

The State of Journalism 2021

Reporting, social media habits, and preferences for
working with PR in the year of COVID-19

A study by

MUCK RACK

In this survey, we explore:

1. Social media, news consumption, and reporting
2. Media relations in 2021: pitching preferences and more



Looking for best practice PR advice and takeaways?

Check out our [companion eBook](#), “7 immediate actions to take from Muck Rack’s State of Journalism 2021 survey”

About this survey

We surveyed **2,482** journalists from **January 11th** to **February 8th, 2021**.

- **Role:** 62% are full time editorial writers or bloggers, 19% are freelance journalists, 12% are part time journalists and 7% selected 'other', with the top reasons being retirement and unemployment.
- **Experience:** 37% have been journalists for over 20 years. 23% have been journalists for 10-20 years. 17% said 6-10 years and 16% said 3-5 years. Under 6% have been journalists for 2 years or less.
- **Medium:** 30% primarily report in print, 42% online-only, 10% TV, 8% radio, 2% newsletter and 1% podcast. 3% said it was too difficult to choose a single medium.
- **Beat:** The average journalist covers 3 or more beats. 47% cover politics, business or legal. 33% cover regional or local news. 32% cover business and finance. 25% cover Health, Wellness & Fitness. 20% cover technology and telecoms, 19% cover sports, 17% food and dining, 16% travel and 8% fashion and beauty.

See extended audience breakdown in the appendix.

Research partners



mediabistro®



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SEJ SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS





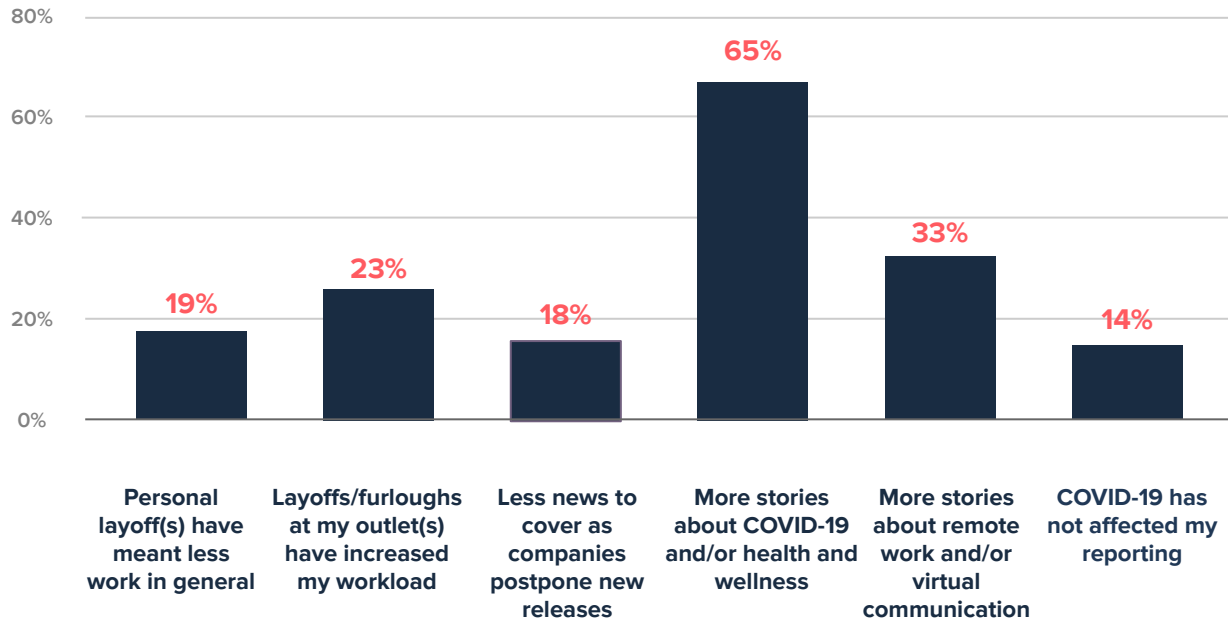
1

Social media, news consumption, and reporting

How much of your reporting would you estimate has pivoted to angles related to COVID-19?

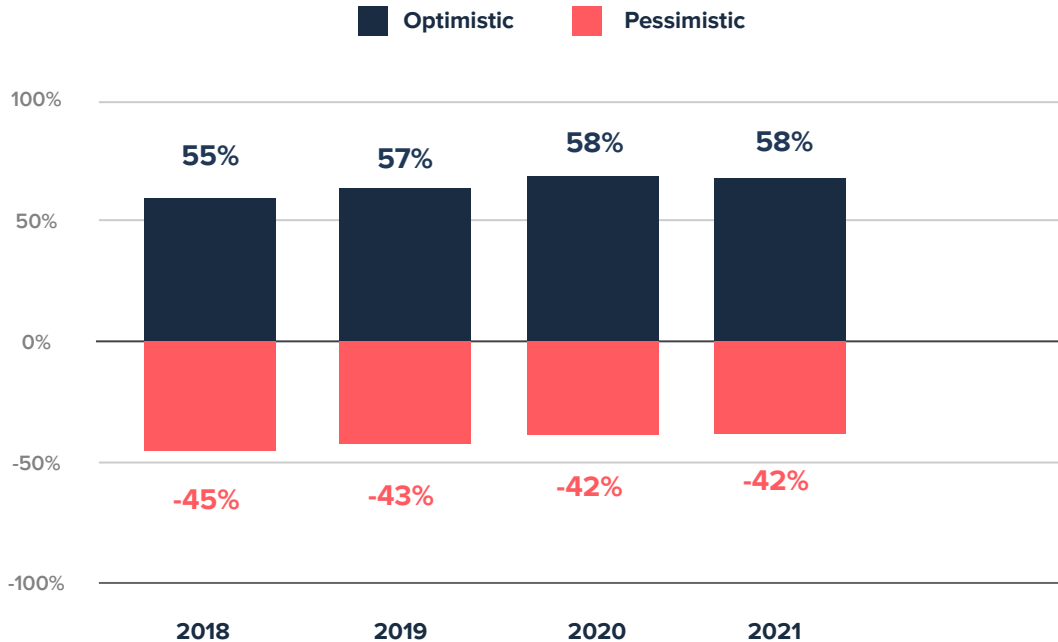


How has economic uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work? (Select all that apply)



86% of journalists said COVID-19 has affected their work. Of those journalists, the majority selected 2 or more answers.

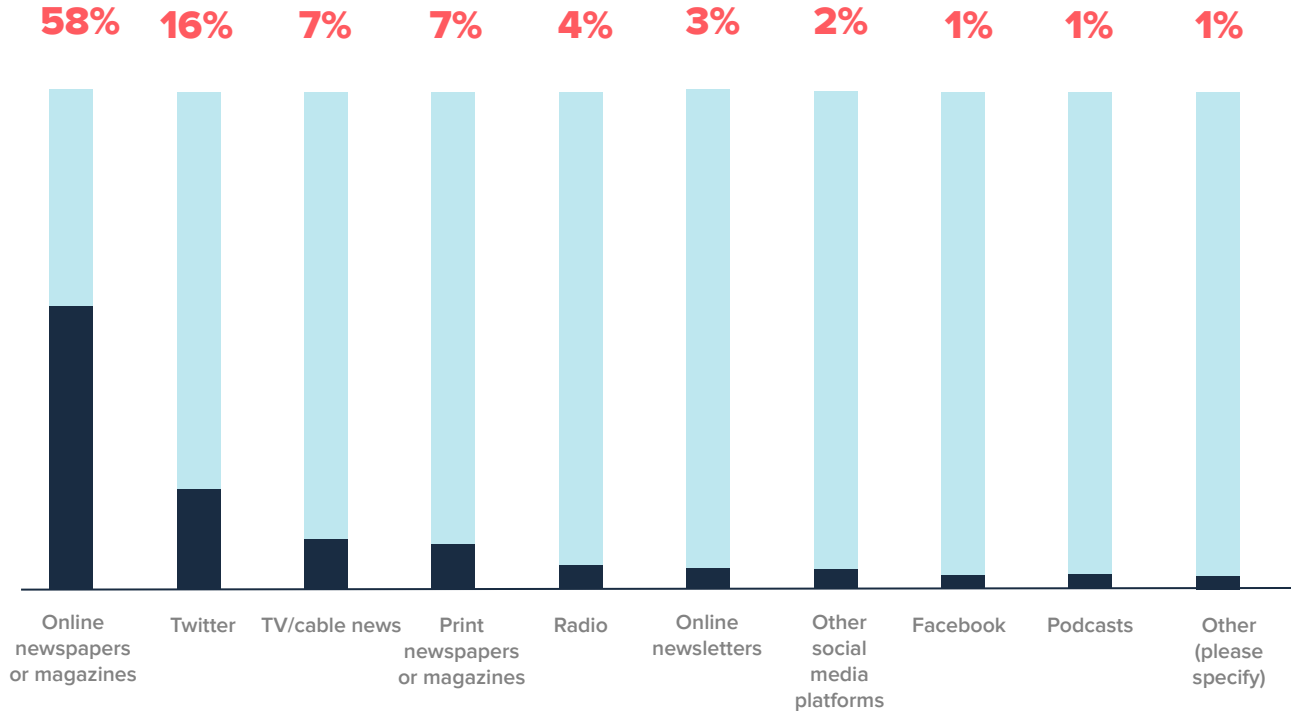
Are you optimistic about the journalism profession?



