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POP THEORY



Betrayal, starring Shaun Evans and Romola Garai. Available on [ITVX](#).

THE TRUST ISSUE

Trust Issues: Wearables, Rivals and the Rise of Reddit - During Tumultuous Times, where are Brits Placing their Trust?

Trust is a hot topic right now. As we navigate a saturated digital world ([62% of Brits would be worried to hear that a loved one places trust in social media influencers](#)), technology overwhelm ([75% of Brits say that the infiltration of AI makes it difficult to determine what content is real or fake](#)) and of course the arrival of a new prime minister (our 5th across the last 5 years), it makes perfect sense that trust is a point of both concern and intrigue. As Brits maneuver a hectic era of life, we are getting stuck into content that embraces themes of secrecy, deception and trust, whilst also figuring out new spaces, technologies and modes of influence that feel worthy of our trust.



DATA OR HUMAN NATURE?

For over a decade ([the FitBit and GoPro boom began in the early 2010's](#)), Brits have been putting confidence in wearable technology to gain greater insight into health and fitness and to track and record snippets of our lives. Rather than taking cues from our bodies to let us know when we're due our period, have had a good night's sleep or challenged ourselves on a run, we are placing trust in the metrics that wearable technology offers us. 44% of Brits own a smartwatch - primarily for the purpose of health monitoring - which rises to 70% amongst younger millennials and 59% amongst Gen Z ([Mintel, 2026](#)) and 41% of Brits track their sleep using wearable technology ([Aviva, 2026](#)).

While we relish the fun of tracking and measuring our performance and feeling as though we are optimising ourselves, we are divided over whether or not we actually trust health-tracking devices. 30% of us see wearable technology as a fad, while 47% see it as a lasting innovation, and 48% of wearable users express concern about how health data collected through wearables might be used ([YouGov, 2025](#)).

So, why are Brits so fond of wearable tech, despite its shortcomings? Perhaps it has to do with accessing a sense of control over our health that feels otherwise hard to come by. While 47% of Brits say that the NHS is their main source of national pride, 21.9% said long NHS waiting times led them to use private healthcare services in the last 12 months ([Mintel, 2025](#)). We are attempting to take our health into our own hands as much as possible because we simply don't trust those in power to look after us - in fact - 62% of the British public feel actively resentful towards political and economic systems (ITV, What Unites a Kingdom, 2026).

In an alternative vein, there are many who are calling for us to ditch the data and reclaim our human nature, simply because. Diary of a CEO host Steven Bartlett [recently sparked controversy](#) for claiming that having two glasses of wine had 'ruined his life for 3 days', not according to how he felt, but according to sleep and dopamine metrics measured by his smart watch. Radio 1 DJ Greg James [posted a video in response](#) which attracted 3.8 million views and copious praise on Instagram, claiming that over-reliance on technology and measuring everything is killing fun. Carol Vorderman even jumped into the comment section to tell the story of how she ditched her Oura ring and decided to go old school by trusting her body instead.

The arrival of Meta glasses might just be the straw that breaks the camels back when it comes to our trust in wearable recording technology. [The CEO of Wetherspoons has spoken out against them](#), expressing that the glasses won't be welcome at Spoons as they breach a code of trust that should exist in public spaces, and [a petition against the sale and promotion of smart glasses in the UK has reached over 8,000 signatures](#). Attitudes towards wearables, measurement culture and health technology are far from clear cut,

but a movement towards reclaiming trust in each other and our human nature seems to be slowly emerging.

TRUSTING OUR RIVALS IS TANTALISING

Content that shows us navigating trust in our rivals is captivating audiences. Celebrity Traitors returns to our screens on October 8th; the last series was 2025's most watched TV show, and by bringing in 3.1 million 16-24 year old viewers, [it has been accredited as the show that ushered Gen Z towards live TV](#). The Traitors' exploration of deception and trust left audiences so hungry for more that fans are flocking to Scotland to see the Traitors backdrop with their own eyes ([the show has injected £21.8 million into Scotland's economy](#)) and you can now book tickets for a live Traitors experience London's Covent Garden.



