

The Impact of Disinformation on Journalism: Online Survey of Journalists

Conducted for PEN America by the FDR Group
Conducted June 23-October 25, 2021

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Topline Findings from an Online Survey of Journalists

I. INTRODUCTION

The FDR Group conducted this research on behalf of PEN America to help it better understand and document the impact of disinformation on journalists and how they go about doing their work. For the purposes of this survey, disinformation was defined as “content created or distributed with intent to deceive.” PEN America intends to use these research findings to identify measures it can take to support the journalism community as it works to counter the negative impact of disinformation.

The findings from the online survey with 1,030 US-based journalists reveal widespread concern about the degree to which journalists think disinformation is a problem for journalism in general and for their news outlets in particular, the changes they have made to their own practice in response to disinformation, and their reactions to possible ways to address it.

Key findings include:

- Virtually all journalists surveyed think disinformation is a serious problem for journalism today: 81% say it's a very serious problem, and 16% say somewhat serious.
- Most journalists surveyed indicate that detecting and addressing disinformation is a priority at their news outlets: 40% say "urgent" and 47% "important, but not urgent"; only 8% say it's "not too important."
- Describing the impact of disinformation on their own experiences as journalists in recent years, majorities say that they have personally faced hostility from the public (65%) and that they are vigilant about limiting their personal data on the Internet (53%).
- Describing changes they have made in their day-to-day practice as a result of disinformation, majorities say that they are spending more time debunking information (66%) and making efforts to be transparent (59%).
- More than half of the journalists surveyed (57%) say at least one of the following things have happened to them in recent years: received threatening communications; was harassed in person; was doxxed or trolled online; was catfished; or added personal security precautions to daily routine due to safety fears.
- Asked about eight potential actions their news outlets could take to counter the impact of disinformation, one in three journalists indicate that their news outlet has taken none of them. The most likely actions focus on word choices in headlines and ledes, and diversity in newsrooms.

What follows are the overall findings as well as comparisons across a variety of subgroups (i.e., race/ethnicity, title, years of experience, frequency of dealing with disinformation, and being a target of a disinformation campaign). The online survey with 1,030 US-based journalists was conducted between June 23 and October 25, 2021; two virtual focus groups with journalists preceded the survey. A full description of the research methodology as well as the Complete Survey Results can be found at the end of this report. Question numbers in parenthesis in the body of the report correspond to the question numbers in the Complete Survey Results.

II. OVERALL FINDINGS

1. Disinformation: Extent of the Problem

- Virtually all journalists surveyed think disinformation is a serious problem for journalism today: 81% very serious, 16% somewhat serious. (q6)
- Journalists are far more likely to be worried about disinformation spreading inaccurate information that can cause harm (62%) than they are about it undermining the public's confidence in news coverage (35%) or distracting people's attention from important news (3%). (q14)
- Twice as many journalists feel that "news outlets should make every effort to debunk false or misleading content even if it risks amplifying the disinformation" rather than "news outlets should be extremely discerning about when to debunk disinformation – even if it means falsehoods go unaddressed – because writing about it only gives it more visibility" (54% vs. 27%) (19% are unsure). (q13)
- Most find themselves dealing with disinformation regularly in their current jobs: 61% some days, 15% all or most days; 21% say hardly ever or never. (q10)
- Most have confidence in their own ability to detect disinformation they may come across in their work: 60% a lot of confidence, 39% some. (q9) [11% say "I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself" (q18)]

2. Impact of Disinformation on Journalists

- Describing their experience as journalists in recent years, almost two in three say they have faced hostility from the public, and more than half say they are vigilant about limiting their personal data on the Internet. Here's the full list: (q18)
 - 65% I have faced hostility from the public
 - 53% I am vigilant about limiting my personal data on the Internet
 - 48% I feel frustrated or overwhelmed
 - 42% I feel that some portion of my audience has lost trust in me
 - 30% It's harder to do my work because sources are less likely to respond to my requests
 - 27% I take far longer to finish a story
 - 27% I have seriously considered leaving the profession
 - 11% I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself
 - 8% None of the above

- Describing changes they have made in their day-to-day practice as a result of disinformation, the journalists surveyed say they find themselves doing the following more frequently: (q19)
 - 66% Debunking information or making extra efforts to provide context
 - 59% Making intentional efforts to be transparent about decisions, methods, and sources
 - 38% Reaching out directly to develop relationships and trust with my audience
 - 34% Questioning my gut instincts
 - 26% Feeling overwhelmed by the level of fact-checking required to complete a story
 - 19% Using new technologies and tools to detect disinformation
 - 17% Avoiding a story due to fear of “fake news” backlash
 - 11% Relying on lawyers to vet a story
 - 9% None of the above