In 2021, **58%** of journalists are optimistic about the journalism profession. **42%** are pessimistic. This is consistent with past years: **58%** optimistic in 2020, **57%** optimistic in 2019, and **55%** optimistic in 2018

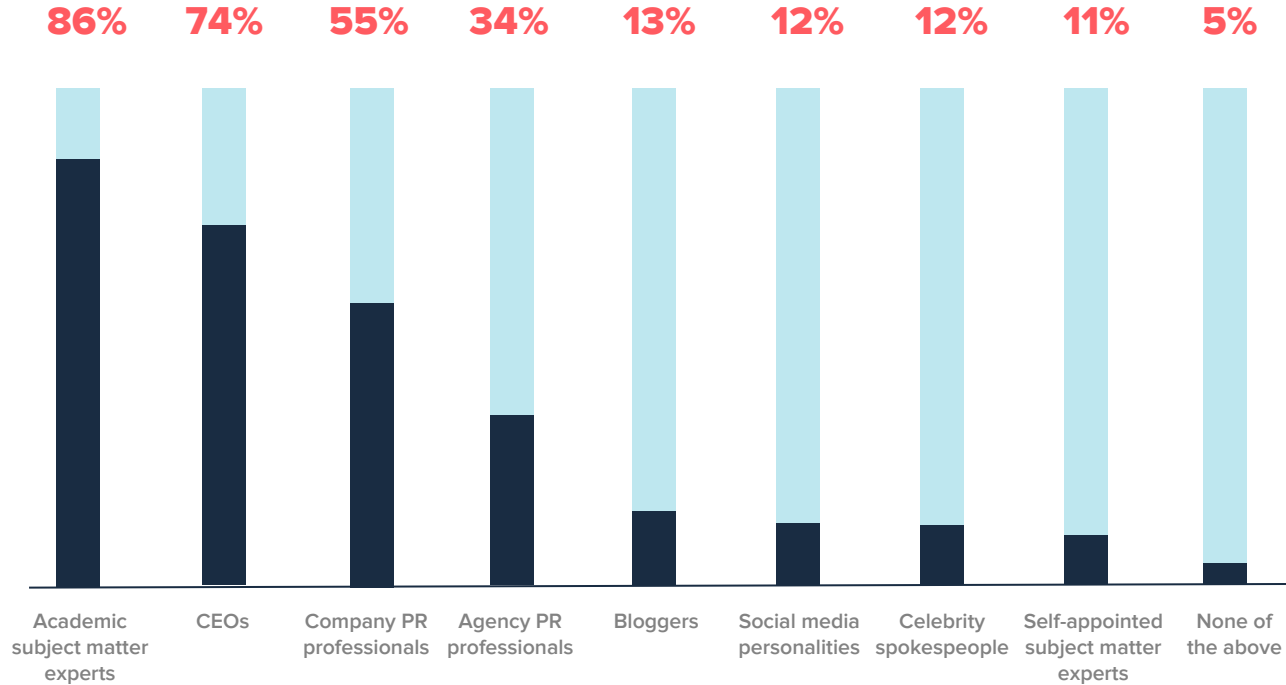
Source: The State of Journalism 2018, 2019 and 2020

In general, where do you go first for your news?



58% of journalists get their news from Online newspapers or magazines (down from 60% last year), **16%** say Twitter (down from 22% last year).

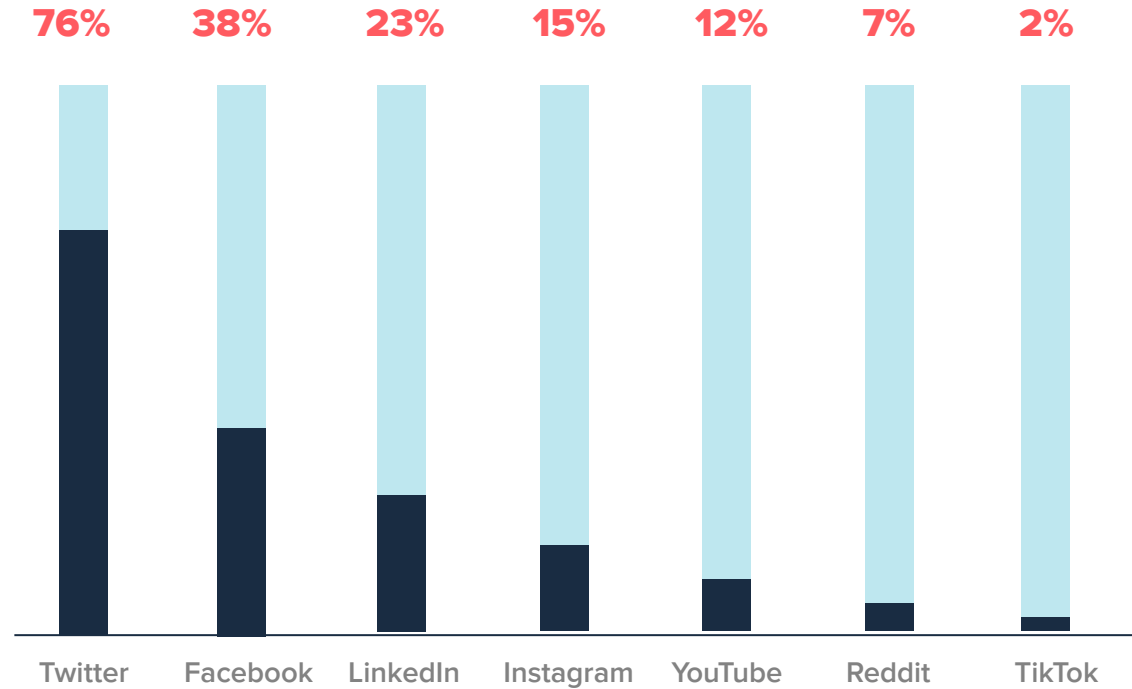
Do you consider the following to be credible sources for your reporting? (Select all that apply)



The vast majority of journalists find academic subject matter experts and CEOs to be credible sources for reporting.

Significantly more journalists find company PR professionals to be credible sources than agency PR professionals (**55% vs 34%**)

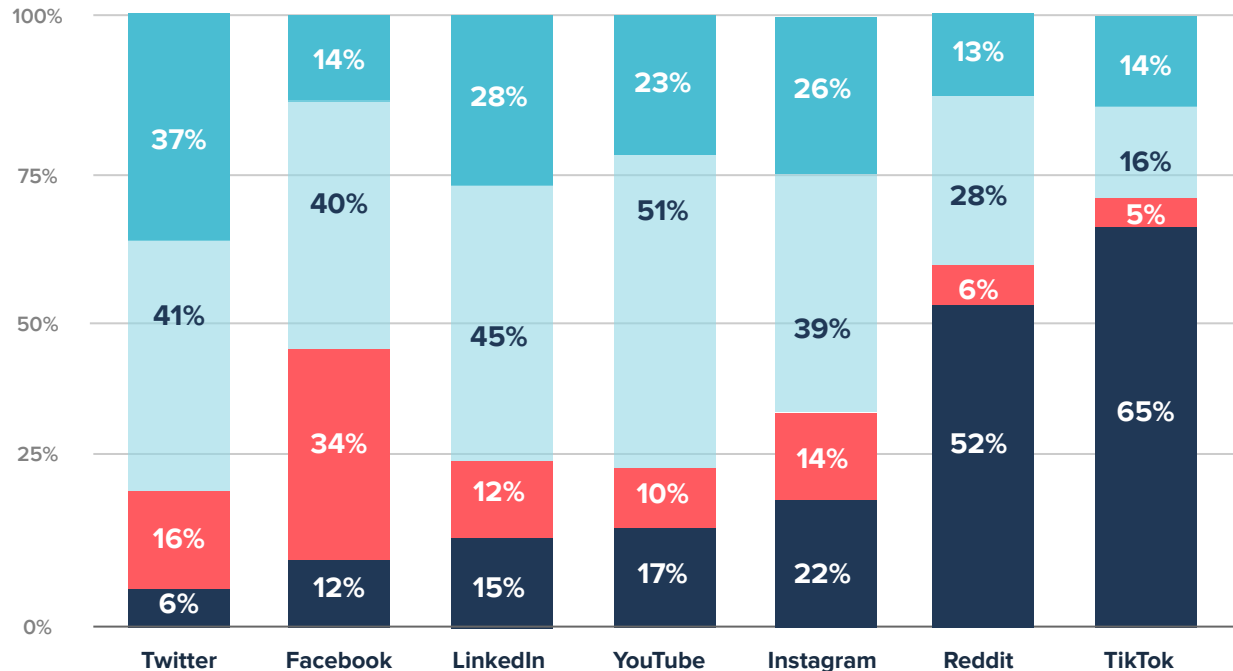
Which social network is most valuable to you as a journalist? (Select all that apply)



76% of journalists say Twitter is the most valuable social network (down from **85%** last year) and **38%** say Facebook (up from **35%** last year). LinkedIn is steady at **23%** and Instagram slid slightly to **15%** (from **16%** last year)

Do you expect to spend more or less time on the following social networks this year?