Queer romance drama *Heated Rivalry* - which follows two ice hockey players pursuing a secret steamy romance despite playing for teams with a deep-rooted rivalry - is also a fan favourite. The show's trust-testing storyline has certainly worked wonders for the popularity of ice hockey; with one ice hockey club manager reporting that [ticket sales increased by 15%](#) following the arrival of *Heated Rivalry* to UK streaming services, and a [drag musical parody of the show](#) took place at Edinburgh Fringe this August.

[The UK's 2nd most listened to podcast](#) -

The Rest is Politics - sees former politicians Alistair Campbell and Rory Stewart break down current affairs, with the hook being that the two hosts come from rival political backgrounds. By debating opposing opinions and challenging the expectation of rivalry, the two create a well-rounded, trustworthy space for listeners to tune into.

When former Borussia Dortmund team mates Jude Bellingham and Erling Haaland came face to face as World Cup quarter final rivals at Norway vs England, the internet went crazy over their on-pitch bromance. Audiences relished footage of them being playful on pitch, reassuring each other throughout the rhythm of the game and singing each other's praises in post-match interviews despite playing on the global stage in competition for the biggest football accolade in the world. Seeing two global superstars break down the veneer of rivalry live in front of the world [sent audiences into a fan frenzy](#).

So, why is the test of trust and flirtation with rivalry such a tantalising plotline for audiences? Well, our research into [What Makes Content Catch](#) tells us that unexpected

scenarios and talent pairings create a catalyst for conversation, which speaks especially strongly to Gen Z audiences, who often seek a sense of belonging through content. For brands or creators looking to dip a toe into the test of trust, look no further than two apparent rivals.

INFLUENCED OR ICKED?

Influencer power is losing its grip, and trust - or rather, a lack of it - is at the core of the slump. Influencing was once rooted in trust, aspiration and supposed relatability. Now, audiences are much more alert to being deceived, are getting their Miss Marple hats on and are taking fact-checking into their own hands.

71% of Brits believe that misinformation is present in influencer content, compared to 38% who believe that misinformation is present in TV advertising ([Ipsos, 2025](#)). 44% say that they will immediately lose trust in influencer content if it feels fake or overly scripted and 36% would choose to disengage immediately upon detecting profit-driven promotion ([Adobe Express, 2026](#)). 'De-influencing' has even become a trend - [#deinfluencing](#) has over 1 billion views globally. The trend puts honesty, accountability and conversation in the spotlight, but ironically many creators of de-influencing videos are actually influencers themselves!





So, it's a tricky world to navigate and while we are still looking to content creators to help us decide what we buy, we are subjecting them to much more scrutiny. A recent Harris Poll titled [“TikTok Troubles: The Platform Gen Z Can’t Quit \(But Doesn’t Trust\)”](#) revealed that 60% of UK based Gen Z users report trusting TikTok less than they did just one year ago, with a whopping 72% saying they feel a longing for the older more carefree, tongue-in-cheek, authentic days of the app and that current content feels staged and performative rather than authentic.

Shows like HBO’s *I Love LA* (an award winning, tongue-in-cheek look at fabricated online personas) and Charli XCX’s mockumentary *The Moment* both use satire to speak to the illusion of influencing and while the latter wasn’t entirely well received by critics, it certainly marks a moment in pop culture where taking the mickey out of influencing, fame and chronically online culture is becoming a catchy narrative.

In tandem with declining trust in influencers, a Reddit counter-culture is emerging. The UK is the 2nd largest user of Reddit globally - sitting just behind the US - and Reddit is the 6th most

visited website by UK internet users aged between 18 and 24 (a year earlier, it ranked in 10th place) ([The Guardian, 2026](#)). So why has Reddit suddenly captured our trust? Well, honesty (sometimes brutal) is at the heart of it’s concept, which is the number one value Brits want the government to promote in the near future ([ITV, What Unites a Kingdom, 2026](#)). And - on the topic of values - Brits are also seeking out integrity, fairness and respect (ITV, *What Unites a Kingdom*, 2026), indicating a new set of principles that could define the future of influence.