- More than half of the journalists surveyed (57%) say at least one of the following five statements is true for them; still, a sizeable number (42%) indicates that none of these statements apply to them (i.e., they have not been the target of an organized campaign to delegitimize or discredit their work). (q20)
 - 41% I received threatening emails, phone calls, or letters
 - 22% I was harassed in person while doing my job
 - 21% I was doxxed or trolled online
 - 15% I added personal security precautions to my daily routine due to fears for my safety
 - 7% I was catfished – i.e., interacted with a real person who was using a fake identity
 - 42% None of the above

- Large majorities of the journalists surveyed indicate that they need to learn more about tools that could help counter disinformation in their own work: (q17)
 - 82% Using bot detection tools
 - 78% Using image verification tools
 - 70% Using social media monitoring tools
 - 64% Using reverse image search tools
 - 36% Using fact-checking sites

3. Assessing News Outlets' Response to Disinformation

- Most journalists surveyed indicate that detecting and addressing disinformation is a priority at their news outlets: 40% “urgent” and 47% “important, but not urgent”; only 8% say it's “not too important.” (q7)

- Yet, a plurality (40%) say “there is no organization-wide approach; it’s left to individual journalists to deal with”; 30% say their news outlet “has put processes in place that are generally effective” and 21% “its efforts are well intended but still need a lot of work.” (q8)

- At most, only about one in three journalists surveyed rate their news outlets as “doing a good job” when it comes to each of the following. *[Note: this battery of questions garnered notably high “not sure” responses, between 11% and 19%.]* (q15)
 - 36% Having senior editors who put strong systems in place for countering disinformation
 - 35% Relying on the variety of perspectives reflected in newsroom staff to help address disinformation (e.g., age, ethnic/racial, political, religious)
 - 33% Knowing when to “prebunk” – preemptively report accurate information before disinformation spreads
 - 21% Making efforts to address how disinformation travels through communities that are vulnerable, e.g., due to language, immigration, isolation, etc.
 - 18% Offering professional development on how to detect and report on disinformation

- Asked about eight potential actions their news outlet could take to counter the impact of disinformation, about one in three journalists indicate that their news outlet has taken none of them. The most likely actions focus on word choices in headlines and ledes, and diversity in newsrooms. (q22/q21)
 - 36% Put more emphasis on choosing headlines, ledes, and photos that minimize their potential misuse as disinformation *[67% think this would be a generally effective action]*
 - 35% Implement changes to attract and hire journalists to ensure a wide variety of perspectives in the newsroom *[69% think this would be a generally effective action]*
 - 23% Have systems in place to respond quickly to disinformation *[73% think this would be a generally effective action]*

- o 21% Devote resources to building relationships in communities where disinformation is likely to circulate *[63% think this would be a generally effective action]*
- o 21% Provide training and guidelines to journalists on how to report on disinformation *[80% think this would be a generally effective action]*
- o 14% Partner with organizations to educate the public on how to identify disinformation *[60% think this would be a generally effective action]*
- o 14% Establish an in-house fact-checking team to monitor, debunk, and write stories about “fake news” *[50% think this would be a generally effective action]*
- o 9% Assign a journalist whose beat is disinformation and its impact *[41% think this would be a generally effective action]*
- o 32% None of the above

4. Potential Sources & Greatest Proliferators of Disinformation

- The sources of the most egregious cases of disinformation in journalists’ own work are (q11):
 - o 76% Right-wing conspiracy theorists
 - o 70% Government officials, candidates, or political organizations
 - o 65% Special-interest or advocacy groups
 - o 54% Organizations dedicated to creating disinformation via things like bots and doctored images
 - o 40% Celebrities or social media influencers
 - o 35% Left-wing conspiracy theorists
 - o 30% Foreign government actors
 - o 2% None of the above
- And thinking about the issues they cover, here are the social networks where the journalists surveyed see the greatest proliferation of disinformation (q16):
 - o 88% Facebook
 - o 63% Twitter
 - o 45% YouTube
 - o 24% Parler
 - o 20% Instagram
 - o 19% TikTok
 - o 18% Reddit
 - o 18% Nextdoor
 - o 10% WhatsApp
 - o 4% None of the above

5. Likely Targets of Disinformation

- Journalists were asked if they are aware of disinformation campaigns designed to mislead any of the following groups – “voters” tops the list. (q12)
 - 75% Voters
 - 50% Senior citizens
 - 50% Racial or ethnic minority groups
 - 48% Journalists
 - 48% Economically poor communities
 - 43% Rural communities
 - 42% Religious groups
 - 31% Non-English speakers
 - 27% Government officials
 - 14% LGBTQ community
 - 9% None of the above

III. SUBGROUP ANALYSIS

1. By Race/Ethnicity [*Comparison Groups: White n=750 | POC n=131*]

There are relatively few attitudinal or experiential differences among the journalists surveyed when comparing white journalists to journalists who are people of color.

