news, readership is even more concentrated in the first 3 days (86%) and 95% of their readership within the first week.

- **If readership indicates a crisis is unfolding, respond quickly and don't waver.** 2023's brand culture wars show just how bad silence and ambiguity faired for Bud Light.

- **Don't discount a paywalled reporter if they have a history of widening readership through syndication**. Paywalled articles see a 35% boost in readers if syndicated.

- **Instead of pitching a CEO profile,** focus thought leadership efforts and commentary on the issues the public cares about most.

- Before you put AI initiatives at the center of your comms strategy, it's worth noting that **only 7% of articles made up nearly 50% of readership on the topic.**

Methodology & Data

For this report, Memo analyzed article readership (i.e. the unique visitors to an article) from hundreds of national, local, business, lifestyle, and trade outlets. Details about the specific data sets are below.

Macro Trends: 252K articles published Jan 1- Nov 30 2023 about the biggest issues, themes, events, and public figures of the year. Used for biggest news moments of the year and busiest news days of the week. A subset of 16K was analyzed for generative AI in the news.

Brand Coverage: 538K articles published Dec 1 2022-Nov 30 2023 that mention at least one of 53 brands across industries. Subsets of 9.2K articles were analyzed for CEO coverage, 7.2K articles for layoff analysis, 5.4K articles for product PR, and 5.3K articles for culture wars.

Presidential Candidates: 55.9K articles published Aug 15 2023 - Jan 22 2024 about the U.S. presidential candidates.

Additional reporter-level readership trends were pulled from Memo's Reporter Intelligence.

Accurate data leads to better decisions.

Only Memo reports readership direct from publications.

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