

CISION[®]

2021 GLOBAL

State of the Media



THE GO-TO SOURCE FOR BECOMING JOURNALISTS' GO-TO SOURCE

Contents

Executive Summary

The Struggle Is Real

With a seemingly infinite supply of crises, the year 2020 made an indelible mark on newsrooms around the world. Communities looked to the media for information and a chance to be heard as they navigated a relentless pandemic, global recession, racial and social strife and catastrophic natural disasters. Not to mention divisive elections, tense foreign affairs, and yes, even murder hornets.

As 2020 shaped up to be one of the biggest dumpster fires in history, a host of new challenges arose for journalists on top of those already in play. Lean staffs covering multiple beats were stretched even thinner, charged with tracking down virtual sources for information on a virus with a strange name – all while fending off attacks on freedom of the press and accusations of fake news. And while the media did what they always do – charge ahead and find the story –

those challenges didn't suddenly disappear when the clock struck midnight on December 31. Those challenges continue to influence the press, from editorial strategies to how they work with PR pros.

To gain deeper insights into today's media landscape, Cision surveyed more than 2,700 journalists in 15 countries across the globe from February 1 to March 1, 2021 and asked them to spill the tea on everything from factors changing the way they work and the types of stories they want, to why they put PR pros on the “block/don't call” list and how PR pros can build stronger relationships with media to get coverage.

The result? Cision's 12th annual State of the Media study, packed to the brim with surprising insights, best practices and “aha” moments.

Let's Get Started With Some Key Takeaways:

Journalists' views on public trust in the media have steadily improved over the last five years, but the challenge continues.*

While U.S. journalists were the most likely to report a loss in public trust in the last year, they were also somewhat optimistic that this trend will improve going forward.

Censorship remains a significant concern. Nearly half of all journalists predict a continued deterioration of freedom of the press over the next three years.*

Anticipating, monitoring and quickly acting on trending stories will become even more critical for PR pros. With fragmented news consumption and increased competition for eyeballs, journalists are closely evaluating whether a story idea has the "it factor" that will translate into traffic and social shares (and ultimately ad revenue).

Journalists are both overwhelmed and underwhelmed by pitches. PR pros need to build highly targeted media lists. More than 1 in 4 journalists receive over 100 pitches per week with most ending up in the virtual trash due to irrelevance. And, contrary to popular belief, a sizeable percentage say they like receiving pitches on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Journalists want PR pros to help make their jobs easier. With journalists covering several beats and stories per week, they're looking for press releases that are chock full of original research, graphics and invites to interview experts or attend events.

PR pros should avoid pushing journalists' biggest buttons. Pitches that sound like marketing brochures, lack of transparency and following up repeatedly are among the top pet peeves for journalists.

Biggest Points of Pain (and General Annoyances) for Journalists

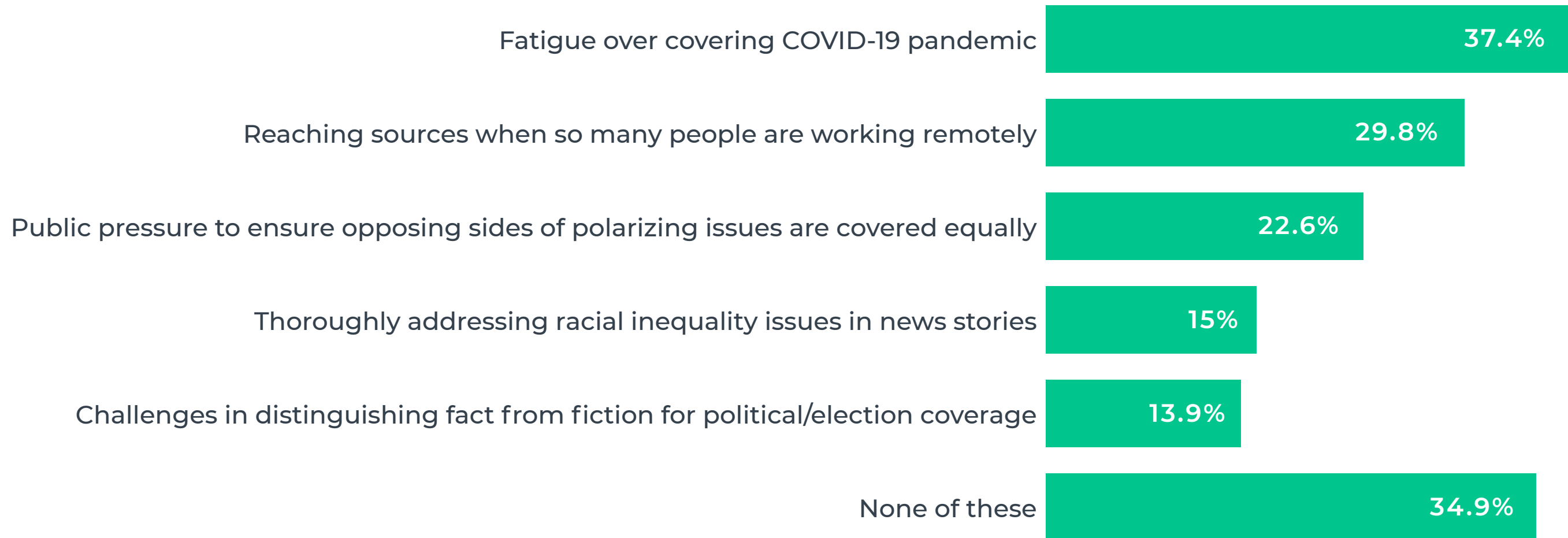
We've already touched on a few, but it's worth exploring in more detail to better understand the current mindset of journalists. Declining circulation and advertising revenue has long wreaked havoc on staffing and resources for traditional news organizations, and the events of 2020 didn't help matters. Downsized news crews scrambled to cover world-changing, emotionally-charged and, at times, head-scratching events while making sense of conflicting data and opinions.

Journalists faced increased public pressure to cover opposing sides of polarizing issues equally, and there was no shortage of them. COVID-19 beckoned headlines 24/7/365 on everything from lockdowns, overrun hospitals and vaccine trials to spectator-less sports and toilet paper shortages – creating the perfect recipe for fatigue for 37% of journalists.

At the same time, racial injustice protests erupted across the U.S. and in markets around the world in a poignant show of solidarity. Amid time and space constraints, around 1 in 7 journalists said they struggled with thoroughly addressing racial inequality issues in news stories as they strove to give a voice to communities that needed to be heard.

And then there was the political arena and, along with it, the ongoing battle of distinguishing fact from fiction and keeping bias at bay. A tall order in a precarious time made even more difficult with many sources working remotely.

Did you struggle with any of the following in 2020? Check all that apply.



When asked to identify the biggest challenge for journalism in 2020 in their own words, journalists shared the following:

“Ongoing lies about fake news, attacks on press freedom, blurred lines between news and commentary...”

“The need to provide constant COVID-19 news coverage at the expense of other topics.”

“Maintaining mental health and well-being while still being productive/functional during a pandemic.”

“Staffing and declining ad revenue.”

“Proving the value of good journalism to the general public and why they should pay for it.”

“Access to the primary sources of my articles was severely hampered by COVID. Everything else is a distant second.”

“Given lockdowns and working by phone at home, journalists have lost touch with people – too much coverage comes from official sources with less scrutiny and testing premises with real people.”

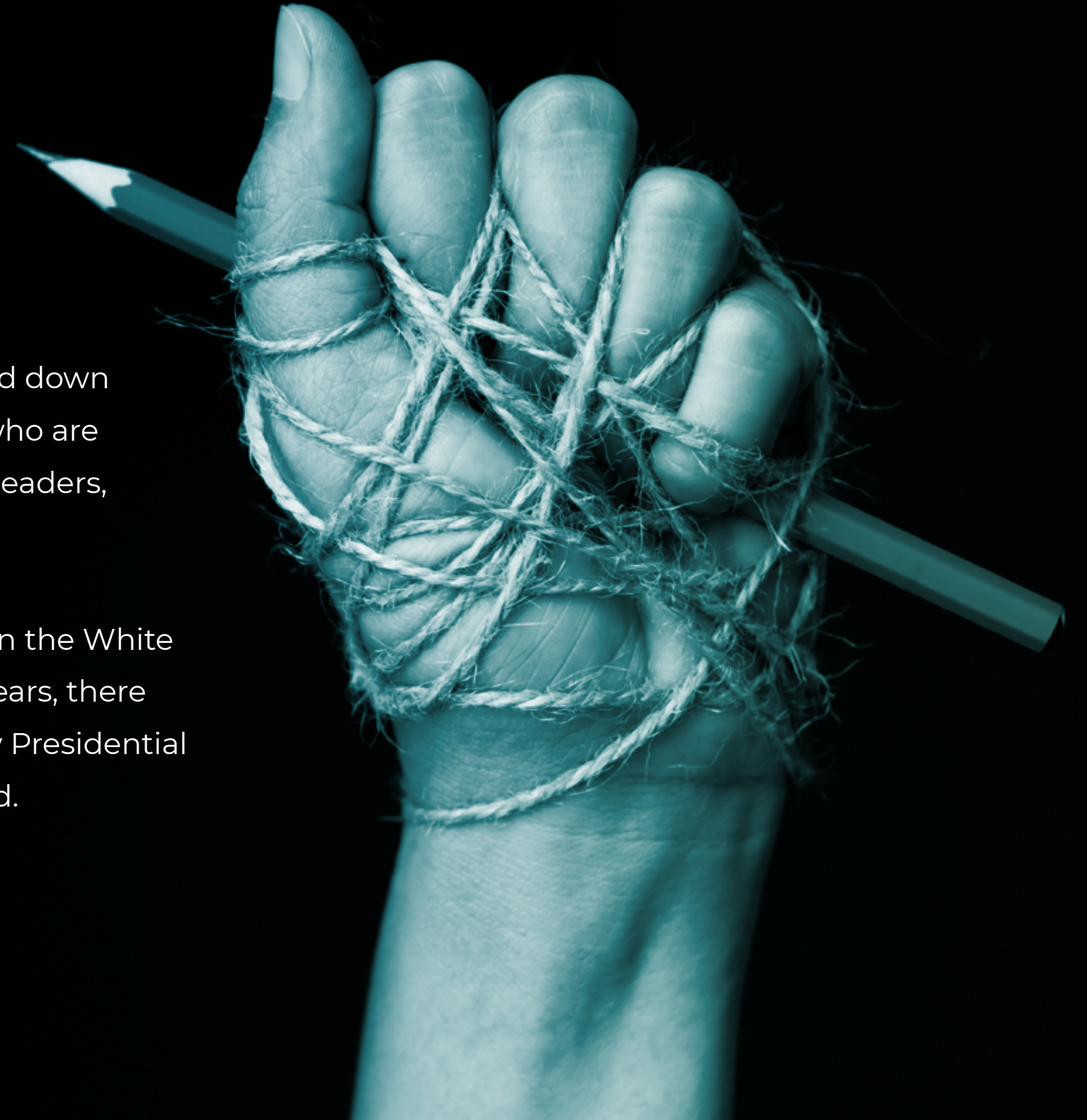
“Everyone is trying to convince others to feel the way they feel, think the way they think. I miss just the facts and hope to provide more of that in 2021. I’m not here to get people to think like me.”