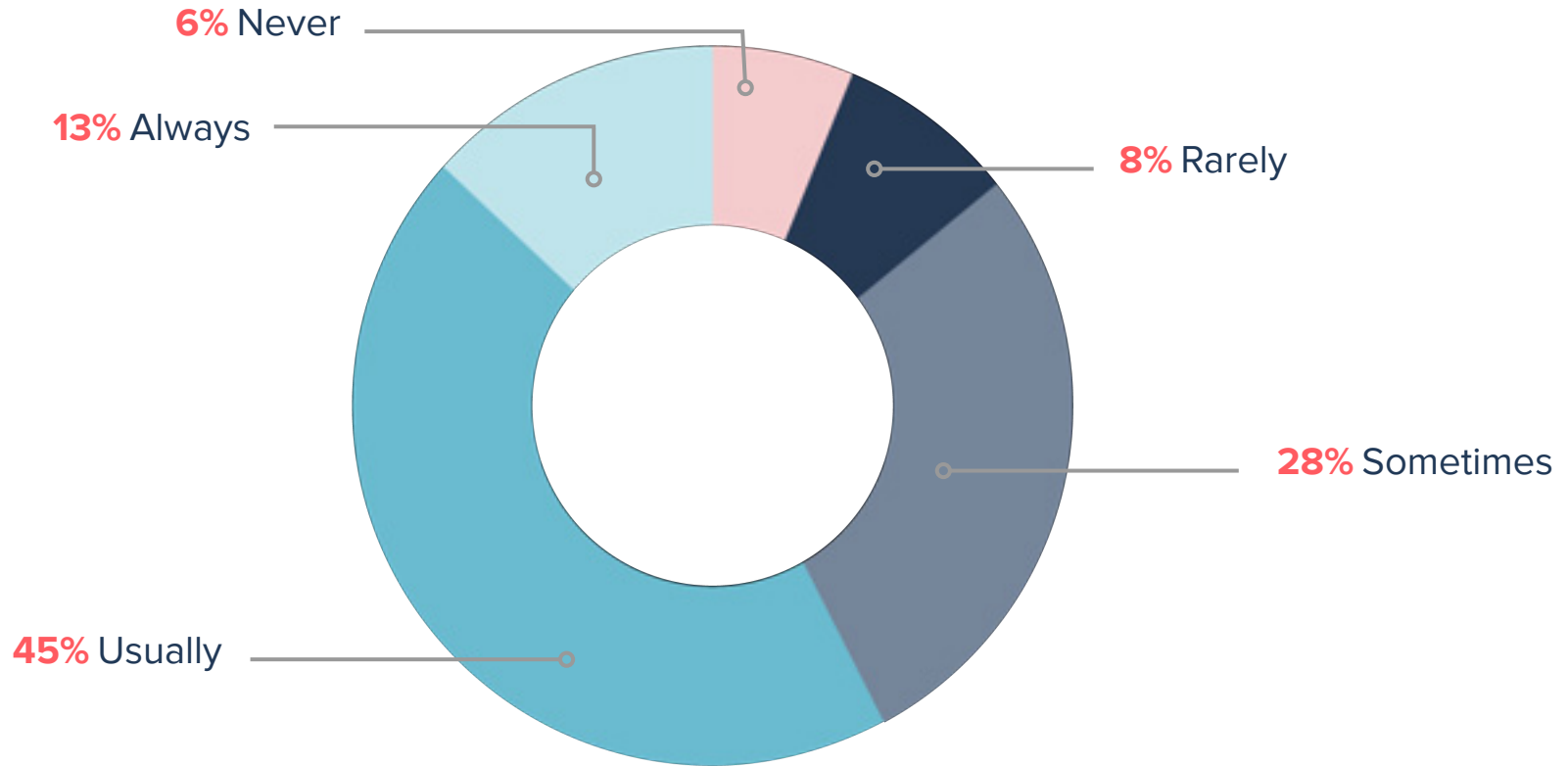
More No difference Less Do not use or plan to use



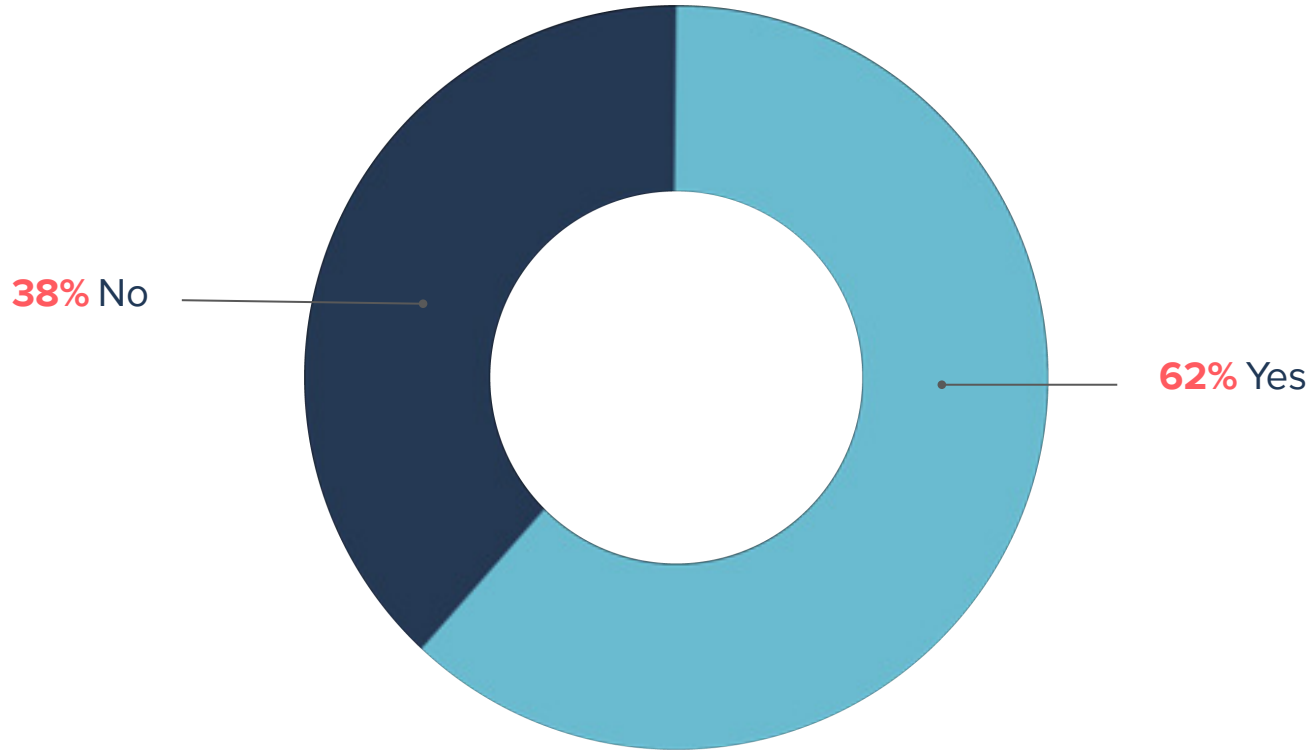
The highest percentage of journalists want to use Twitter more (37%), followed by LinkedIn (28%), Instagram (26%), and YouTube (23%).

34% plan to use Facebook less, 16% plan to use Twitter less and 14% plan to use Instagram less.