- Race/ethnicity does not appear to have a notable influence on whether journalists have experienced a variety of negative impacts due to disinformation. Two exceptions: white journalists are more likely to say they’ve faced hostility from the public; journalists who are POC are more likely to say they take far longer to finish a story.

WHITE | POC

68% v 56% I have faced hostility from the public

53% v 60% I am vigilant about limiting my personal data on the Internet

48% v 53% I feel frustrated or overwhelmed

44% v 44% I feel that some portion of my audience has lost trust in me

30% v 29% It’s harder to do my work because sources are less likely to respond to my requests

27% v 31% I have seriously considered leaving the profession

24% v 44% I take far longer to finish a story

11% v 13% I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself

- Race/ethnicity does not appear to have a notable influence on whether disinformation causes journalists to make changes to their day-to-day practice. Two exceptions: white journalists are more likely to say they are doing more debunking/providing context; journalists who are POC are more likely to say they're feeling overwhelmed by the level of fact-checking required to complete a story.

WHITE | POC

68% v 56% Debunking information or making extra efforts to provide context
 60% v 60% Making intentional efforts to be transparent about decisions, methods, and sources
 38% v 37% Reaching out directly to develop relationships and trust with my audience
 33% v 37% Questioning my gut instincts
 24% v 34% Feeling overwhelmed by the level of fact-checking required to complete a story
 18% v 24% Using new technologies and tools to detect disinformation
 16% v 20% Avoiding a story due to fear of "fake news" backlash
 10% v 13% Relying on lawyers to vet a story

- Race/ethnicity does not appear to have a notable influence on being a target of an organized disinformation campaign to delegitimize or discredit one's work.

WHITE | POC

42% v 38% I received threatening emails, phone calls, or letters
 22% v 18% I was doxxed or trolled online
 21% v 23% I was harassed in person while doing my job
 14% v 17% I added personal security precautions to my daily routine due to fears for my safety
 7% v 6% I was catfished – i.e., interacted with a real person who was using a fake identity

- 74% of journalists who are white and who are POC believe that "having systems in place to respond quickly to disinformation" would be a generally effective action for news outlets to take to counter the impact of disinformation. But white journalists are somewhat more likely than journalist who are POC to report that their own news outlets have such systems in place (24% v 15%).

- Two notable differences:
 - Journalists who are POC are less likely to say they have a lot of confidence in their ability to detect disinformation when they come across it in their own work (62% v 44%).
 - Journalists who are POC are more likely to be aware of disinformation campaigns designed to mislead the following groups:

	<u>WHITE</u> <u>POC</u>
Racial or ethnic minority groups	46% v 72%
Economically poor communities	46% v 63%
Non-English speakers	28% v 48%

2. By Title *[Comparison Groups: Editor n=318 | Staff Reporter n=423]*

The findings suggest that Editors are more sanguine than Staff Reporters about the efforts news outlets are making to combat disinformation. But the differences may be simply a factor of the different roles they play. Editors may be more knowledgeable about the decisions being made or perhaps more protective of themselves since they are the ones responsible for implementing these efforts.

- Editors are more likely to think their outlet has “Put more emphasis on choosing headlines, ledes, and photos that minimize their potential misuse as disinformation” (48% v 31%).
- Editors are more likely to think their outlet is doing a good job when it comes to “Having senior editors who put strong systems in place for countering disinformation” (44% v 31%).
- Editors are more likely to think their outlet is doing a good job when it comes to “Relying on the variety of perspectives reflected in newsroom staff to help address disinformation” (42% v 30%).
- Editors are more likely to think their outlet has put generally effective processes in place to counter disinformation (34% v 25%).

3. By Years as a Professional Journalist

[Comparison Groups: 4 or less n=74 | 5-9 years n=146 | 10-19 n=215 | 20+ n=535]

On questions about how news outlets are addressing the problem of disinformation, the data show a consistent pattern of differences based on years of professional experience. In general, the more experience journalists have, the more likely they are to think their news outlet is aware of the problem and is implementing ways to address disinformation. Veterans are also more likely to be confident in their ability to detect disinformation in their own work – and less likely to say the impact of disinformation causes them to feel frustrated or overwhelmed.

The more experience a journalist has...