A Closer Look at Public (Dis)trust and Freedom of the Press

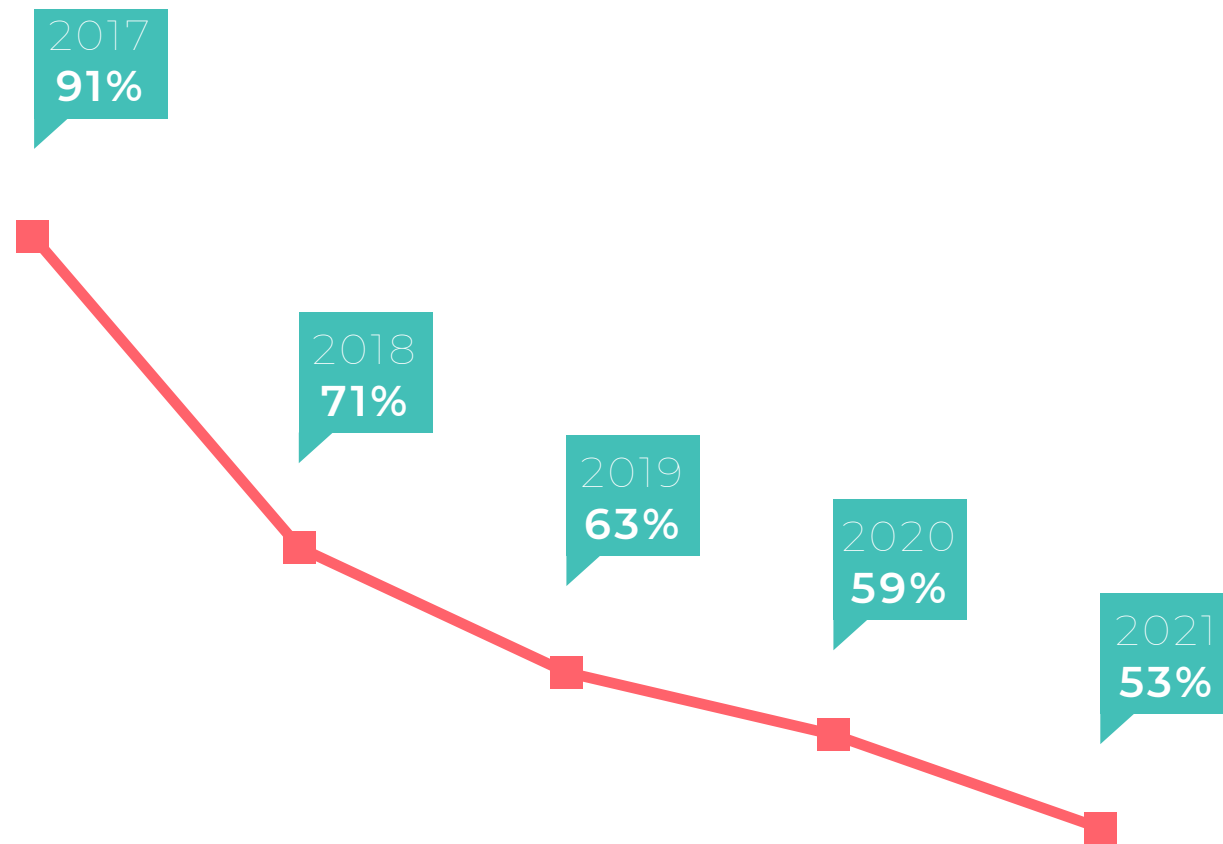
Public trust in the media and freedom of the press are key areas of concern for news outlets worldwide. More than half (53%) of journalists feel the public lost trust in the media over the last year.*

While this trend has steadily improved over the last five years and shifted down from 59% in Cision's 2020 survey, it remains a pressing issue for media who are dealing with increased skepticism fueled by rhetoric from government leaders, interest groups and competing news sources, among others.

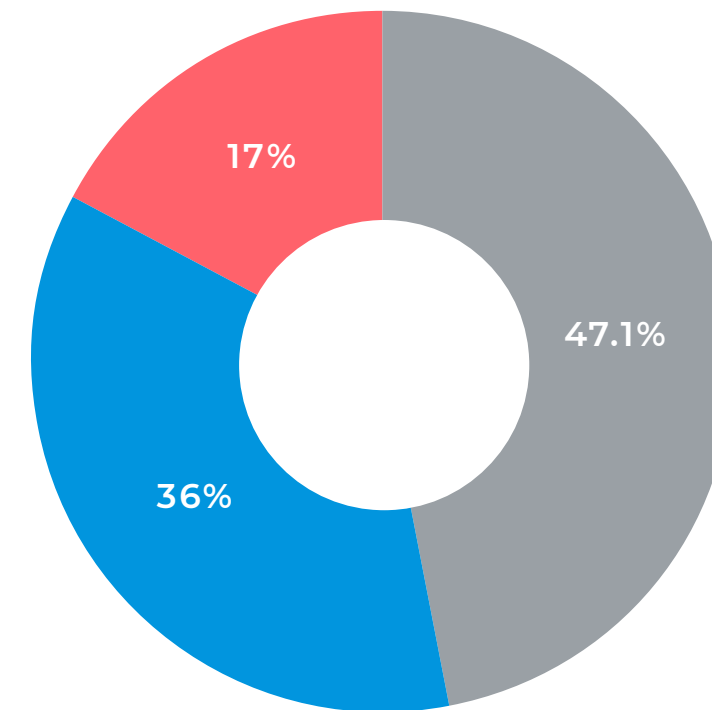
Looking specifically at the U.S., where contentious relationships between the White House and certain media outlets were aired publicly over the last four years, there are signs of optimism. More than a third of journalists (36%) feel the new Presidential administration will help the public gain trust in the media going forward.



Percentage of journalists who believe the public lost trust in the media over the last year.



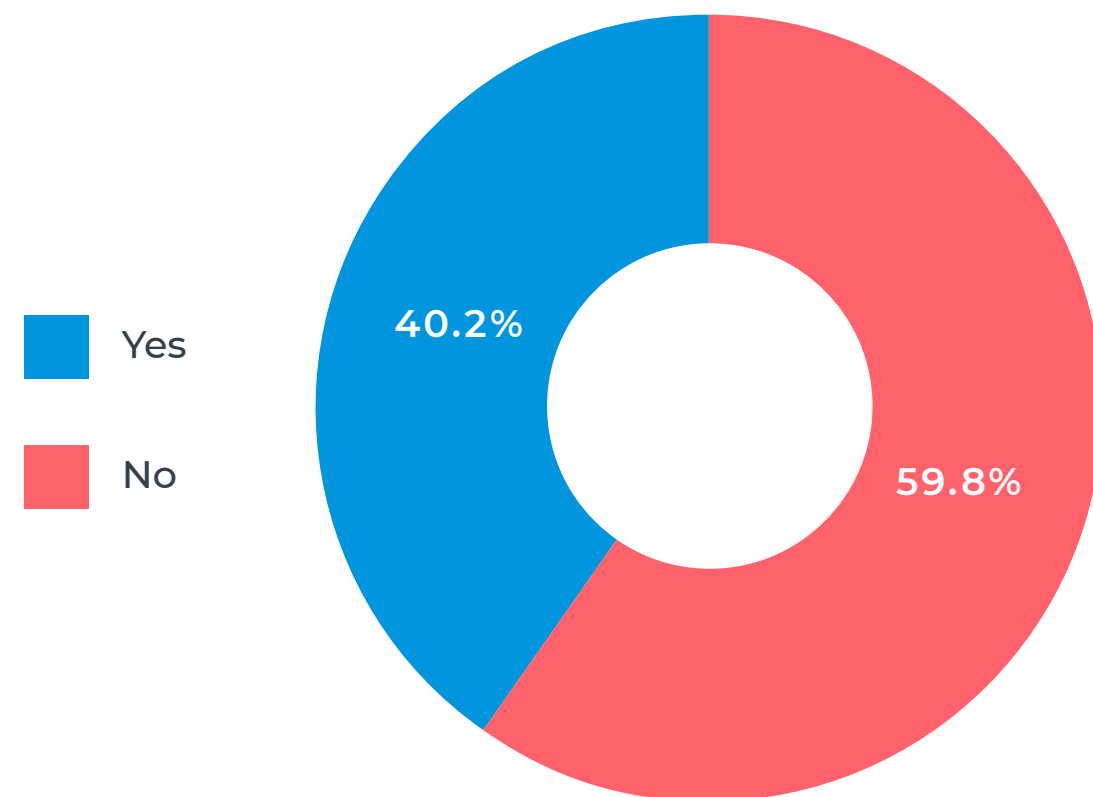
How do you think having a new Presidential administration in 2021 will impact trust in the media going forward? (U.S. only)



