



MEDIANET AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISTS SURVEY

COVID-19's Impact on Journalists and the Media in Australia

Insights for PR and Communication
Professionals

March 2021



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About the survey

Welcome to the findings report for Medianet’s survey on COVID-19’s Impact on Journalists and the Media. This survey was conducted from November to December 2020 to help understand the challenges faced by Australian journalists in 2020, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the media industry. All respondents were invited to participate via professional email addresses stored in Medianet’s Journalist Contact Database.

The findings presented in this report are intended to provide insight for PR and communications professionals into the work and preferences of journalists. 1008 respondents participated in the survey, providing a comprehensive result which helps us understand the communication preferences, social media habits and story sources of journalists. The report will also demonstrate some of the ways the work of journalists were affected by the pandemic, and the impact these changes had on media content.

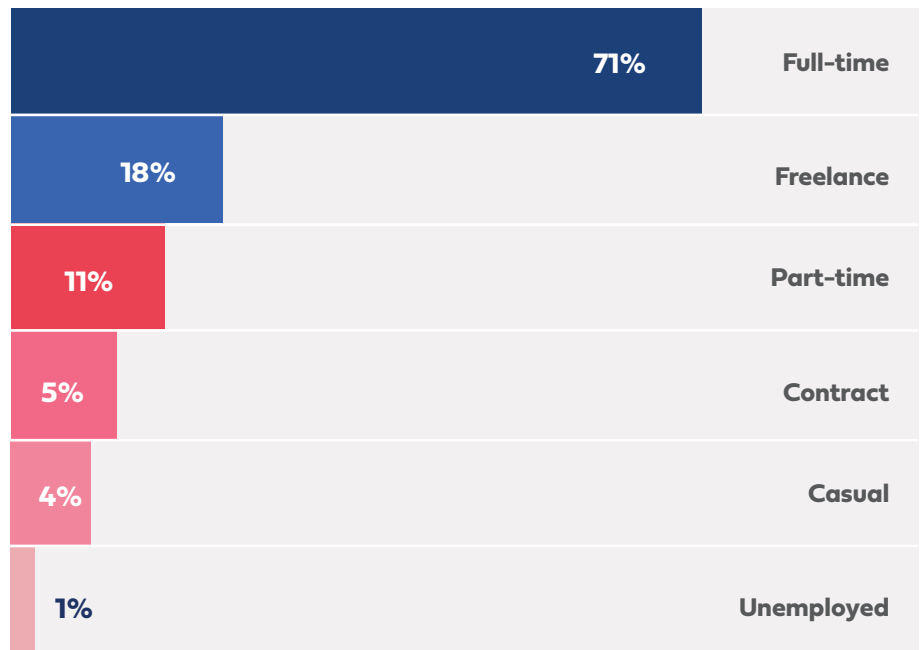


FIGURE 1: Employment type of respondents

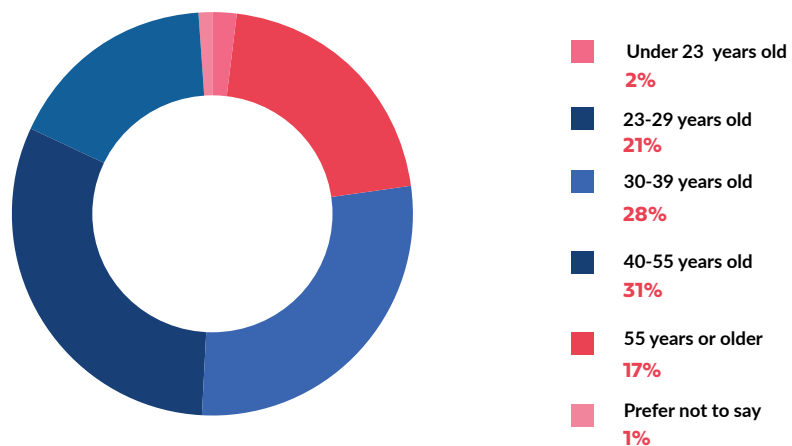
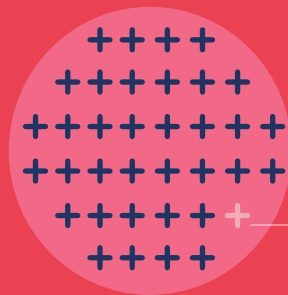


FIGURE 2: Ages of respondents

† Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is either due to rounding or because respondents were able to select more than one answer to the question

1008

respondents



1%
non-binary



40%
Male

59%
Female

Radio	20%
TV	14%
Print	52%
Digital journalism	62%

Snapshot of key findings



88%

PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

of journalists used industry and professional contacts as sources, making it the most common source.



