

Study: Voters more likely to visit extreme Leave content online

Submitted by: Mavens of London

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Extreme 'brexit' sites compete with traditional media influence

Economic impact attracts most voter interest, followed at distance by immigration

London, June 13, 2016 – Voters are more likely to read extreme 'Leave' content online than articles strongly in favour of remaining in the EU when searching for information. This is one of the findings from research by strategy consultancy Mavens of London, who analysed over 3.5 million Google search queries across 1,048 keywords. The study also shows that information about the economy in relation to the Referendum is three times as popular among UK voters as the topic of immigration, while the NHS and national security attract comparatively little interest. Media outlets BBC, the Financial Times, The Week, the Telegraph and the Guardian attract a majority share of traffic.

By analysing millions of Referendum-related UK searches, consultancy firm Mavens of London was able to identify what kind of information Brits are looking for around the vote, how interest is changing over time, and also which sites were subsequently visited to inform their decision-making.

Economy and Immigration attract interest, NHS does not

Between January and April 2016, Google received 2,948,650 searches that can be classified as information gathering for the purpose of decision-making. While the vast majority of these were general queries such as 'EU Referendum', the Economy and Immigration were clearly the two issues of most interest to British voters. "Queries around the economic impact of a Brexit were searched for 3.5 times as often as queries around immigration and the EU," says Tom Mowat, Director at Mavens. "Equally striking is that the NHS recorded barely any search interest in the context of the Referendum."

Clicks to biased content

Analysing the search engine results likely to be clicked on by people looking for information shows that more people ended up in 'Remain'-leaning content online than 'Leave'-focused articles. "It has to be noted that the popular Remain-leaning sites more often tend to be moderate in their stance, while the most visited Leave sites tend to express strong views for a Brexit," explains Mowat. "Among the top 50 sites ranking in Google for Referendum-related queries, seven are purpose-built Leave sites such as betteroffout.net (12th) and eureferendum.com (13th), compared to just two dedicated Remain sites such as strongerin.co.uk (29th). The dedicated Leave sites also perform better in generating traffic from organic search, which explains why voters are more likely to visit extreme Leave content, even though the overall information landscape seems to slightly favour staying in the EU."

Media matters

The two sites claiming most clicks from Referendum-related search queries during the research period were the BBC and the Financial Times, with the BBC recording more than twice as much traffic as the FT. Third in the list of most influential sites for Referendum-related organic search is The Week, followed by the

government's Referendum page, the Telegraph and the Guardian. "Together, these six sites are estimated to have claimed 61 per cent of organic reader interest from Google.co.uk in the past few months, demonstrating the importance of the digital presence of traditional media," says Mowat. The Independent (11th) also features in the top fifteen, while the Daily Mail (20th) and the Sun (49th), both normally considered to be influential around political events, rank lower.

Polling particularly popular

The Mavens research shows that interest in the Referendum overall has increased dramatically between January and April. "In January we saw 221,170 relevant search queries, which grew to over 1.2 million in February," continues Mowat. "In March however, interest dropped slightly, with 'only' 990,980 searches that month." Functional queries around for example the referendum date steadily went up in volume, as did searches around Referendum polls. "Search for polling updates are gaining share of search, suggesting that voters are keeping an eye on the changing state of popular opinion, possibly to help make up their own minds. This could prove to have an impact on the final outcome," concludes Mowat.

Boris vs. Cameron

Overall to date in 2016, Boris Johnson is searched for more often in relation to the Referendum than David Cameron, the two leading politicians in this debate judging by public interest. Johnson gained momentum especially in February, when nearly 30,000 Referendum-related searches referenced his name, versus 19,160 referencing Cameron's. Jeremy Corbyn (6,350) was a distant third that month, although interest in him spiked in April, when queries such as 'Corbyn EU' outsourced those around Johnson and Cameron. Other party figures such as Clegg, Farron and Sturgeon have seen comparatively little public interest in relation to the Referendum, all with consistently less than 100 monthly searches.

About the Research

Mavens of London used aggregated digital data from January to May, 2016, in relation to the UK Referendum on EU membership. The strategy and research consultancy categorised 1,048 Google keywords, analysed 3,692,700 search queries and identified the sites that rank for this information.

About Mavens of London

Mavens provides research, strategy and marketing activation consultancy for some of the world's largest brands, including Unilever, GSK, IBM, Microsoft, Royal Philips and SABMiller. Established in 2009 and with offices in the UK, United States, Singapore and Brazil, the consultancy distinguishes itself by aggregating and analysing data to provide insight into people and their behaviour; breaking down business challenges and providing clear, realistic and actionable solutions. www.mavens.co.uk.

NOTE for the EDITORS [Not for distribution]

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