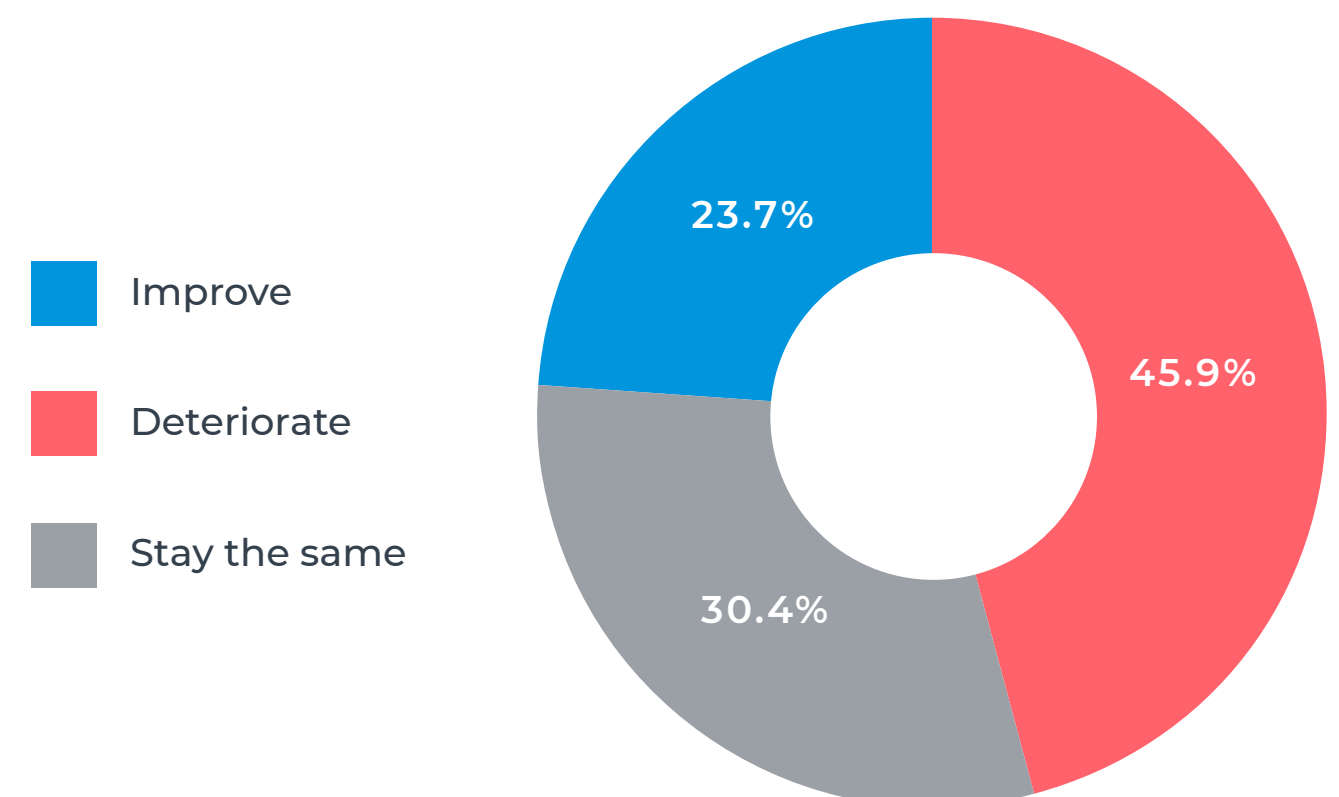
- The public will lose trust in the media
- Trust in the media will not change significantly
- The public will gain trust in the media

When it comes to freedom of the press – a hard-fought right for many countries – 40% of journalists stated that they see a deterioration in their country of origin or in the country on which they report; 46% predict that freedom of the press will continue to deteriorate over the next three years, while 24% expect the situation to improve.*

Do you currently see a deterioration of freedom of the press in either your country of origin or in the country on which you report?



Do you believe freedom of the press will improve, deteriorate or stay the same in the next three years?





What to Expect in 2021 and Beyond

So, what does this all mean for PR pros as you compete for journalists' very divided attention to secure coverage and deliver on business goals (and get Barb from Accounting to stop asking why your company isn't on the front page of the Wall Street Journal)? It means you have to rethink how you're planning and packaging your story, how you're targeting and approaching press, and how you're managing your ongoing relationships so you're the first call they make when they're on deadline.

What types of stories are journalists looking for this year?

Glad you asked. After a year of disruption, division and a whole lot of headshaking, the public and journalists alike are hungry for positive news. As COVID-19 coverage continues, journalists want “feel good” stories on getting back to normal and how companies, communities and technologies are helping others. One third are also looking for stories on furthering diversity, equity and inclusion as those conversations continue across communities. In addition, journalists want more research-based, thought leadership content.

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the public and journalists alike are hungry for positive news



Two Dogs Rescued From the Streets Now Live Their Best Life on the Road—Seeing the Sites of Europe

Apr 2, 2021

Animals

Source: Good News Network

How have the events of 2020 shaped your editorial strategy for 2021? Check all that apply.



To provide more insight on journalists' wish lists, we asked them to provide guidance on the types of stories they want to tell this year. Here's an inside peek at what they're looking for:

"Stories about how businesses are pivoting to serve customers post-COVID-19."

"Practical stories to help families face another challenging year."

"Stories on racial and social justice."

"Finding ways to entertain and inspire. We're avoiding the negativity, the pandering, the scare tactics, etc. that our competitors resorted to last year."

"My organization is moving away from 'news of the day' and toward longer, character-driven storytelling."

"Product and technology stories with consumer interest."

"Sustainable business and ESG [Environment, Social and Governance] investing."

"Stories that address return to travel and what the future looks like."

"Instructional 'how to' storytelling to help educate readers."

"Return to hyperlocal community news."

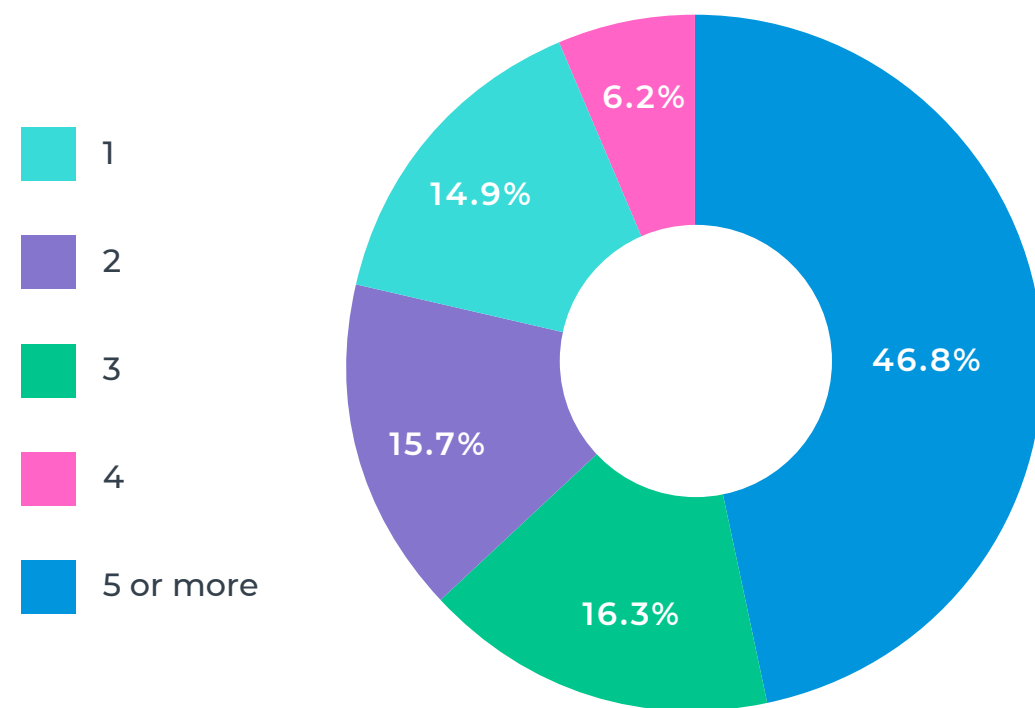
Read the Room: Understanding Your Audience (of Journalists)

When it comes to getting the attention of journalists, PR pros have a lot to compete with. “How do I stand out? What does it take to break through? Why didn’t I just go to law school like my dad told me to?” are the types of questions we hear over and over again. Before you can effectively reach your journalist audience, it’s important to know where they are coming from first – their challenges and their priorities. As you think through your outreach approach, consider the following factors taking over journalists’ time and energy today.