- ...The more likely to think that detecting and addressing disinformation is an “urgent” priority at their news outlets (31% v 23% v 42% v 45%).
- ...The more likely to think their news outlets have processes in place to counter disinformation (14% v 17% v 29% v 34%).
- ...The more likely to think their news outlets are “doing a good job” on each of the following:

<=4|5-9|10-19|20+

20% v 21% v 34% v 43%	Having senior editors who put strong systems in place for countering disinformation
22% v 24% v 35% v 37%	Knowing when to “prebunk” – preemptively report accurate information before disinformation spreads
1% v 10% v 19% v 22%	Offering professional development on how to detect and report on disinformation
20% v 30% v 31% v 42%	Relying on the variety of perspectives reflected in newsroom staff to help address disinformation (age, ethnic/racial, political, religious)
7% v 11% v 25% v 25%	Making efforts to address how disinformation travels through communities that are vulnerable, e.g., due to language, immigration, isolation, etc.

- ...The more likely to think “news outlets should make every effort to debunk false or misleading content even if it risks amplifying the disinformation” (41% v 42% v 47% v 62%).
- ...The more likely to have a lot of confidence in their ability to detect disinformation when they come across it in their own work (41% v 60% v 56% v 64%).

- ...The less likely to say that they feel frustrated or overwhelmed as an impact of disinformation (68% v 67% v 61% v 37%).

4. By Frequency of Dealing with Disinformation

[Comparison Groups: All/Most Days n=152 | Some Days n=628 | Hardly Ever/Never n=218]

Journalists who regularly come across disinformation in their own work – writing about it, debunking it, explaining it, uncovering it – differ in their views and experiences compared with those who rarely deal with it. On the whole, those who find themselves dealing with disinformation are more likely to be concerned about it and to be alert to the actions that news outlets take to counter it.

- Vast majorities of journalists – more than nine in ten across the board – describe disinformation as a serious problem for journalism today. But those who come across disinformation in their own work are far more likely to describe it as a “very serious” problem (93% v 84% v 64%).
- They are more likely to think that detecting and addressing disinformation is an “urgent” priority at their news outlets (59% v 42% v 23%).
- They are more likely to think that their news outlets have processes in place that are generally effective in countering disinformation (38% v 30% v 24%).
- They are more likely to identify specific sources of disinformation as “egregious cases”:

<u>ALL/MOST</u>	<u>SOME</u>	<u>HARDLY/NEVER</u>	
88%	v 72%	v 53%	Government officials, candidates, or political organizations
81%	v 80%	v 65%	Right-wing conspiracy theorists
76%	v 66%	v 56%	Special-interest or advocacy groups
63%	v 55%	v 46%	Organizations dedicated to creating disinformation via things like bots and doctored images
45%	v 41%	v 34%	Celebrities or social media influencers
45%	v 28%	v 27%	Foreign government actors
43%	v 34%	v 32%	Left-wing conspiracy theorists

- They are more likely to be aware of disinformation campaigns designed to mislead each of the following groups:

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY/NEVER

85% v 78% v 62% Voters
 68% v 48% v 32% Journalists
 65% v 51% v 35% Senior citizens
 65% v 51% v 36% Racial or ethnic minority groups
 63% v 50% v 34% Economically poor communities
 64% v 42% v 33% Rural communities
 59% v 43% v 28% Religious groups
 45% v 27% v 14% Government officials
 41% v 32% v 18% Non-English speakers
 22% v 14% v 7% LGBTQ community

- They are more likely to identify all of the following social networks as being places where they see a great proliferation of disinformation.

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY/NEVER

95% v 88% v 81% Facebook
 71% v 65% v 54% Twitter
 59% v 46% v 33% YouTube
 36% v 25% v 15% Parler
 30% v 20% v 14% Instagram
 28% v 17% v 17% TikTok
 25% v 17% v 17% Reddit
 21% v 19% v 11% Nextdoor
 17% v 9% v 10% WhatsApp

- They are more likely to think “news outlets should make every effort to debunk false or misleading content even if it risks amplifying the disinformation” (69% v 51% v 51%).

- They are more likely to have experienced the following negative impacts due to disinformation:

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY/NEVER

80% v 67% v 52% I have faced hostility from the public
 63% v 50% v 35% I feel frustrated or overwhelmed
 49% v 55% v 52% I am vigilant about limiting my personal data on the Internet
 47% v 44% v 34% I feel that some portion of my audience has lost trust in me
 40% v 27% v 18% I have seriously considered leaving the profession

34% v 29% v 17% I take far longer to finish a story
 32% v 31% v 28% It's harder to do my work because sources are less likely to respond to my requests
 16% v 11% v 7% I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself

- They are more likely to have made the following changes in their day-to-day practice as a result of disinformation:

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY/NEVER

77% v 70% v 49%	Debunking information or making extra efforts to provide context
67% v 60% v 52%	Making intentional efforts to be transparent about decisions, methods, and sources
47% v 38% v 29%	Reaching out directly to develop relationships and trust with my audience
38% v 35% v 29%	Questioning my gut instincts
37% v 26% v 18%	Feeling overwhelmed by the level of fact-checking required to complete a story
32% v 18% v 12%	Using new technologies and tools to detect disinformation
24% v 16% v 15%	Avoiding a story due to fear of “fake news” backlash
17% v 11% v 7%	Relying on lawyers to vet a story

- They are more likely to say they have been targets of organized disinformation campaigns to delegitimize or discredit their work:

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY/NEVER

57% v 43% v 26%	I received threatening emails, phone calls, or letters
40% v 20% v 11%	I was doxxed or trolled online
32% v 22% v 13%	I was harassed in person while doing my job
21% v 15% v 9%	I added personal security precautions to my daily routine due to fears for my safety
15% v 5% v 5%	I was catfished – i.e., interacted with a real person who was using a fake identity

- They are more likely to report that their news outlets have taken the following actions to combat disinformation:

ALL/MOST | SOME | HARDLY EVER/NEVER

42% v 39% v 27%	Put more emphasis on choosing headlines, ledes, and photos that minimize their potential misuse as disinformation
38% v 37% v 27%	Implement changes to attract and hire journalists to ensure a wide variety of perspectives in the newsroom

35% v 23% v 15%	Have systems in place to respond quickly to disinformation
29% v 23% v 11%	Provide training and guidelines to journalists on how to report on disinformation
25% v 12% v 10%	Establish an in-house fact-checking team to monitor, debunk, and write stories about “fake news”
22% v 15% v 5%	Partner with organizations to educate the public on how to identify disinformation
22% v 24% v 12%	Devote resources to building relationships in communities where disinformation is likely to circulate
19% v 8% v 6%	Assign a journalist whose beat is disinformation and its impact

5. By Target of Organized Disinformation Campaign

[Comparison Groups: Target n=583 | Not Target n= 424]

Note: “Target” is defined as journalists who indicated that at least 1 of 5 statements is true for them about being the target of an organized campaign to delegitimize or discredit their work (q20: added personal security, received threats, was catfished, was doxed, was harassed in person)

The consequences of disinformation are especially prevalent among journalists who feel they’ve been targets of organized campaigns to delegitimize or discredit their work. Journalists who identify as targets are consistently more likely than those who do not to report that, in recent years, they have experienced negative impacts due to disinformation. And they also are consistently more likely to report that they have made changes in their day-to-day practice as a result of disinformation.

- Journalists who were targets of organized disinformation campaigns to delegitimize or discredit their work are more likely to say each of the following:

TARGET | NOT TARGET

84% v 38% I have faced hostility from the public

58% v 35% I feel frustrated or overwhelmed

55% v 52% I am vigilant about limiting my personal data on the Internet

51% v 30% I feel that some portion of my audience has lost trust in me

36% v 22% It’s harder to do my work because sources are less likely to respond to my requests

33% v 19% I have seriously considered leaving the profession

31% v 22% I take far longer to finish a story

14% v 7% I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself

- Journalists who were targets of organized disinformation campaigns to delegitimize or discredit their work are more likely to say they are doing each of the following more frequently:

TARGET | NOT TARGET

- 73% v 56% Debunking information or making extra efforts to provide context
- 64% v 53% Making intentional efforts to be transparent about decisions, methods, sources
- 44% v 30% Reaching out directly to develop relationships and trust with my audience
- 40% v 27% Questioning my gut instincts
- 29% v 21% Feeling overwhelmed by level of fact-checking required to complete a story
- 22% v 14% Using new technologies and tools to detect disinformation
- 20% v 12% Avoiding a story due to fear of “fake news” backlash
- 14% v 6% Relying on lawyers to vet a story

IV. METHODOLOGY

The findings in this report are based on an online survey of 1,030 US-based journalists in editing or reporting roles at print, online-only, or broadcast (radio and TV) news outlets. The survey was fielded between June 23 and October 25, 2021. To help inform the themes and questions to cover in the survey, two virtual focus groups were conducted with journalists from across the country in April 2021.

The online survey was fielded as follows: An initial invitation plus one reminder were sent via email on a rolling basis between June 23 and September 9 to a total of 22,405 journalists listed in the comprehensive database maintained by online media marketing company Meltwater. The criteria used to define journalists were: based in the U.S.; serving in editing and reporting roles; and working at print, online-only, or broadcast (radio and TV) news outlets with local, regional, or national reach. The email message, which included a description of the purpose of the research, assurances of anonymity, and a link to the online survey, was sent from Suzanne Nossel, Chief Executive Officer of PEN America. This outreach generated 857 completed surveys. At the same time, PEN America staff reached out to their own networks of journalists and nonprofit organizations that serve journalists to encourage participation in the online survey. This outreach resulted in 173 completed surveys. An analysis of the two sample sources showed no discernable differences in attitudes and experiences; there were some demographic differences and these are reported in the table below.