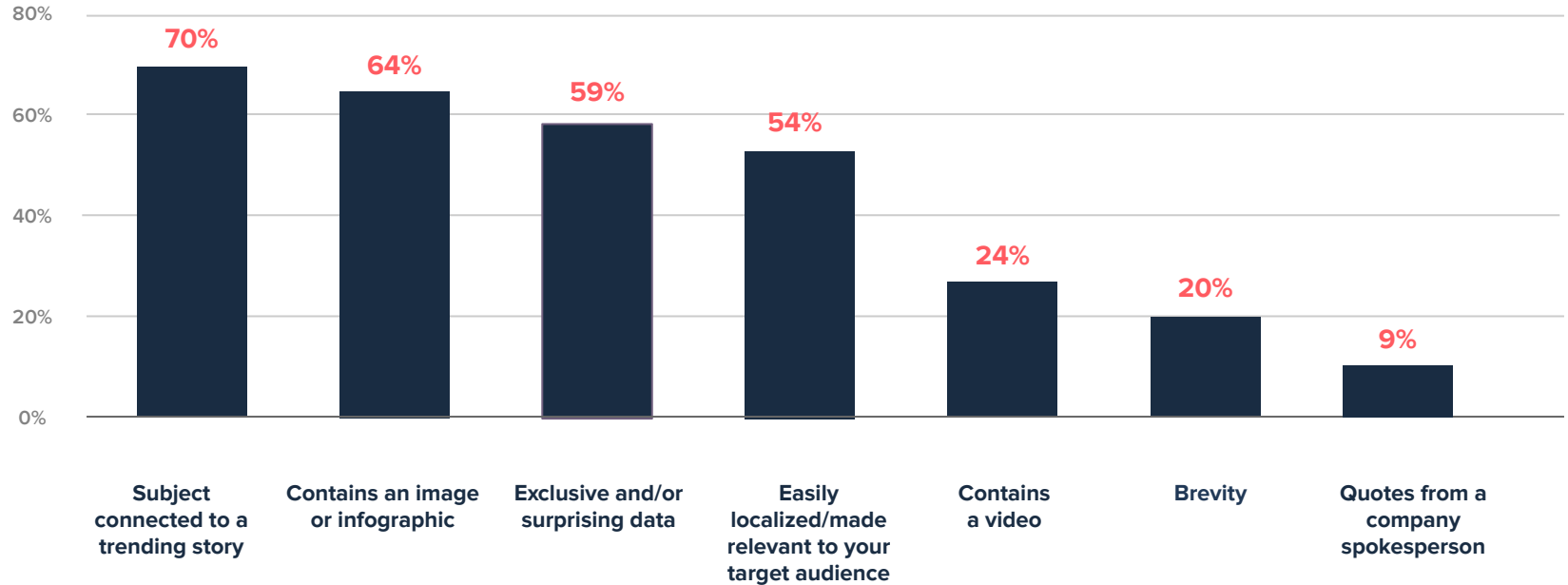
When reporting on a company, I consult the company's social media.

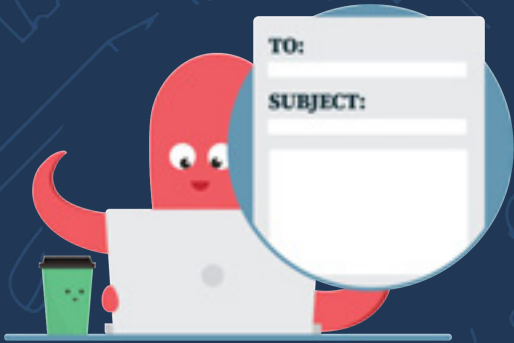


Do you track how many times your stories are shared on social media?



What makes a story more shareable? (Select all that apply)





2

Media relations in 2021: pitching preferences and more

The way most companies share information with the media is outdated

Strongly agree



Agree



Disagree



Strongly disagree



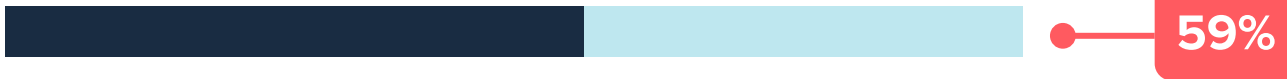
While more journalists agree than disagree with the statement “The way most companies share information with the media is outdated”, only **15%** feel strongly either way.

Do you generally see your relationship with PR teams and people at PR agencies as:

A partnership



Mutually beneficial, but not quite a partnership



Antagonistic, but not inherently a bad thing



A necessary evil



Only **6%** of journalists see their relationship with PR pros as a partnership. **17%** view it as a necessary evil, **18%** describe it as 'antagonistic' and **59%** describe it as 'mutually beneficial, but not quite a partnership.'

Compared to a year ago, I am:

More likely to respond to pitches



Less likely to respond to pitches

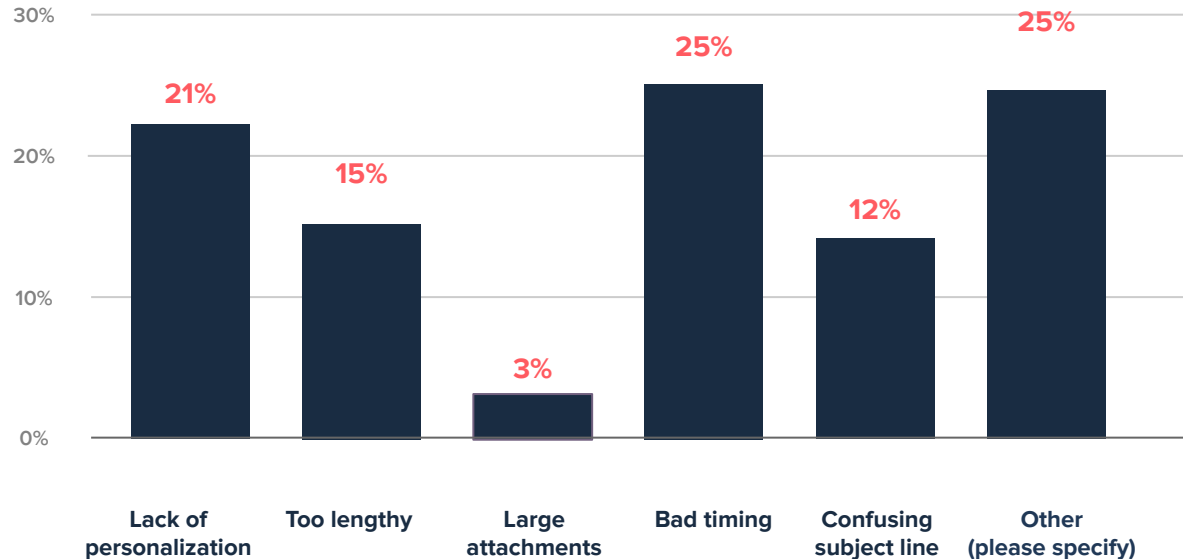


Just as likely to respond to pitches



Despite the challenges of 2020, journalists are just as likely to respond to pitches as a year ago. While **22%** of journalists said they're less likely to respond to pitches, **22%** said they're more likely to and the remaining **56%** said they're just as likely to.

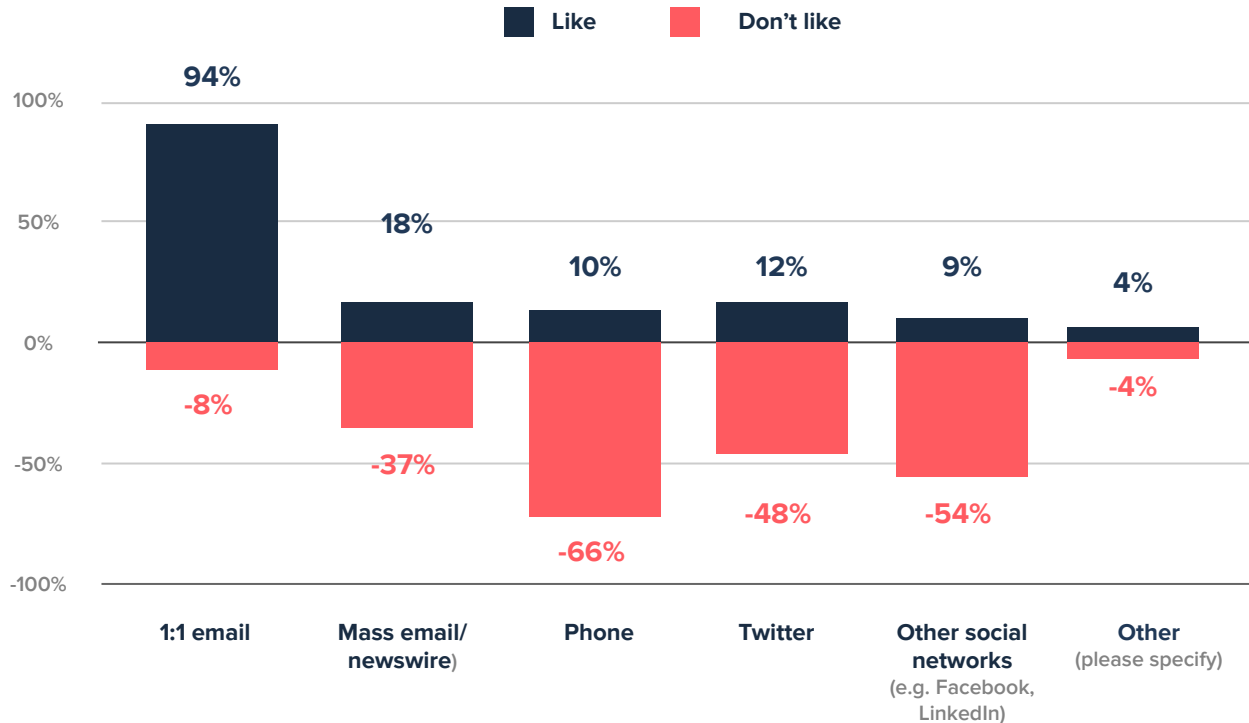
Why do you immediately reject otherwise relevant pitches?