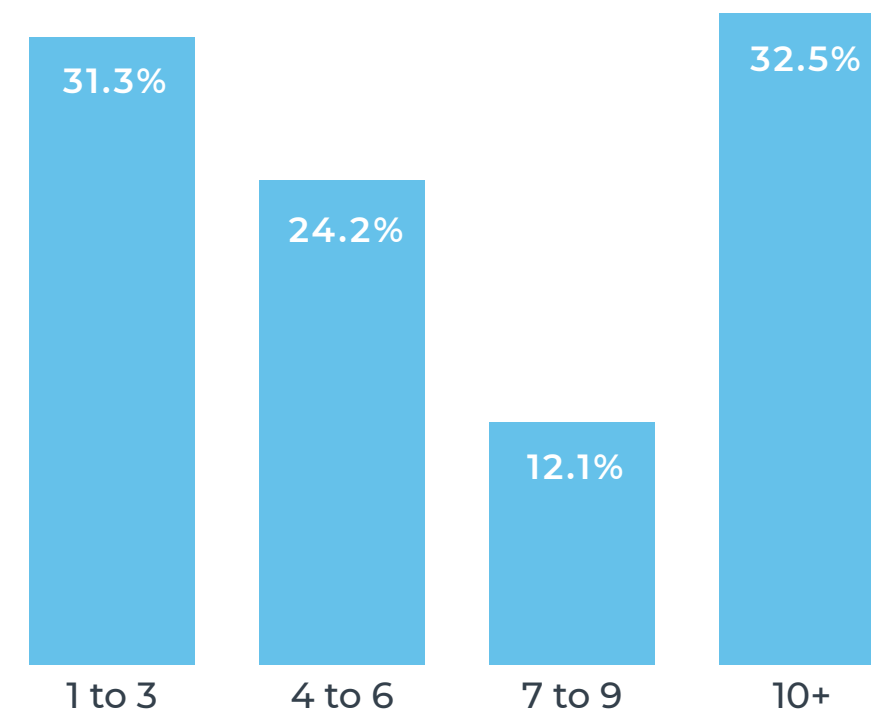
Factors Reshaping How Journalists Work With PR Pros

Journalists are stretched a mile wide. Shrinking newsrooms have reporters juggling multiple beats with demanding workloads and pressing deadlines. Almost half of journalists (47%) cover five or more beats* and nearly the same amount file seven or more stories per week; 33% say they file 10 or more. Journalists don't have time to chase down stories, so giving them all the information they need up front (insightful data, relevant quotes, accompanying images) takes the burden off them to assemble critical details and increases the likelihood they will cover the story (while putting you in their good graces).

How many beats are you currently covering?

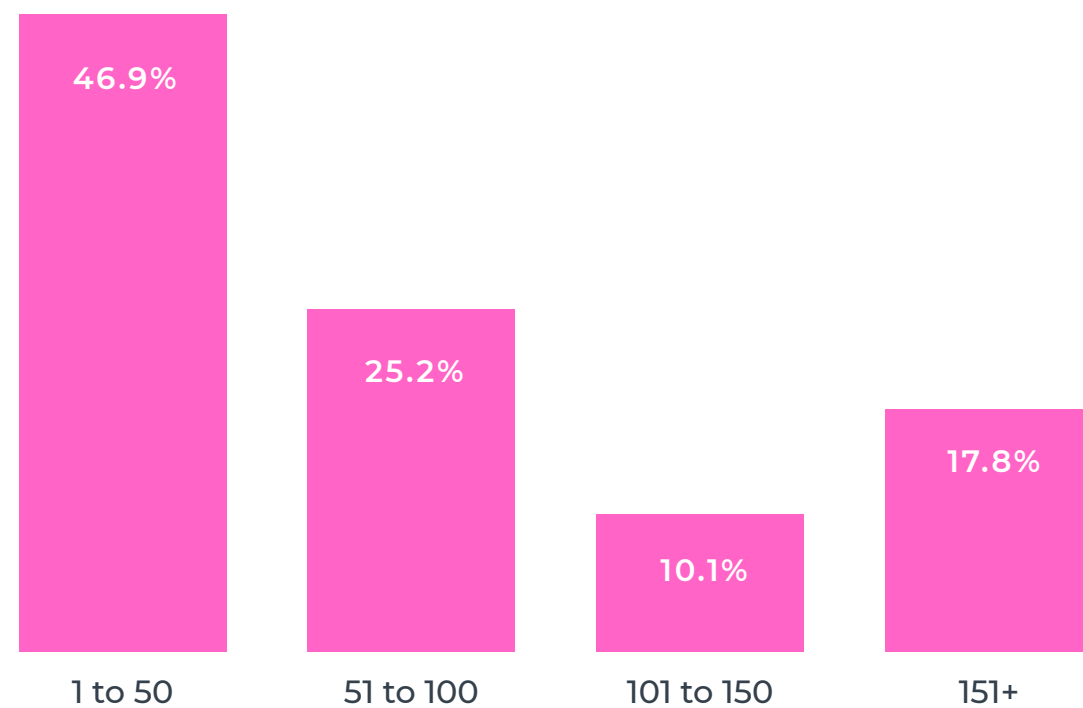


How many pieces do you file weekly?

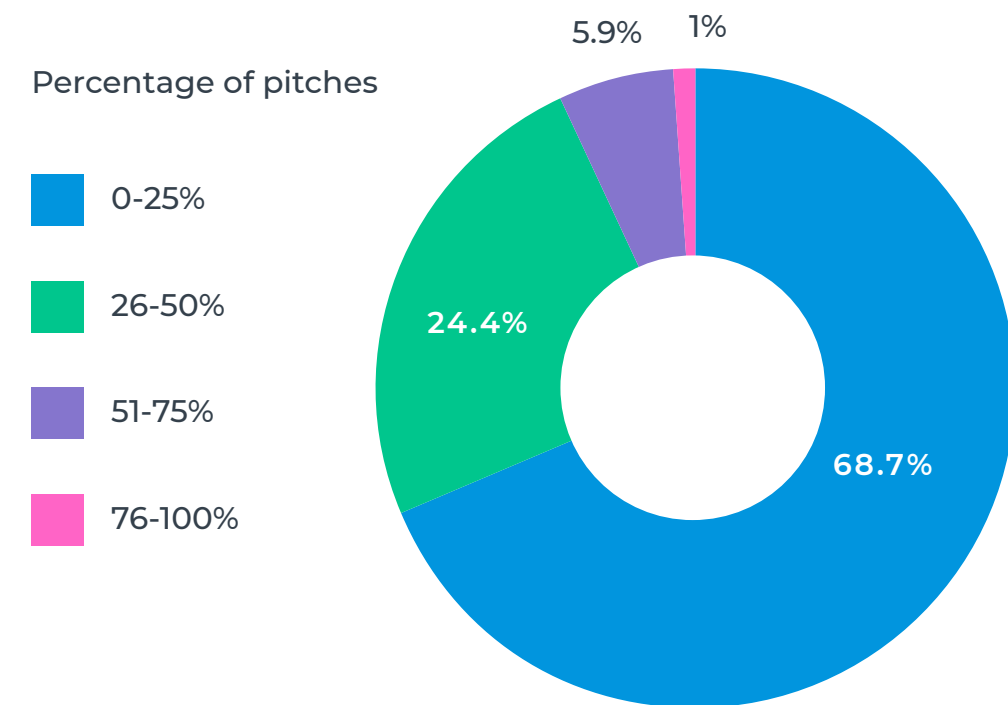


Journalists are inundated with spam. Fifty-three percent of journalists receive more than 50 pitches a week, and 28% receive more than 100 per week. Yet the vast majority of journalists (69%) say only a quarter (or less) of the pitches they receive are relevant to their audiences. The takeaway? Be part of the solution: Make sure your pitch is relevant to the journalists you're reaching out to (see "Do your homework" below) and be clear as to why. As one journalist put it, "[I'm] absolutely choked with news. A pitch needs to be really good and must fit our mission/readership/model."

How many pitches do you get a week (including emails, phone calls, social media messages, etc.)?



What percentage of pitches received do you consider relevant?