The survey instrument was pre-tested with journalists to ensure that question wording was accessible and appropriate. Questions were randomized and answer categories rotated in an effort to minimize non-sampling sources of error. In total, the survey included 45 items: 33 were substantive and 12 were demographic; on average it took about 10 minutes to complete. Survey Monkey was used to administer the questionnaire and collect the data.

The survey instrument and focus group moderator’s guide were crafted by the FDR Group with input from PEN America. Data analysis and interpretation in this report were done by the FDR Group, and the focus groups were moderated and analyzed by the FDR Group.

The FDR Group would like to thank the more than 1,000 journalists across the country who so generously took the time to complete the online survey. We especially thank the 13 journalists who participated in the focus groups and five who pre-tested the survey instrument for their thoughtful responses and constructive feedback. Thank you as well to the folks at PEN America who entrusted us with this important research effort, for sharing their knowledge and expertise on the issue, and for giving us free rein to craft the survey instrument, analyze the data, and report the findings.

TABLE: DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Total N=1,030	Meltwater N=857	Networks N=173
Title			
Staff reporter	41	45	23
Editor	31	33	20
Freelance journalist	10	7	25
News executive	6	6	8
Opinion writer	5	4	7
Producer	2	2	5
Video/Audio/Photo journalist	2	2	2
Race/Ethnicity <i>(does not total to 100% due to multiple responses and non-response)</i>			
(Net) Person of Color	15	13	26
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	1	1
Asian/Asian American	4	4	4
Black/African American	4	3	12
Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx	6	5	10
Middle Eastern/North African	1	1	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	*	*	-
White/Caucasian	76	78	65
Gender			
Man	49	52	31
Woman	43	39	60
Non-binary	1	*	2
Number of Years as a Journalist			
4 years or less	7	6	11

5-9 years	14	15	13
10-14 years	11	10	13
15-19 years	10	10	10
20 years or more	52	53	47
Status of News Outlet			
For-profit	75	80	51
Non-profit	22	18	41
Reach of News Outlet <i>(does not total to 100% due to multiple responses)</i>			
Local/Community	43	45	35
City	27	27	25
Regional/State	40	41	36
National	30	29	36
International	18	17	24
Audience of News Outlet			
General	83	85	76
Specific	17	15	24
Number of Journalists in News Outlet			
0-19	42	43	39
20-49	16	17	15
50-99	14	14	13
100 or more	19	20	16
Type of News Outlet			
Newspaper/Magazine	56	60	34
Online only	22	19	36
Radio	8	8	10
TV (network+cable)	5	5	5

V. Complete Survey Results

The Impact of Disinformation on Journalism Online Survey of Journalists Conducted June 23-October 25, 2021

What follows is complete question wording and percentage responding to each survey item. An asterisk indicates less than one-half of one percent response; in some questions totals do not add to 100 percent due to rounding or multiple answers.

Total answering: N=1,030

1. Choose the title that comes closest to describing your current role as a journalist.

- 41 Staff reporter
- 31 Editor
- 10 Freelance journalist
- 6 News executive
- 5 Opinion writer
- 2 Producer
- 2 Video/Audio/Photo journalist
- 4 Something else

3. Is your news outlet:

- 22 Non-profit
- 75 For-profit (commercial)
- 2 Not sure

4. Is the primary reach of your news outlet:

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 43 Local or community
- 27 City
- 40 Regional or state
- 30 National
- 18 International

5. Does your news outlet mostly serve a general audience or does it mostly cater to a specific demographic community?

- 83 General audience
- 17 Specific demographic community

6. How serious a problem do you think disinformation is for journalism today?

(For the purposes of this survey, disinformation is defined as content created or distributed with the intent to deceive.)

- 81 Very serious
- 16 Somewhat serious
- 2 Not too serious
- * Not serious at all

* Not sure

7. At your news outlet, how high a priority is detecting and addressing disinformation?

- 40 Urgent
- 47 Important, but not urgent
- 8 Not too important
- 5 Not sure

8. Which statement best describes your news outlet's organizational efforts to counter disinformation?

- 30 It has put processes in place that are generally effective
- 21 Its efforts are well intended but still need a lot of work
- 40 There is no organization-wide approach; it's left to individual journalists to deal with
- 9 Not sure

9. How much confidence do you have in your ability to detect disinformation that you may come across in your work?

- 60 A lot of confidence
- 39 Some confidence
- 1 Very little confidence
- * Not applicable

10. How frequently do you find yourself dealing with disinformation – e.g., writing about it, debunking it, explaining it, uncovering it?

