

BRIEF:

DISINFORMATION AND BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES

HOW AMERICANS PERCEIVE BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES AND THEIR ROLE IN DISINFORMATION

This report examines American attitudes toward certain information sources and their role in spreading disinformation, or deliberately misleading or biased news or information. While some may call this “fake news,” “false news” or even use it interchangeably with “misinformation,” this report uses the term “disinformation” for consistency and clarity in terminology.

Results are based on a nationally represented survey of 2,200 Americans conducted by Morning Consult from March 19-24, 2019.

WHICH BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES DO AMERICANS VIEW AS MOST TRUSTWORTHY?

The Trustworthiness of Business-Related Sources

Business Related Sources	Percentage with at Least “Some” Trust in Source
College and University Professors	46%
Journalists	45%
Public Relations Professionals	26%
Companies/Corporations	26%
CEOs	22%
Marketers and Advertisers	20%

Americans placed the most trust in college and university professors (46%) and journalists (45%). Fewer Americans trust public relations professionals (26%), companies/corporations (26%), CEOs (22%), and marketers/advertisers (20%).

Political affiliation clearly plays a role in how much respondents trust certain professions. Most Democratic respondents said they trust journalists (64%), whereas only one in three (31%) Republican respondents said they had “some” trust in journalists. Political affiliation also divided respondents on their level of trust in college and university professors, as Democrats (65%) were more likely to trust professors than Republicans (28%).

An individual’s political affiliation did not affect their perception of trust of public relations professionals, companies/corporations, CEOs, or marketers and advertisers.

WHICH BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES DO AMERICANS BELIEVE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING DISINFORMATION?

Business-Related Sources Responsible for Spreading Disinformation

Business-Related Sources	Percentage Saying Source is "Somewhat" Responsible for Spreading Disinformation
Marketers and Advertisers	65%
Journalists	63%
Public Relations Professionals	58%
Companies/Corporations	54%
CEOs	53%
College and University Professors	48%

A majority of Americans said marketers and advertisers were "Somewhat" responsible for spreading disinformation (65%), followed closely by journalists (63%). Political affiliation only played a role with journalists and college/ university professors. Republicans (71%) were more likely than Democrats (52%) to say journalists were at least "somewhat" responsible for spreading disinformation, and Republicans (61%) were also more likely than Democrats (34%) to say college and university professors were responsible.

WHICH BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES COMBAT DISINFORMATION WELL?

Top Business-Related Sources for Combatting Disinformation

Business-Related Sources	Percentage Saying Combats Disinformation at Least “Somewhat Well”
Journalists	44%
College and University Professors	39%
Public Relations Professionals	30%
Companies/Corporations	25%
Marketers and Advertisers	24%
CEOs	23%

The information sources combatting disinformation the best were journalists (44%) and college/university professors (39%). Political affiliation did impact responses for these two occupations. The majority of Democrats (62%) said journalists were doing at least “somewhat well” at combatting disinformation compared to only one-third (32%) of Republicans. Additionally, Democrats (52%) were more likely than Republicans (26%) to say that college and university professors were doing at least “somewhat well” with combatting disinformation.



WHICH BUSINESS-RELATED SOURCES DO AMERICANS BELIEVE SHOULD BE MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR COMBATTING DISINFORMATION?

Business-Related Sources that Should Be Most Responsible for Combatting Disinformation

Business Related Sources	Percentage Saying Source Should be Responsible for Combatting Disinformation
Journalists	83%
College and University Professors	79%
Public Relations Professionals	76%
Companies/Corporations	72%
Marketers and Advertisers	72%
CEOs	71%

Among the information sources considered, respondents said journalists (83%), public relations professionals (79%), and college and university professors (76%) should be most responsible for combatting disinformation in the media. Political affiliation did not play a role. Of the business-related sources, seven out of 10 respondents said each of the sources have a responsibility to combat disinformation.

METHODOLOGY:

This poll was conducted between March 19-24, 2019 by Morning Consult among a national sample of 2,200 adults. The interviews were conducted online and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on age, educational attainment, gender, race, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

For the full report and charts, please visit the Institute for Public Relations website at instituteforpr.org/ipr-disinformation-study. If you are an academic researcher who would like access to the data, please contact Tina McCorkindale at tina@instituteforpr.org.



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