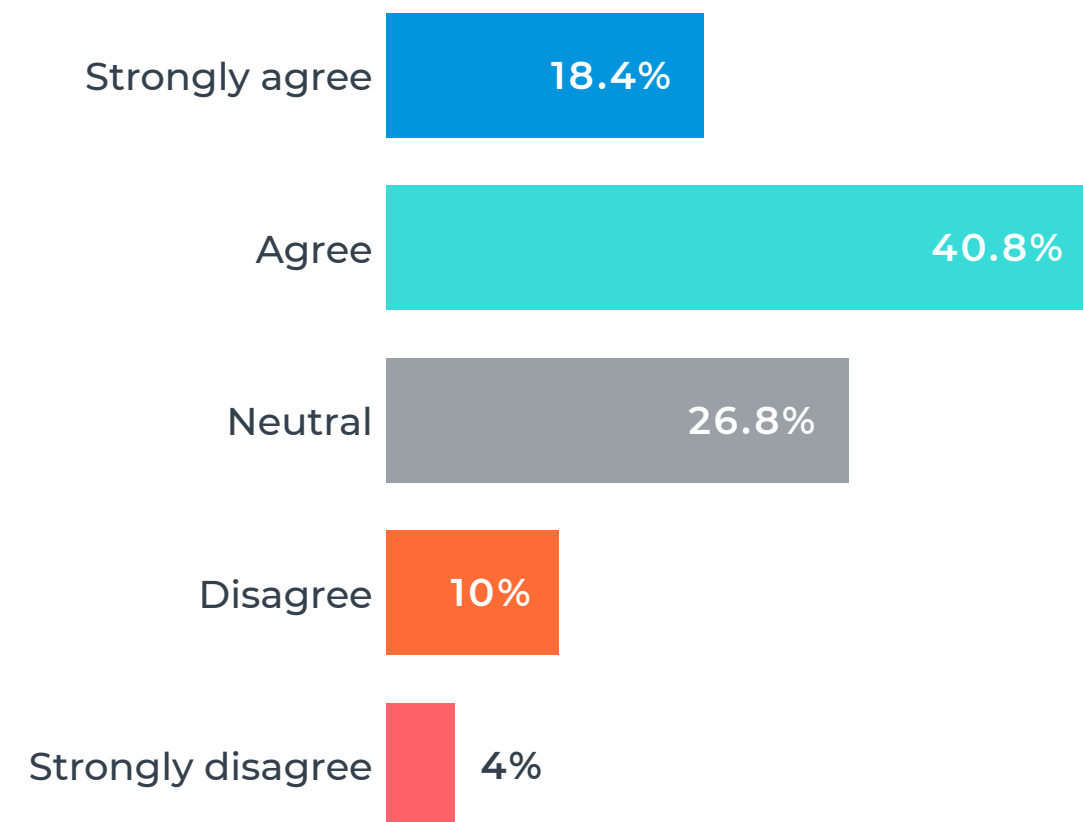


Journalists are minding the metrics. Much like PR pros, journalists are under more pressure than ever to prove their value using hard numbers. Fifty-nine percent of journalists agree that the availability of detailed audience metrics (views, engagement, demographics) has changed the way they evaluate stories. Many are focusing on stories that will generate the most traffic and shares across social media and other distribution channels in an effort to draw the almighty advertising dollar (and job security). Keep this information in mind when shaping your pitch. Ask yourself: Would your story give people pause when scrolling through their social feeds? Is there a compelling data point, a strong point of view, interesting commentary? Does it provide information people can't find anywhere else? In other words, is it...share-worthy?

...

59% percent of journalists agree that the availability of detailed audience metrics has changed the way they evaluate stories

Do you agree that the availability of detailed audience metrics (views, engagement, demographic data, etc.) has changed the way you evaluate stories?



How PR Pros Can Build Better Relationships With Journalists

In addition to providing insight on their biggest challenges, journalists weighed in on their relationship with PR pros. While 48% of journalists say they are satisfied with the PR pros they work with, 14% aren't quite as impressed, and the remainder don't have strong feelings either way. While it's unclear what the Yelp review equivalent of that is, it's evident that there's room to improve the relationship between journalists and PR pros.

7 Ways to Help Journalists Help You

We asked journalists what PR pros can do to be better partners – from the best pitching approaches to the types of content that get coverage – for insight that will help foster mutually beneficial relationships and ultimately save time (and frustration) for both sides. (Hint: It's easier than you think!):

1. **Do your homework.** For 61% of journalists, one of the biggest ways PR people can help them (and themselves) is by understanding their target audience and what's relevant to them. “Ninety-nine percent of those emailing me have never even read a story I wrote,” said one respondent. “I don't expect every single pitch to be relevant, but if you have no idea of my beat, you're just spamming me.” Before you reach out to journalists, do some research to make sure your pitch makes sense for their audience. Otherwise, that pitch you worked so hard on will just end up in the trash folder – and that's a waste of time and energy for both of you.

“Ninety-nine percent of those emailing me have never even read a story I wrote.”



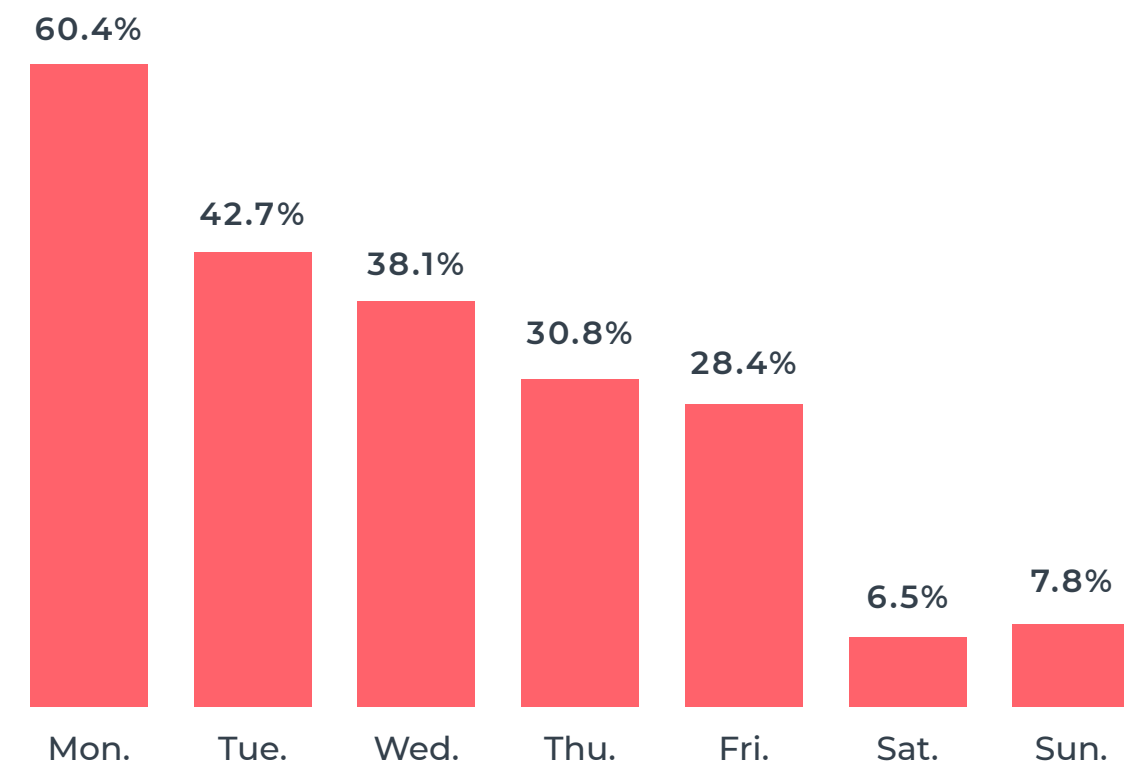
2. **Be a trendspotter.** As mentioned earlier, journalists are looking for stories that speak to what’s happening in the world right now – and that will have bearing on their audience. Set up alerts and use social monitoring tools to stay ahead of news, emerging trends and the conversation around it all to ensure you’re developing timely narratives.

3. **Time it right.** Unlike Garfield, journalists love Mondays – at least when it comes to getting pitched. The majority (60%) prefer to receive pitches on Monday, while Tuesday is also good for 43%. A significant number, however, prefer pitches on Friday (28%) or over the weekend, likely for weekend coverage or to plan for the week ahead.

QUICK SIDENOTE

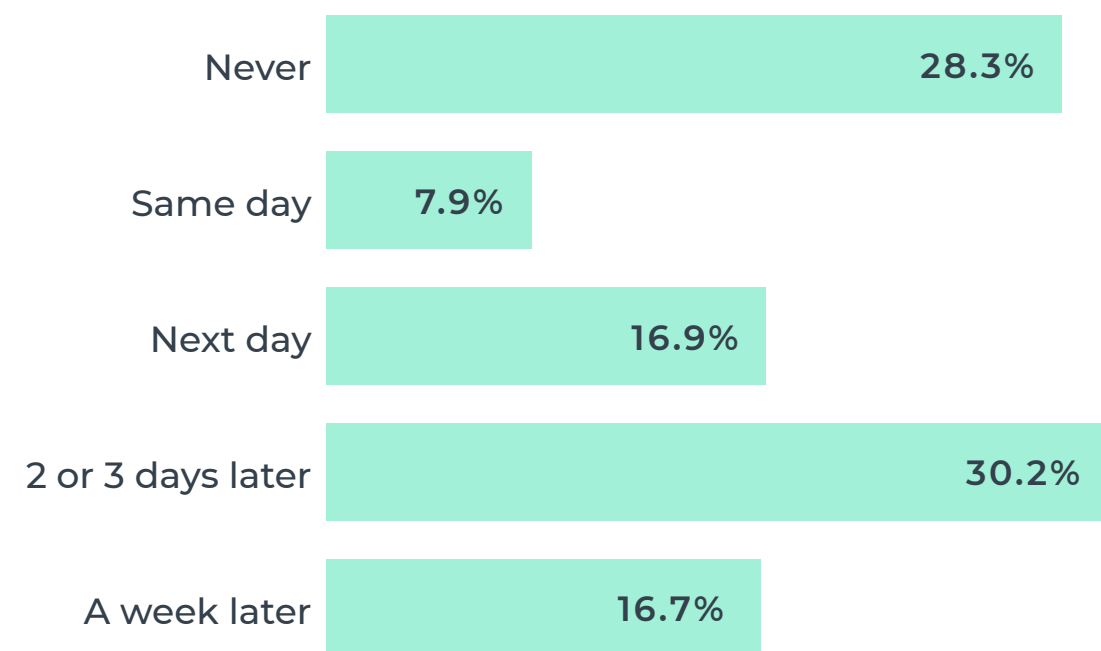
If you’re going to engage more than one journalist at a news outlet, be up front about it. “Don’t send the same pitch to three different people in the same office separately, just email us all together,” one respondent recommended.