Unlike every other year we've conducted the survey, lack of personalization wasn't the #1 reason journalists reject otherwise relevant pitches. Instead, bad timing and 'other' tied for #1 at **25%**. Lack of personalization came in next at **21%**.

However, 'Other' consisted mostly of people who wrote in answers like 'irrelevant', 'random', and 'not localized', which could be considered subsets of 'Lack of personalization'.

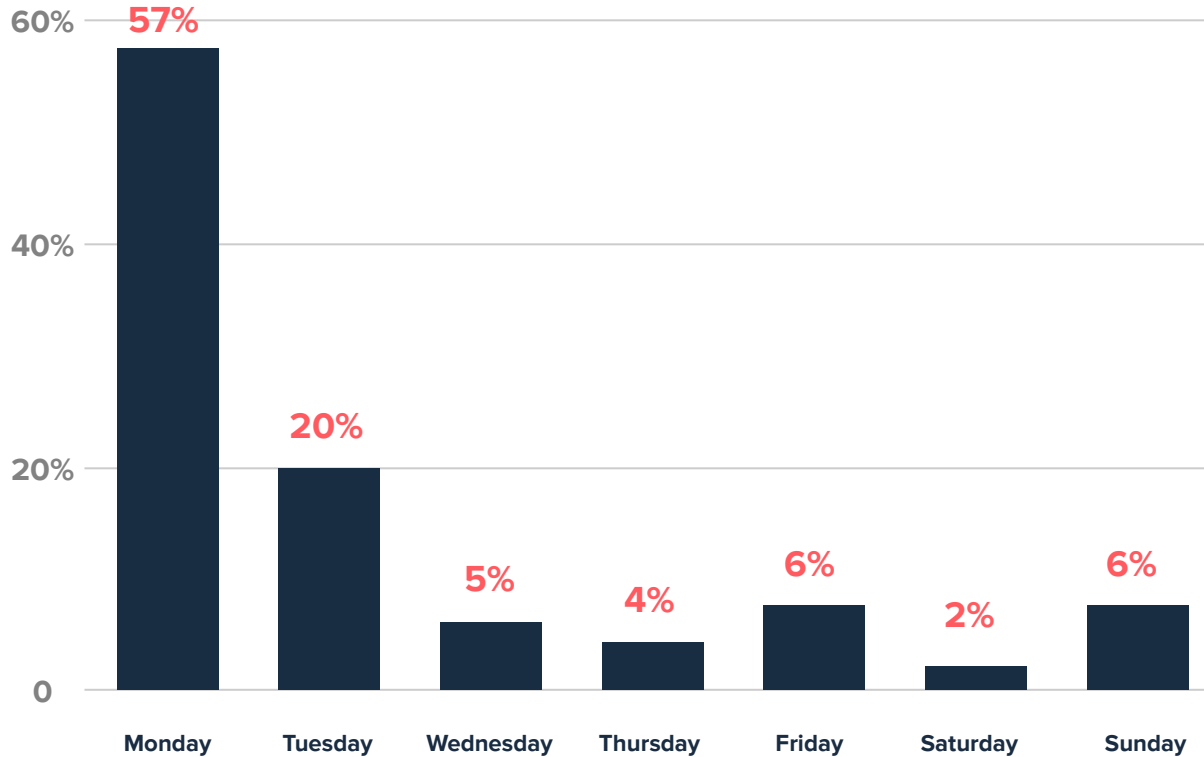
On which channels do prefer to be pitched? (Select all that apply)



As in past years, 1:1 email is most journalists' preferred pitching channel. Again, phone is the least popular channel, followed by social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

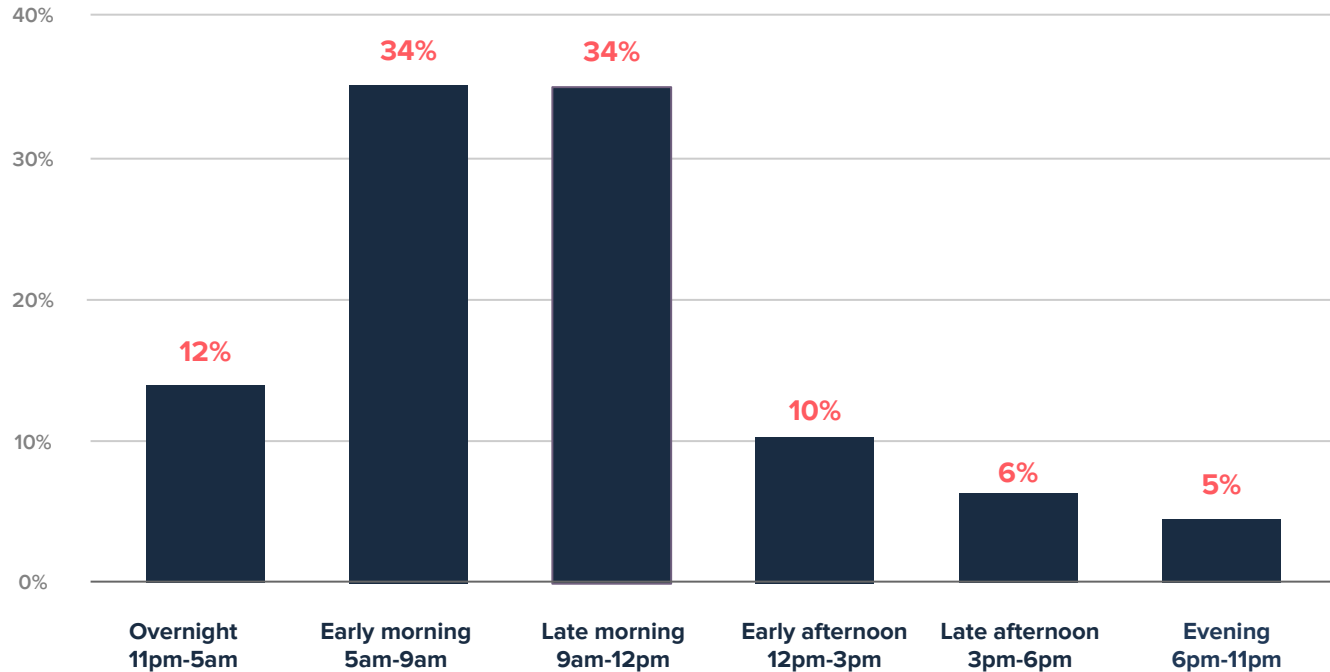
The majority of those who wrote in answers for 'Other' said SMS, WhatsApp and other messaging apps

On what day of the week do you like to receive pitches?



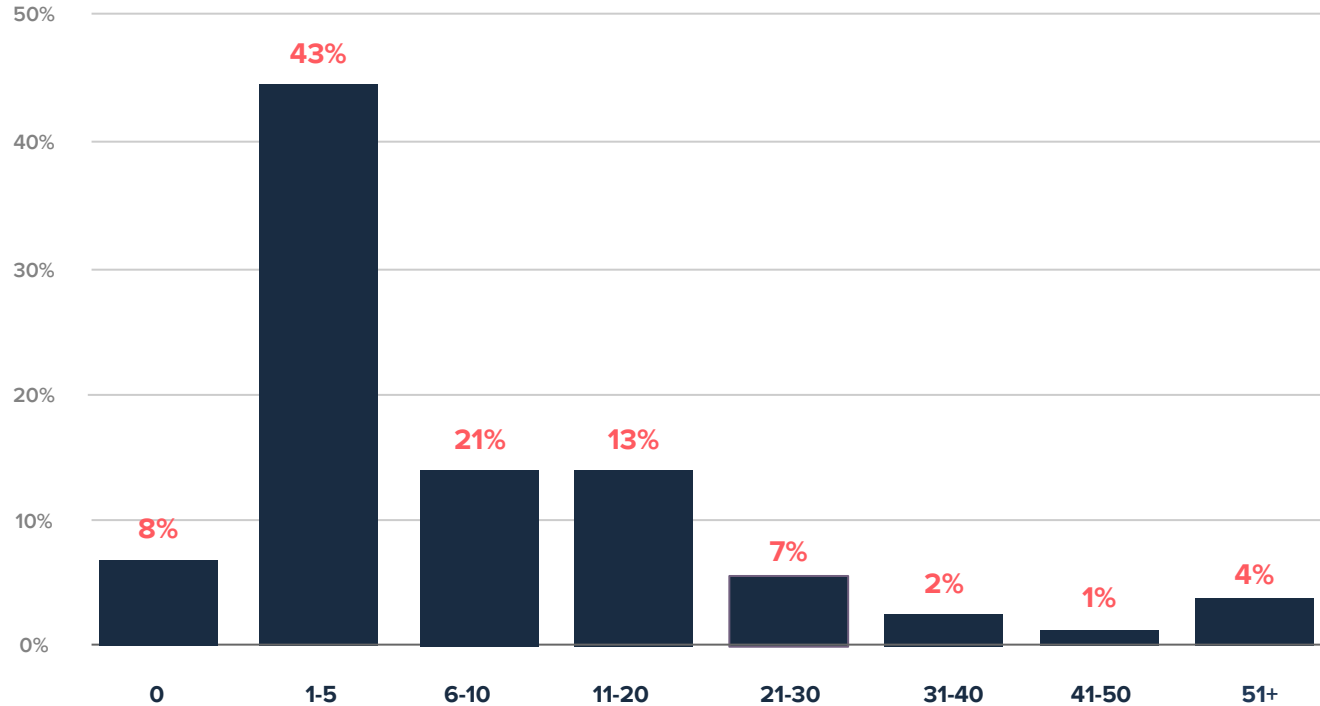
As in past years, journalists cited Monday as their favorite day to receive pitches (**57%**), followed by Tuesday (**20%**).