- 15 All or most days
- 61 Some days
- 21 Hardly ever or never
- 3 Not applicable

11. Here is a list of potential sources of disinformation. Thinking about your own work, which of these – if any – are sources of the most egregious cases of disinformation?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 76 Right-wing conspiracy theorists
- 70 Government officials, candidates, or political organizations
- 65 Special-interest or advocacy groups
- 54 Organizations dedicated to creating disinformation via things like bots and doctored images
- 40 Celebrities or social media influencers
- 35 Left-wing conspiracy theorists
- 30 Foreign government actors
- 2 None of the above

12. Thinking about your own work, are you aware of disinformation campaigns designed to mislead any of the following groups? *(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)*

- 75 Voters
- 50 Racial or ethnic minority groups
- 50 Senior citizens
- 48 Economically poor communities
- 48 Journalists
- 43 Rural communities
- 42 Religious groups
- 31 Non-English speakers
- 27 Government officials

- 14 LGBTQ community
- 9 None of the above

13. Which statement comes closer to your view about how news outlets should address disinformation in their reporting?

- 54 News outlets should make every effort to debunk false or misleading content even if it risks amplifying the disinformation
- 27 News outlets should be extremely discerning about when to debunk disinformation – even if it means falsehoods go unaddressed – because writing about it only gives it more visibility
- 19 Not sure

14. Which of these three consequences of disinformation worries you most?

- 62 That it spreads inaccurate information that can cause harm
- 35 That it undermines the public’s confidence in news coverage
- 3 That it distracts people’s attention from important news
- 1 Not sure

15. How would you rate your news outlet when it comes to each of the following?

15-1. Having senior editors who put strong systems in place for countering disinformation

- 36 Doing a good job
- 33 Needs improvement
- 18 Falls far short
- 13 Not sure

15-2. Knowing when to “prebunk” – preemptively report accurate information before disinformation spreads

- 33 Doing a good job
- 36 Needs improvement
- 13 Falls far short
- 18 Not sure

15-3. Offering professional development on how to detect and report on disinformation

- 18 Doing a good job
- 37 Needs improvement
- 31 Falls far short
- 15 Not sure

15-4. Relying on the variety of perspectives reflected in newsroom staff to help address disinformation (e.g., age, ethnic/racial, political, religious)

- 35 Doing a good job
- 38 Needs improvement
- 17 Falls far short
- 11 Not sure

15-5. Making efforts to address how disinformation travels through communities that are vulnerable, e.g., due to language, immigration, isolation, etc.

- 21 Doing a good job
- 37 Needs improvement
- 22 Falls far short
- 19 Not sure

16. Thinking about the issues you cover, on which of these social networks – if any – do you see the greatest proliferation of disinformation? (Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 88 Facebook
- 63 Twitter
- 45 YouTube
- 24 Parler
- 20 Instagram
- 19 TikTok
- 18 Nextdoor
- 18 Reddit
- 10 WhatsApp
- 4 None of the above

17. For each of the following, please indicate whether you are satisfied with your current level of knowledge, need to learn more, or if it's something you don't need.

17-1. Using bot detection tools

- 7 Satisfied
- 82 Need to learn more
- 11 Don't need

17-2. Using fact-checking sites

- 57 Satisfied
- 36 Need to learn more
- 7 Don't need

17-3. Using image verification tools

- 14 Satisfied
- 78 Need to learn more
- 8 Don't need

17-4. Using reverse image search tools

- 27 Satisfied
- 64 Need to learn more
- 10 Don't need

17-5. Using social media monitoring tools

- 24 Satisfied
- 70 Need to learn more
- 6 Don't need

18. The following statements describe a variety of potential impacts of disinformation that journalists may experience. Which of these – if any – describe your experience as a journalist in recent years?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 65 I have faced hostility from the public
- 53 I am vigilant about limiting my personal data on the Internet
- 48 I feel frustrated or overwhelmed
- 42 I feel that some portion of my audience has lost trust in me
- 30 It's harder to do my work because sources are less likely to respond to my requests
- 27 I take far longer to finish a story
- 27 I have seriously considered leaving the profession

- 11 I have unknowingly reported disinformation myself
- 8 None of the above

19. The impact of disinformation may cause journalists to make changes in their day-to-day practice. Which of the following – if any – do you find yourself doing more frequently?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 66 Debunking information or making extra efforts to provide context
- 59 Making intentional efforts to be transparent about decisions, methods, and sources
- 38 Reaching out directly to develop relationships and trust with my audience
- 34 Questioning my gut instincts
- 26 Feeling overwhelmed by the level of fact-checking required to complete a story
- 19 Using new technologies and tools to detect disinformation
- 17 Avoiding a story due to fear of “fake news” backlash
- 11 Relying on lawyers to vet a story
- 9 None of the above