What day of the week do you prefer to receive pitches? (Please choose all that apply.)

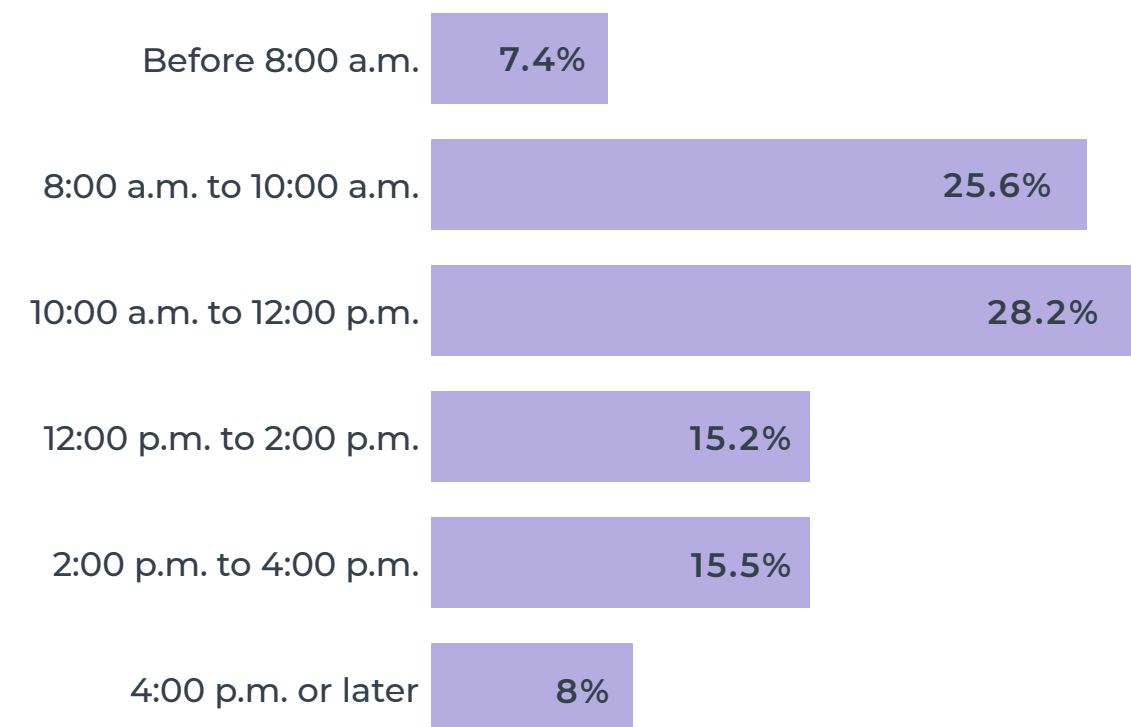


4. **Give them time before following up.** Many journalists want two to three days (or even longer) to look over a pitch before a PR pro follows up with them. Nearly 3 in 10 journalists say they never want follow up. The worst times to follow up with them are bookends for the day (before 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or later) while their sweet spot for following up is generally from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

When should a PR professional follow up with you after sending a pitch? Choose the best response.



What is the best time of day to pitch or follow up with you?

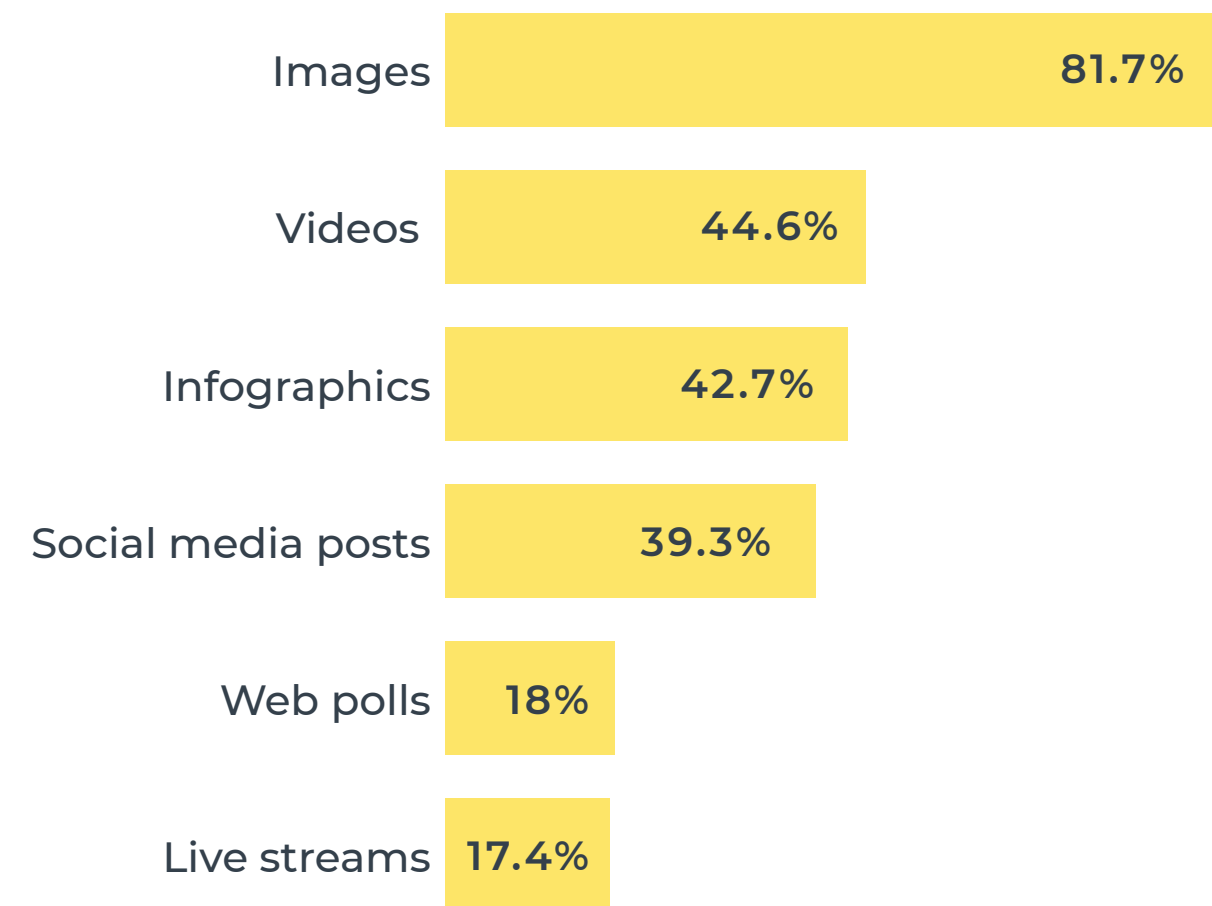


5. **Plan ahead.** Over one-third of journalists (35%) would like to see a list of stories you have planned in advance. While 33% of journalists plan their stories in real time throughout the day, 1 in 4 (25%) journalists plan their stories a week ahead; 18% plan a month ahead.

6. **Get graphic.** Provide journalists with multimedia elements that bring your story to life, and your pitch is less likely to wind up D.O.A. The overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) included images with their stories in the last year, followed by videos (45%), infographics (43%) and social media posts (39%). On top of this, more than 1 in 5 journalists (22%) explicitly said they wish PR pros would include multimedia assets in their press releases.

As one journalist put it, “It’s beyond comprehension that any PR person/agency can send out a news release without an image and logo. What website or publication runs a story without an image? What publication has the resources to waste time searching for an image or logo...?”