When is the best time for you to receive a pitch? (all times EST)



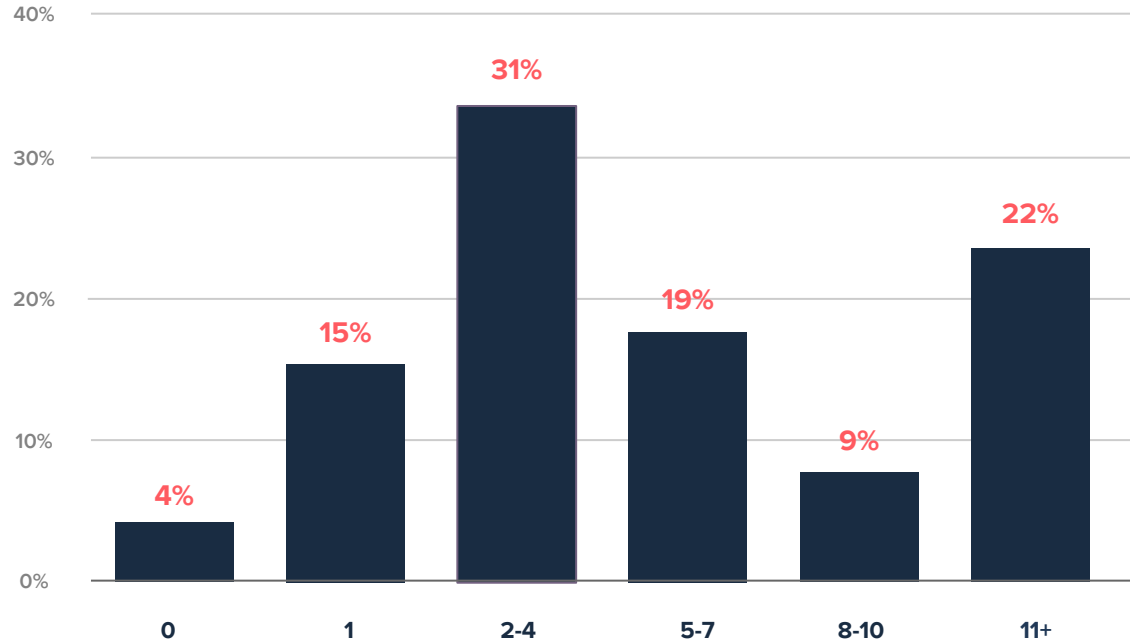
68% of journalists prefer to receive pitches between 5 AM and 12 PM EST.

How many pitches do you receive on an average business day?



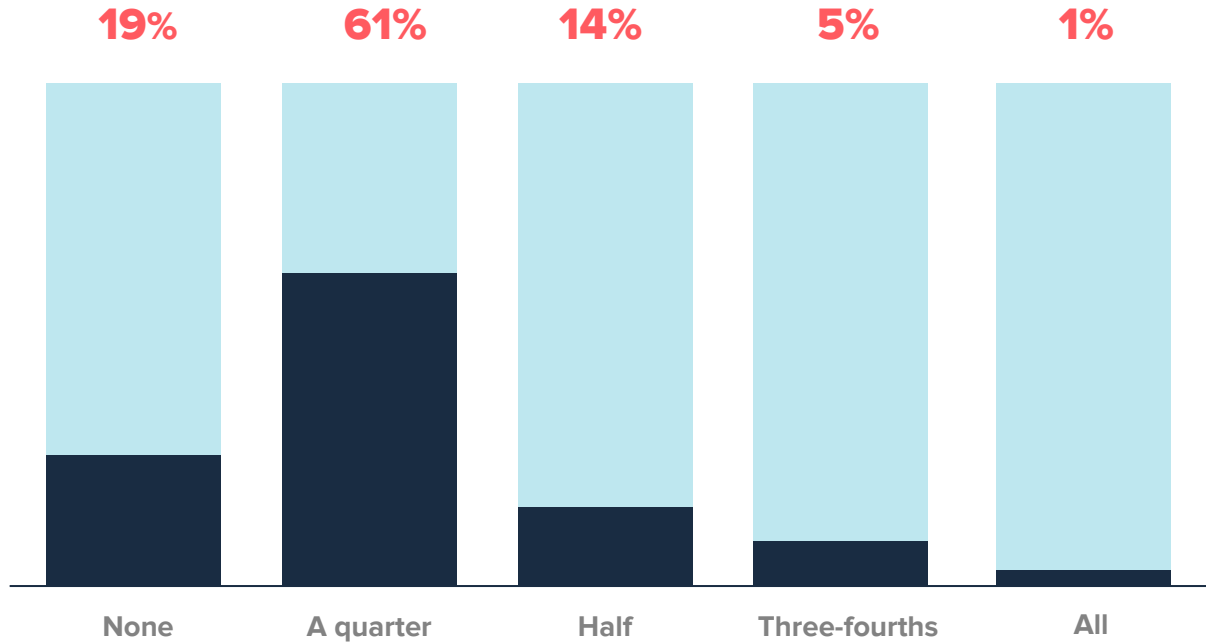
The largest segment of journalists receives 1-5 pitches per business day. This equates to 5-25 pitches per week.

About how many stories do you publish in an average week?



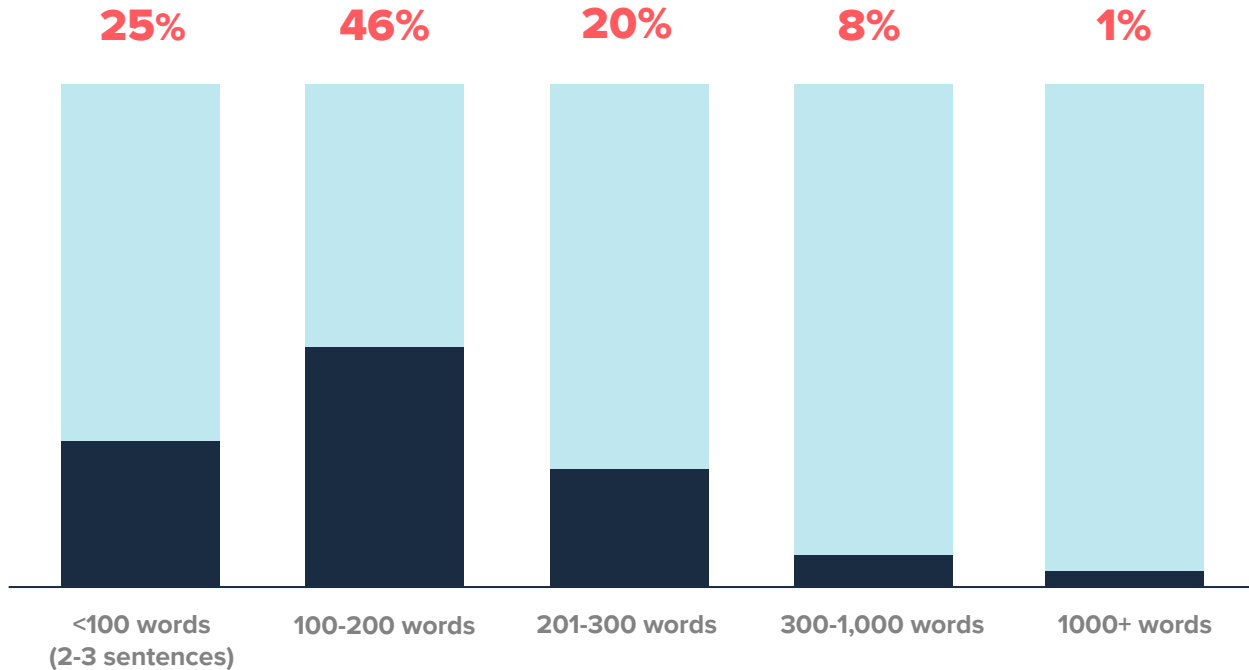
50% of journalists write 5 or more stories per week.