20. In recent years, there have been instances of journalists being targets of organized campaigns to delegitimize or discredit their work. Which of the following statements – if any – are true for you?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 41 I received threatening emails, phone calls, or letters
- 22 I was harassed in person while doing my job
- 21 I was doxxed or trolled online
- 15 I added personal security precautions to my daily routine due to fears for my safety
- 7 I was catfished – i.e., interacted with a real person who was using a fake identity
- 42 None of the above

21. For each of the following, please indicate if you think it would be a generally effective, neutral, or generally ineffective action for news outlets to take to counter the impact of disinformation.

21-1. Assign a journalist whose beat is disinformation and its impact

- 41 Generally effective
- 31 Neutral
- 14 Generally ineffective
- 14 Not sure

21-2. Devote resources to building relationships in communities where disinformation is likely to circulate

- 63 Generally effective
- 21 Neutral
- 7 Generally ineffective
- 9 Not sure

21-3. Establish an in-house fact-checking team to monitor, debunk, and write stories about “fake news”

- 50 Generally effective
- 27 Neutral
- 13 Generally ineffective
- 10 Not sure

21-4. Have systems in place to respond quickly to disinformation

- 73 Generally effective
- 17 Neutral
- 4 Generally ineffective
- 7 Not sure

21-5. *Implement changes to attract and hire journalists to ensure a wide variety of perspectives in the newsroom*

- 69 Generally effective
- 19 Neutral
- 6 Generally ineffective
- 7 Not sure

21-6. *Partner with organizations to educate the public on how to identify disinformation*

- 60 Generally effective
- 24 Neutral
- 9 Generally ineffective
- 8 Not sure

21-7. *Provide training and guidelines to journalists on how to report on disinformation*

- 80 Generally effective
- 13 Neutral
- 3 Generally ineffective
- 4 Not sure

21-8. *Put more emphasis on choosing headlines, ledes, and photos that minimize their potential misuse as disinformation*

- 67 Generally effective
- 21 Neutral
- 5 Generally ineffective
- 7 Not sure

22. And has your news outlet taken any of these actions?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 36 Put more emphasis on choosing headlines, ledes, and photos that minimize their potential misuse as disinformation
- 35 Implement changes to attract and hire journalists to ensure a wide variety of perspectives in the newsroom
- 23 Have systems in place to respond quickly to disinformation
- 21 Devote resources to building relationships in communities where disinformation is likely to circulate
- 21 Provide training and guidelines to journalists on how to report on disinformation
- 14 Establish an in-house fact-checking team to monitor, debunk, and write stories about “fake news”
- 14 Partner with organizations to educate the public on how to identify disinformation
- 9 Assign a journalist whose beat is disinformation and its impact
- 32 None of the above

23. Please use the space below to share an idea for improving how journalists can effectively counter disinformation or to elaborate on any of your previous responses.

(optional) [Open-end Responses provided separately.]

24. Approximately how many journalists and editors does your news outlet have?

- 42 0-19
- 16 20-49
- 14 50-99
- 19 100 or more
- 3 Not applicable
- 5 No response

25. Is your news outlet mainly:

- 56 Newspaper or magazine
- 22 Online only
- 8 Radio
- 4 TV (network)
- 1 TV (cable)
- 5 Not applicable
- 5 No response

26. Which beats do you currently cover?

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

- 50 Government
- 47 Politics
- 40 Crime and Justice
- 35 Education
- 34 Arts and Entertainment
- 33 Health
- 30 Business and Finance
- 29 Environment
- 23 Opinion and Editorial
- 16 Energy
- 16 Science
- 16 Sports
- 15 Technology
- 15 Media
- 14 Transportation
- 13 Food and Dining
- 12 Religion
- 12 Weather
- 11 Real Estate
- 11 World
- 10 Military
- 8 Travel
- 3 Fashion and Beauty
- 6 None of the above
- 6 No response

27. For approximately how many years have you been a professional in the field of journalism?

- 7 4 years or less
- 14 5-9 years
- 11 10-14 years
- 10 15-19 years
- 52 20 years or more
- 6 No response

28. Do you consider yourself:

(Does not total to 100% due to multiple responses.)

76	White or Caucasian
15	Person of Color
1	American Indian or Alaska Native
4	Asian or Asian American
4	Black or African American
6	Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx
1	Middle Eastern or North African
*	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
4	Something else
8	No response

29. Gender: How do you identify?

49	Man
43	Woman
1	Nonbinary
2	Prefer to self-describe
7	No response

30. Do you identify as transgender?

*	Yes
92	No
8	No response