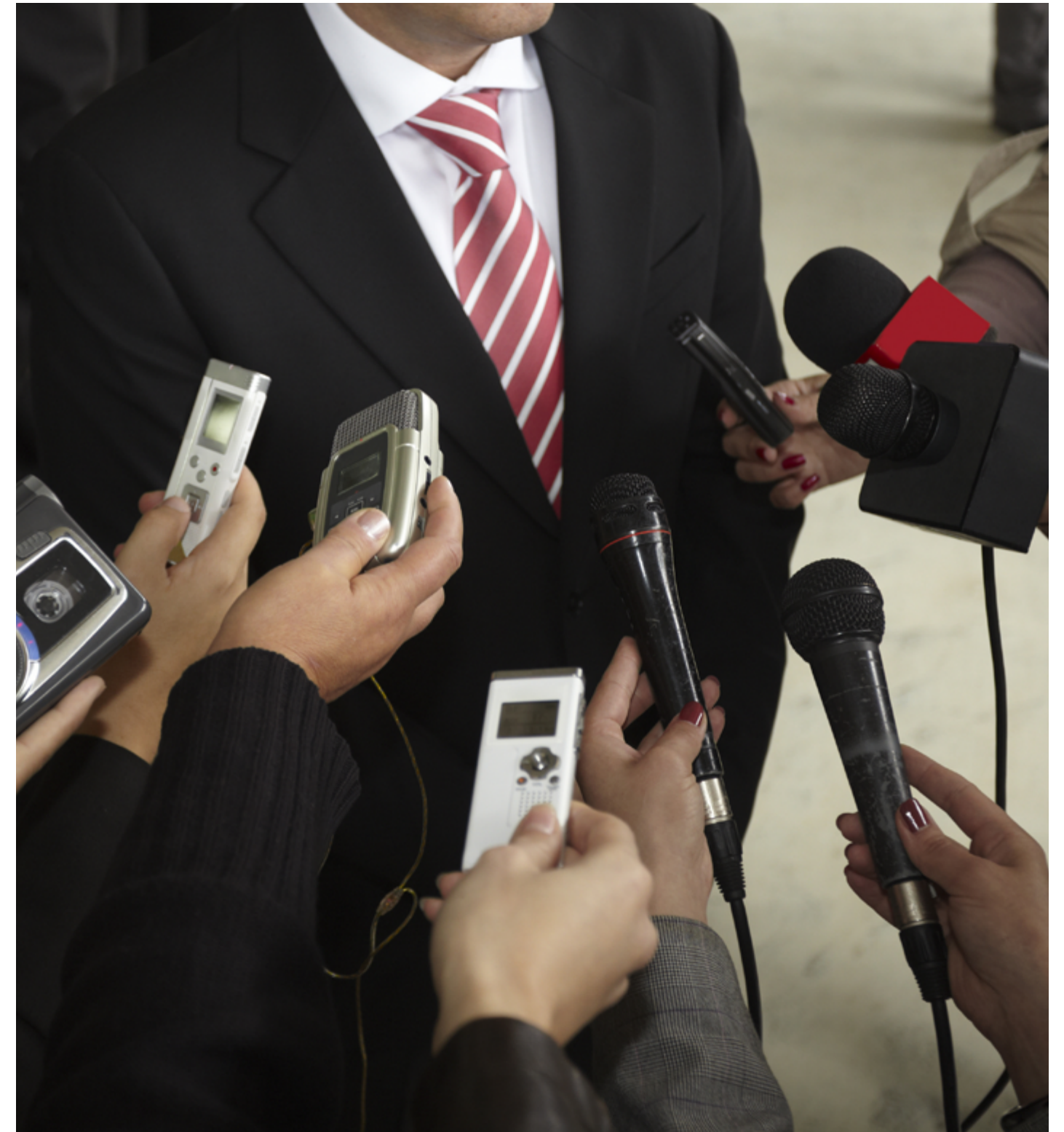
Which multimedia or data elements have you included in your articles over the past 6 months? (Please choose all that apply.)



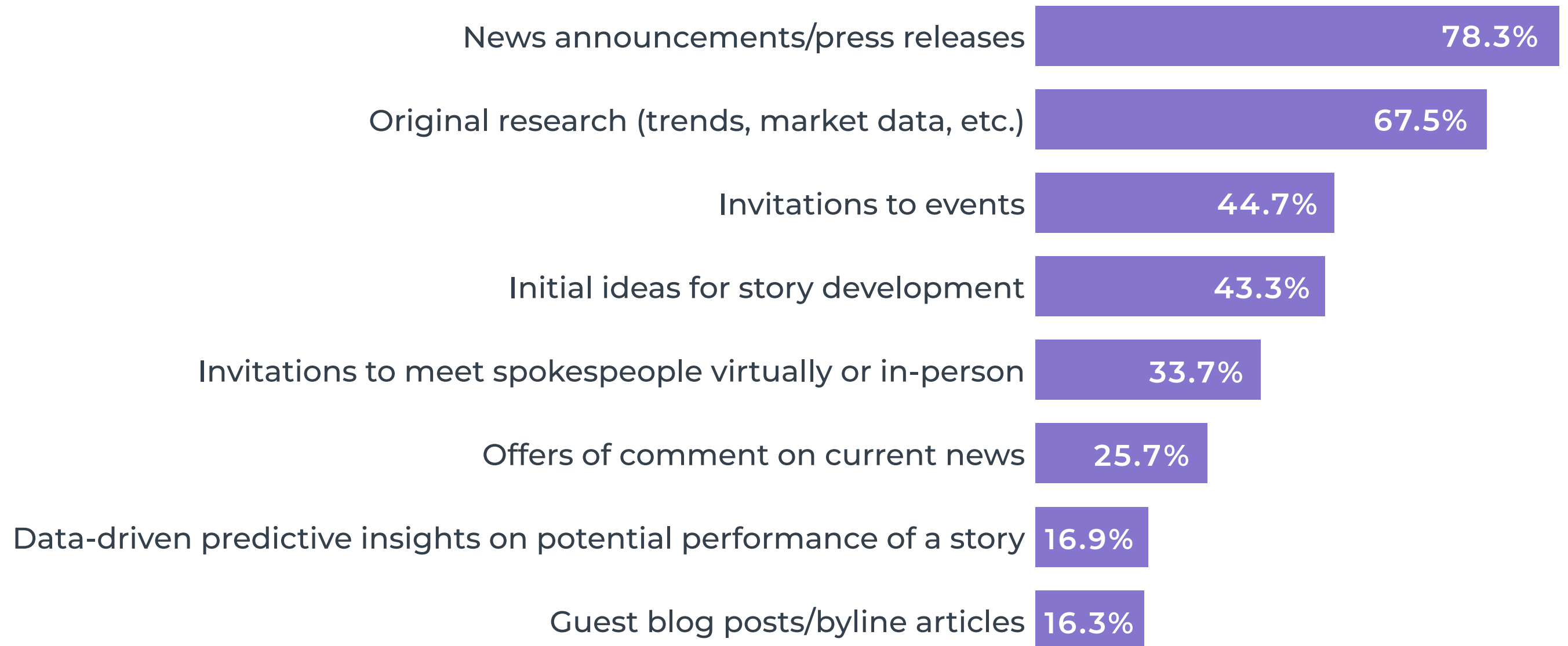
7. **Give them what they want (what they really, really want).** When asked what type of content they want to receive from brands/organizations, the vast majority of journalists (78%) want news announcements and press releases (which is also the source of content journalists said they find most useful). More than two-thirds (68%) want original research reports (like trends and market data), 45% want invitations to events, and 43% want initial ideas for story development. In addition to more in-depth pieces, you may also want to consider sending brief pitches with fast facts that enable them to quickly produce short-form content.

...

78% of journalists want to receive news announcements and press releases from brands/organizations.



What kind of content do you want to see from brands and PR professionals? Check all that apply.



Important Note: Always Deliver on What You Promise

Two in three journalists say PR pros can help them by providing them with data and expert sources when they need them. “When they need them” is key here:

First, make sure they have your cell number so they can quickly reach you, especially if you’re working from home.

Second, be proactive and attentive. Many journalists expressed frustration with PR pros’ lack of follow-through. “I’ve gotten a number of pitches recently where they offer something up and don’t deliver,” said one respondent. “Don’t send a press release, then be unable to put me in touch with anyone from the company who I asked to talk to,” added another.

Finally, be careful about who you choose as your “expert source.” As one respondent advised, “Provide the most informed sources, rather than spokespeople or designated talkers.” Another added, “...Actually set up interviews rather than just provide canned statements.”



Fastest Ways to Get on the “Block/Don’t Call” List

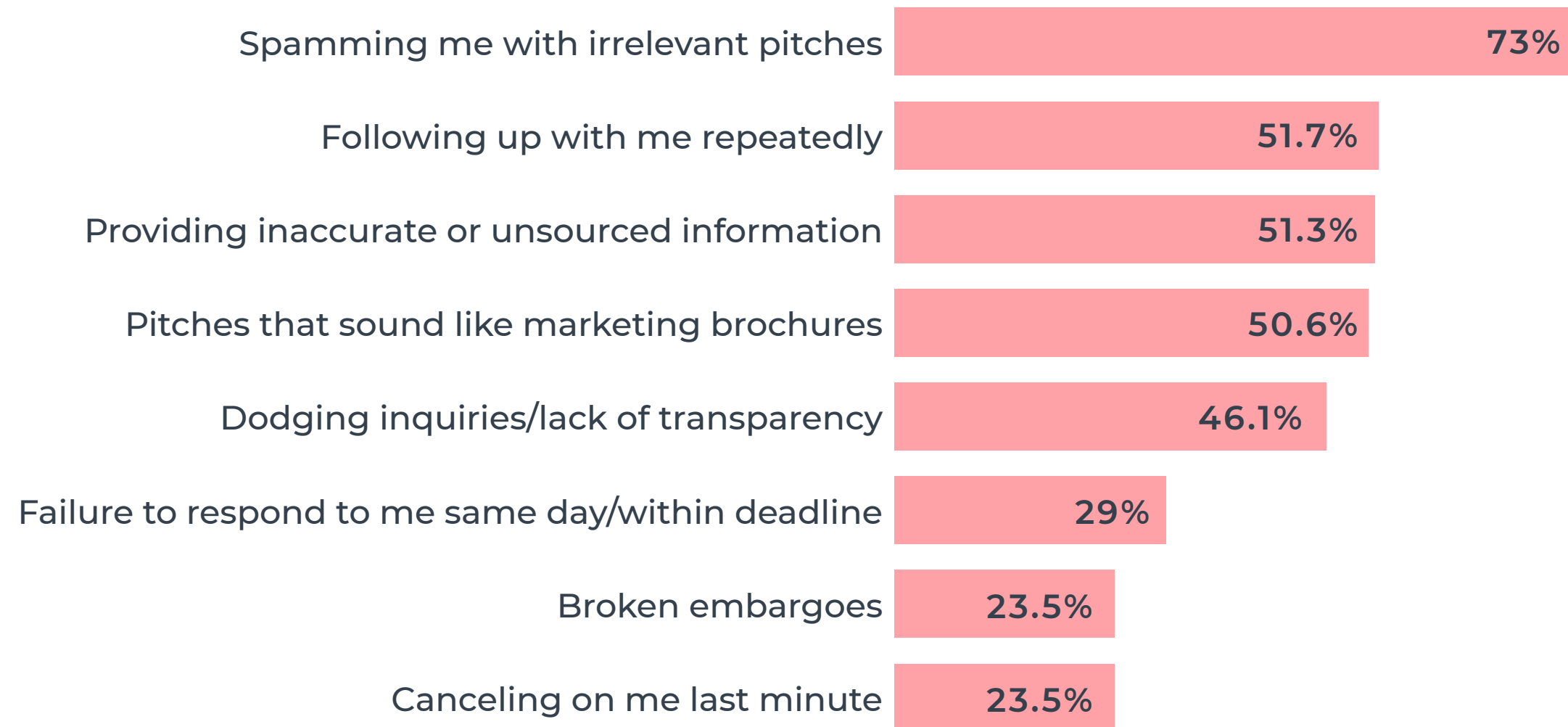
Now that we’ve talked about the DO’s, let’s drop some knowledge about the DON’Ts.