About what portion of stories you publish originate from pitches?



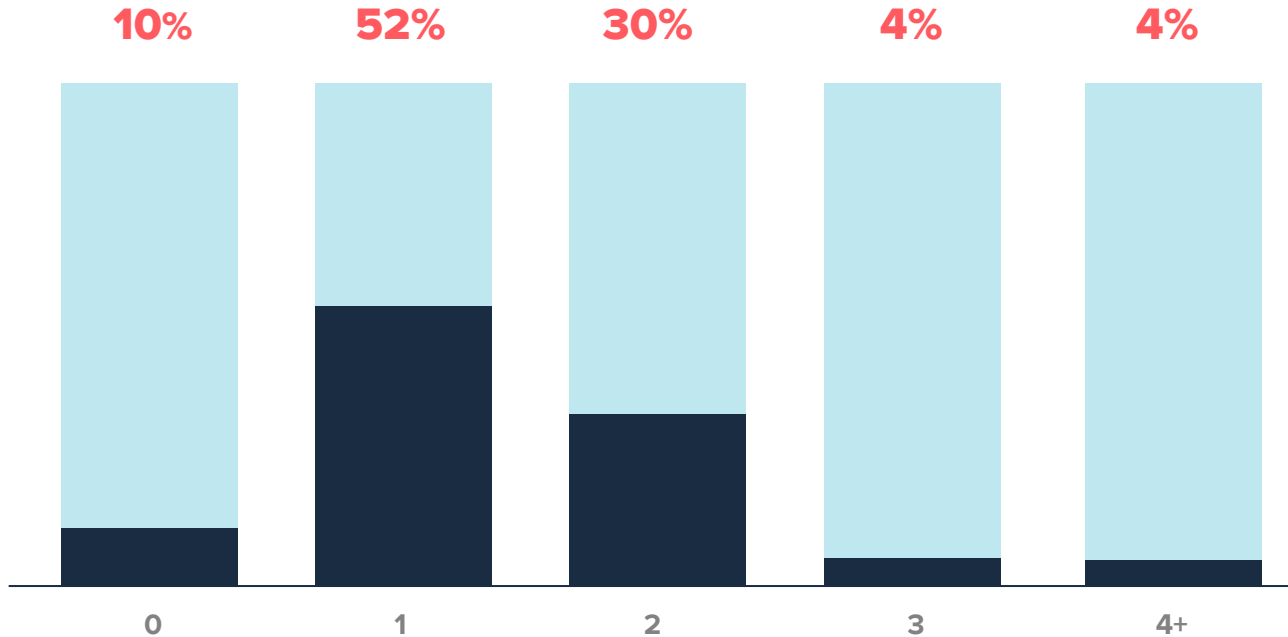
The % of journalists who said 'None' of their pitches came from pitches fell from **28%** last year to **19%** this year. Concurrently, the portion who said 'A quarter' grew from **52%** to **61%**.

What's your ideal pitch length?



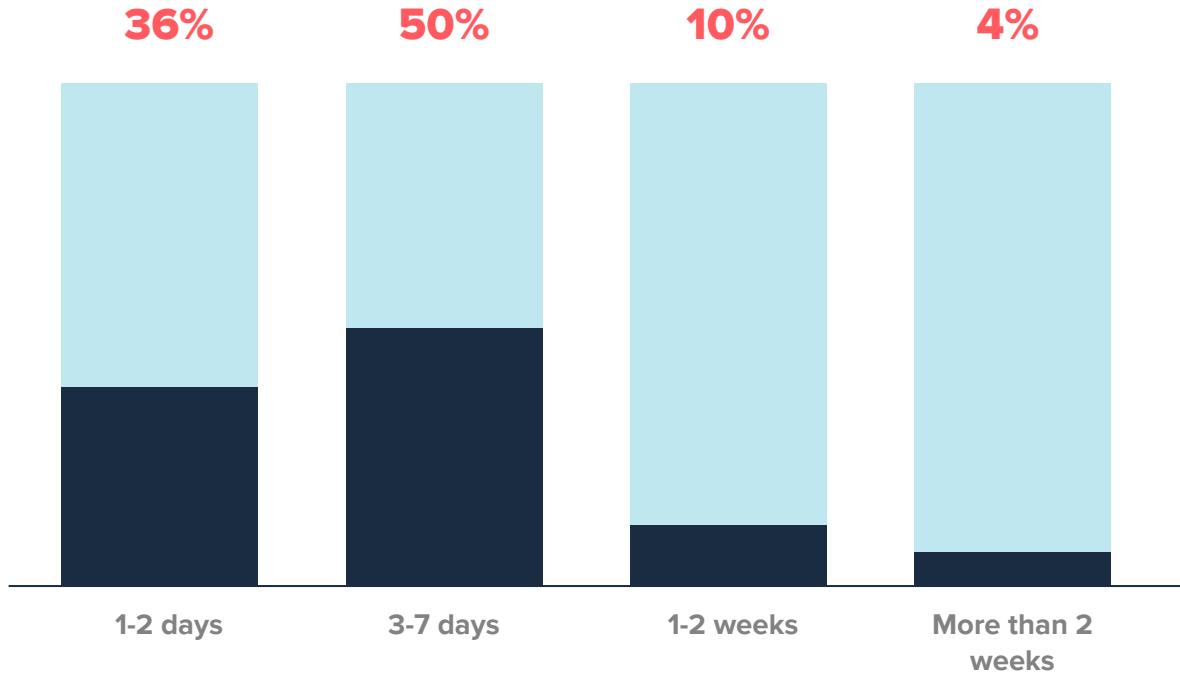
91% of journalists prefer pitches under 200 words. Nearly half (**46%**) prefer 1-200 words and a quarter (**25%**) prefer under 100 words.

How many follow up emails is acceptable?



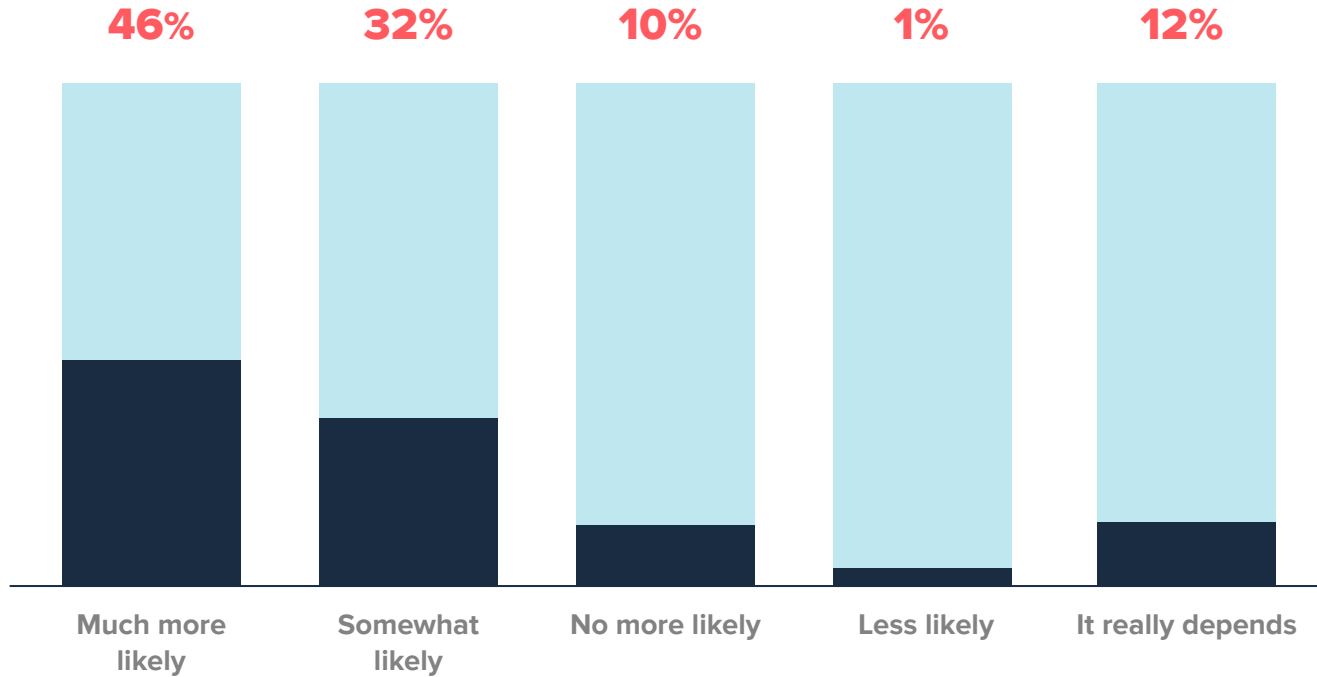
90% of journalists say it's OK to send at least 1 follow up email; **38%** say 2 or more.

How long after an initial email is it ok to follow up?



86% of journalists are OK with a follow up email within one week of the initial message. The other **14%** prefer a follow up over 1 week from the initial pitch.

If offered an exclusive, how much more likely are you to cover a story?



78% of journalists say they are at least somewhat more likely to cover a story if offered an exclusive. **10%** say no more likely, **12%** say it depends and under **1%** say less likely.

Thank you!

Journalists: Showcase your best work, analyze news about any topic and measure the impact of your stories—for free.

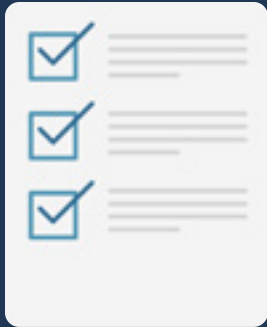
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PR pros: Muck Rack's Public Relations Management (PRM) platform enables PR teams to find the right journalists for their stories, send customized pitches, build meaningful relationships with the media, monitor news and quantify their impact.

[Learn more](#)

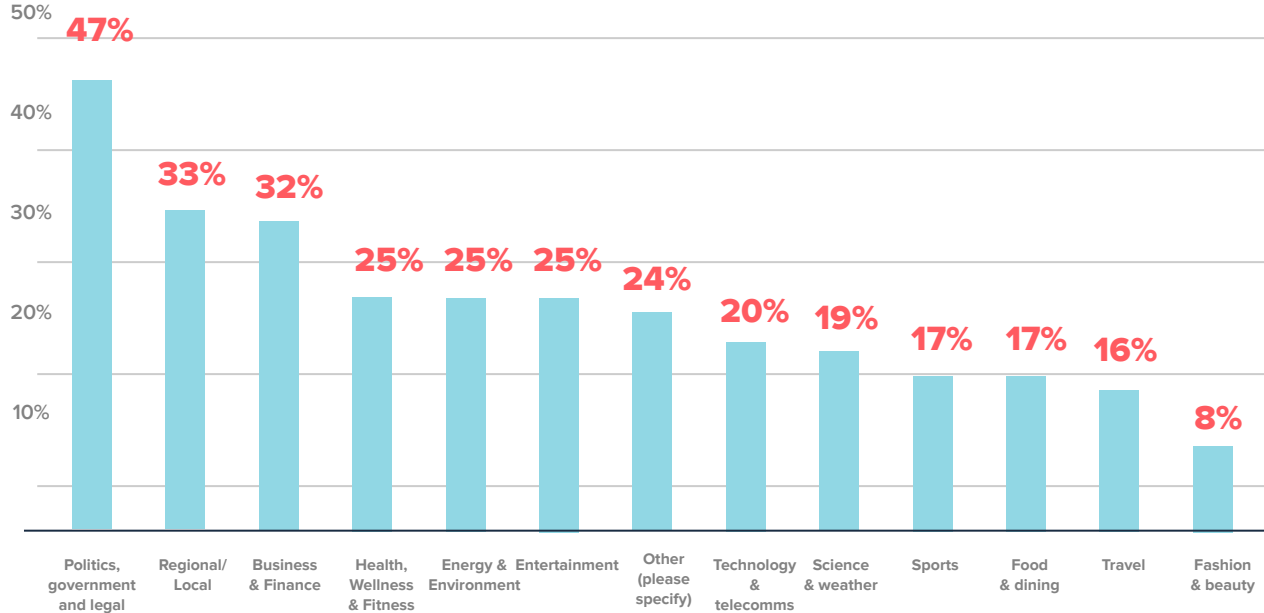
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Appendix: Expanded audience breakdown

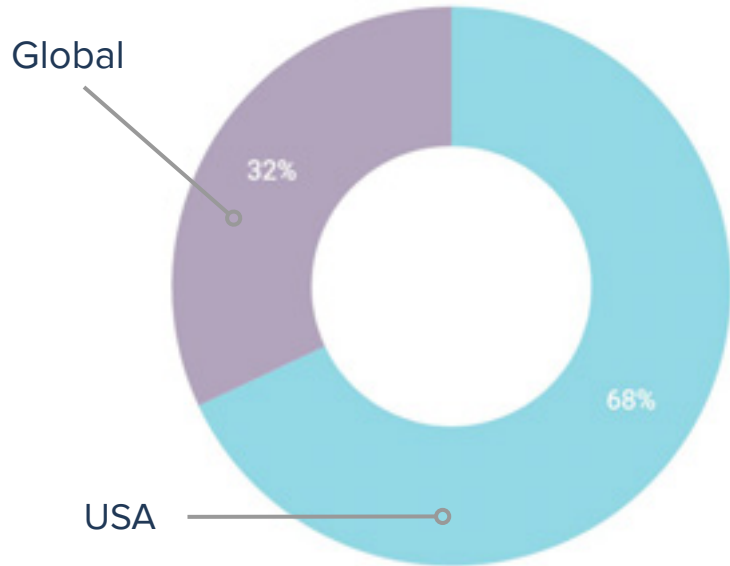
What industries do you cover? (Select all that apply)



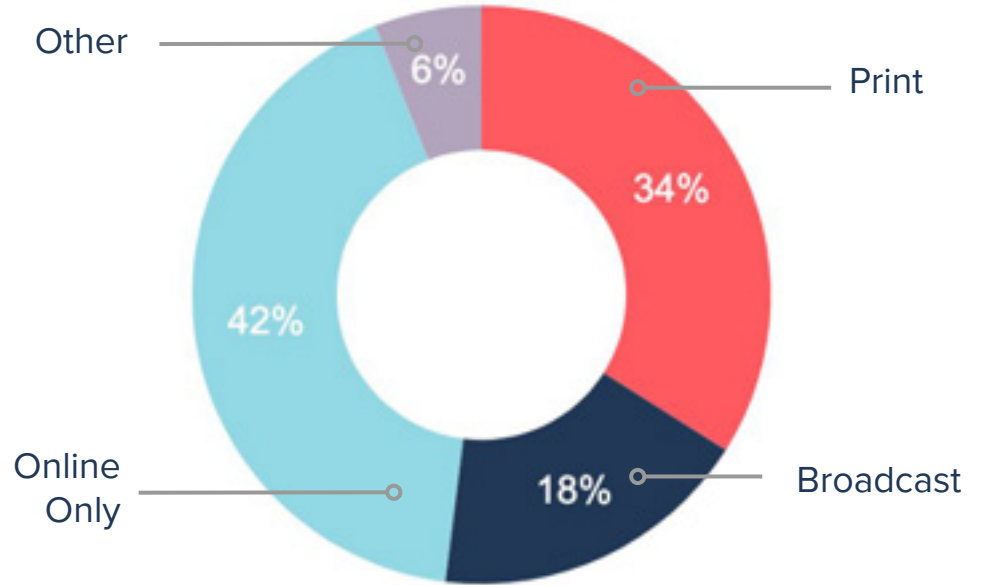
Add these together and you get over **300%**, meaning many selected 3 or more.

Some of the clusters with 15 or more responses in the “Other” category were:
Agriculture, art or culture, automotive, crime, education, and religion

Where are you based?



Which medium do you primarily report in?



Which of the following best describes you?

I'm a full-time journalist, editorial writer or blogger



I'm a full-time freelance journalist



I write some journalistic content, but supplement my income with other work



Other (please specify)



How would you categorize the scope of your coverage? (Select all that apply)

International



National



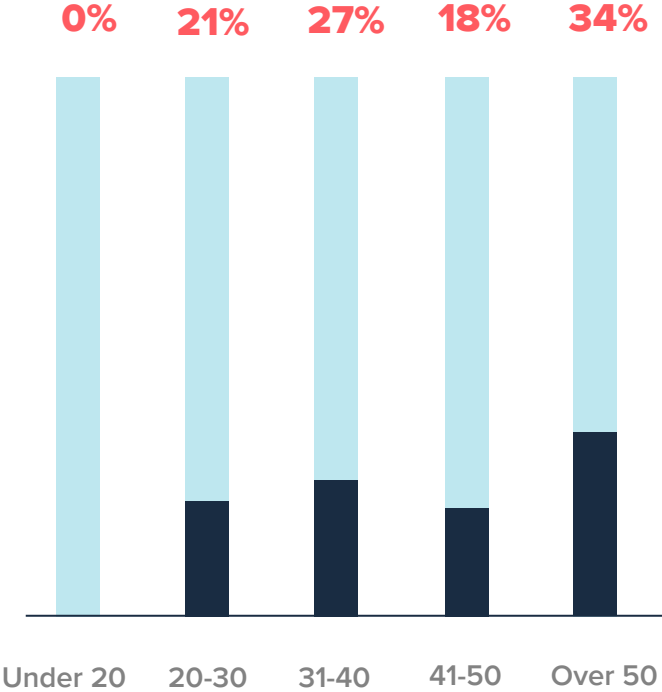
Local/Regional



Trade



How old are you?



How long have you been a journalist?