Earlier, we mentioned journalists’ gripes with spam. Another no brainer that will quickly get you removed from a journalist’s virtual rolodex is providing inaccurate or unsourced information. It happens more than you think and can be an instant deal breaker going forward.

Other pet peeves to avoid? Pitches that sound like marketing brochures and repeated follow ups. Failing to respond in a timely manner or canceling at the last minute can also work against you.

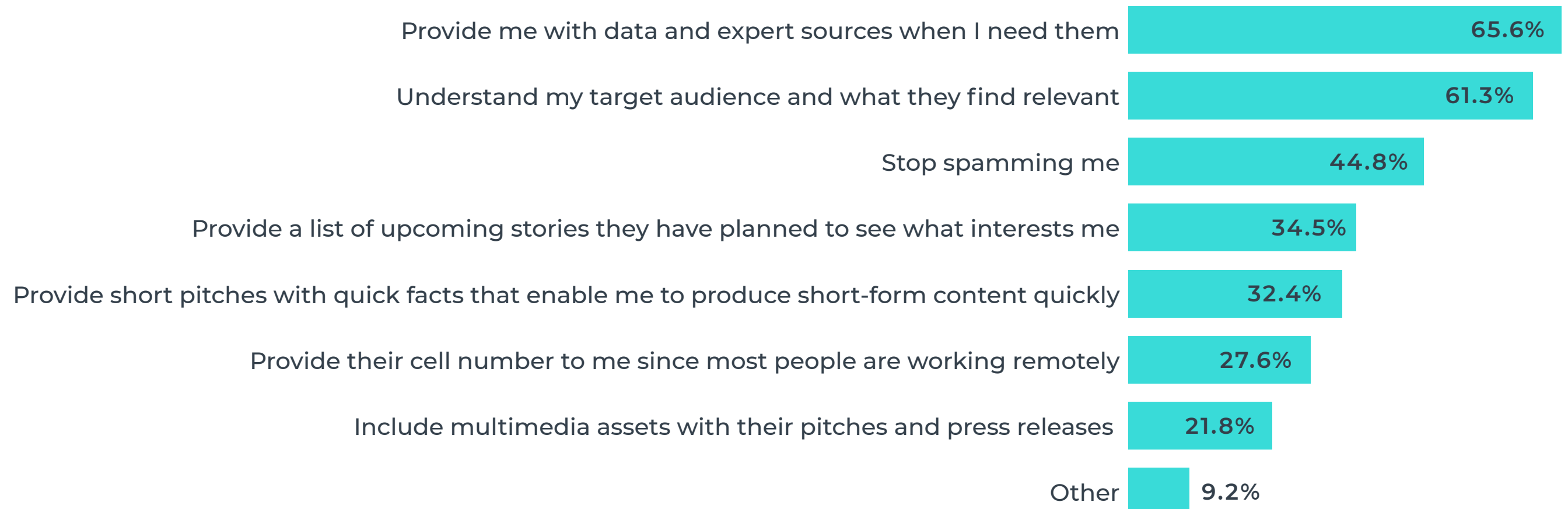
Journalists also don’t like when PR pros gaslight them or suddenly disappear. If you dodge inquiries or aren’t transparent, you can damage your trustworthiness as a source and cause them to ghost you later on.

What would make you block a PR person or put them on your “don’t call” list? Check all that apply.



In a nutshell, the more you can do to be relevant to their audience, be respectful of their time and make their jobs easier, the more journalists will want to work with you.

What can PR professionals do to help you? Check all that apply.



Conclusion

In an ever-changing normal with mounting pressure and an acute deficit of staffing, resources and time, journalists are looking to PR pros to be close partners in creating stories for local, national and global audiences. The universe of coverage for individual journalists is expanding and editorial calendars are shifting as news organizations compete for traffic and advertising dollars. To successfully cultivate relationships and ongoing coverage, PR pros need to be mindful of the unique challenges and priorities driving the media, stay on top of emerging trends, and serve up data-driven, multimedia stories to make journalists' jobs easier.

As the media landscape continues to evolve, so do journalists' needs and expectations. But the fundamentals of thoughtful, targeted storytelling and follow-through will remain the same.

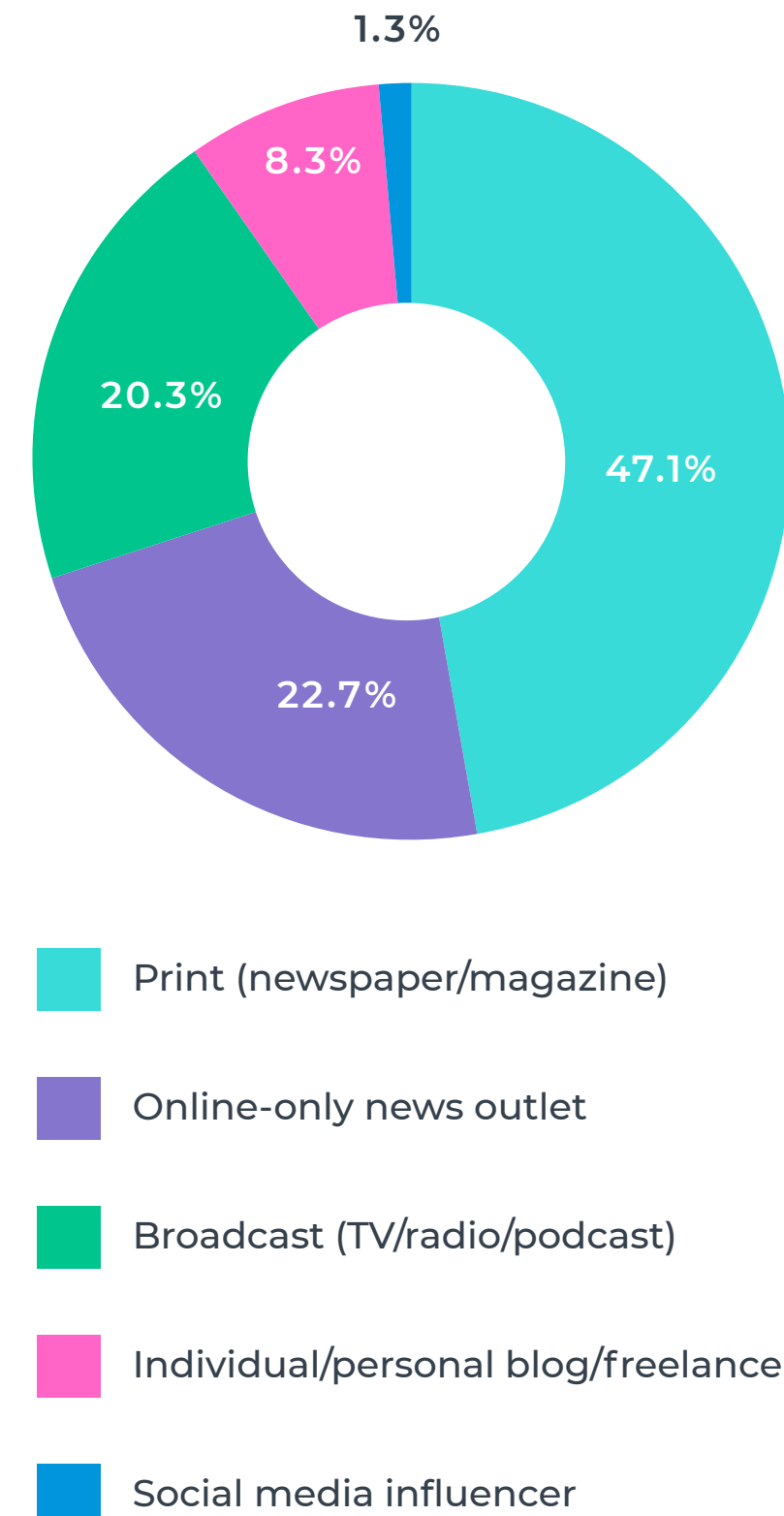
That wraps up this year's State of the Media report. Now that you've got the official inside scoop on what journalists want and expect, get out there and make some headlines!

Methodology

Cision conducted its 2021 State of the Media Survey between February 1 and March 1, 2021. Surveys were emailed to Cision Media Database members, which are vetted by the company's media research team to verify their positions as media professionals, influencers and bloggers. The survey was also available to media professionals in the PR Newswire for Journalists database. This year's survey collected responses from 2,746 respondents in 15 countries across the globe: US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Mexico, Korea, Vietnam and Malaysia.

The survey language was translated and localized for each market and then the results were tallied together to form this global report.

*Certain data points, identified in the report, didn't include APAC markets due to variations in questions asked.





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