83%

FACEBOOK USERS

Facebook remains the most commonly used social media platform for sourcing stories.



40%

PHONE CALLS

of journalists now prefer to use phone calls to communicate with colleagues and sources. Meeting face-to-face was the most popular method of communication prior to 2020.

01

Journalist sources

The most used sources for surveyed journalists when researching a story were industry and professional contacts, press releases and social media.

Respondents who selected 'other' sources predominately cited official documents such as academic research papers, government websites and court documents as their story sources.

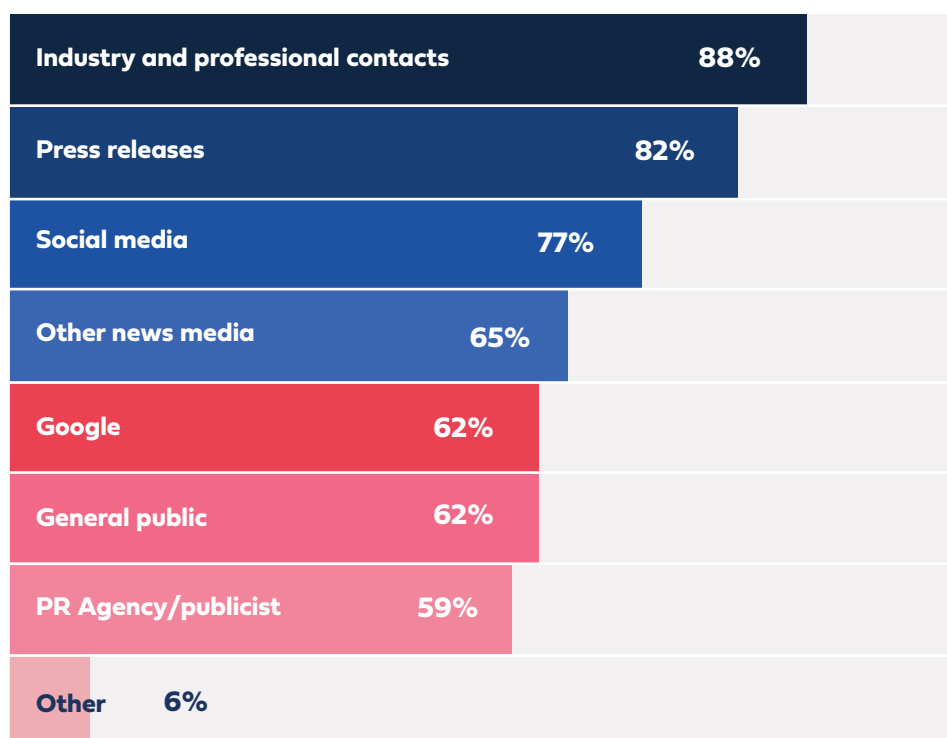
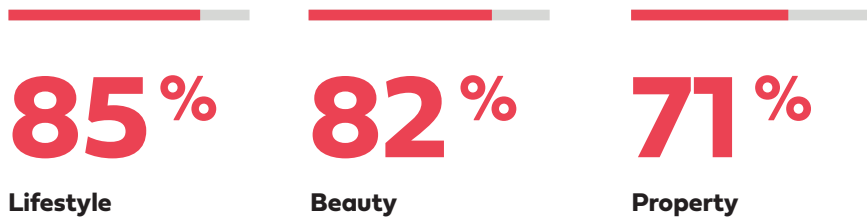


FIGURE 3: Sources used by journalists when researching a story



Journalists who report on lifestyle, beauty and property are the top users of press releases and PR agencies or publicists to find stories



PR agencies or publicists

National news	57%
Regional news	54%
Property	71%
Lifestyle	68%
Beauty	82%
Sport	55%
Entertainment	67%
Business	63%
Finance	67%
Politics	57%

FIGURE 4: Percentage covering each 'subject/topic' who use PR agencies or publicists

Press Releases

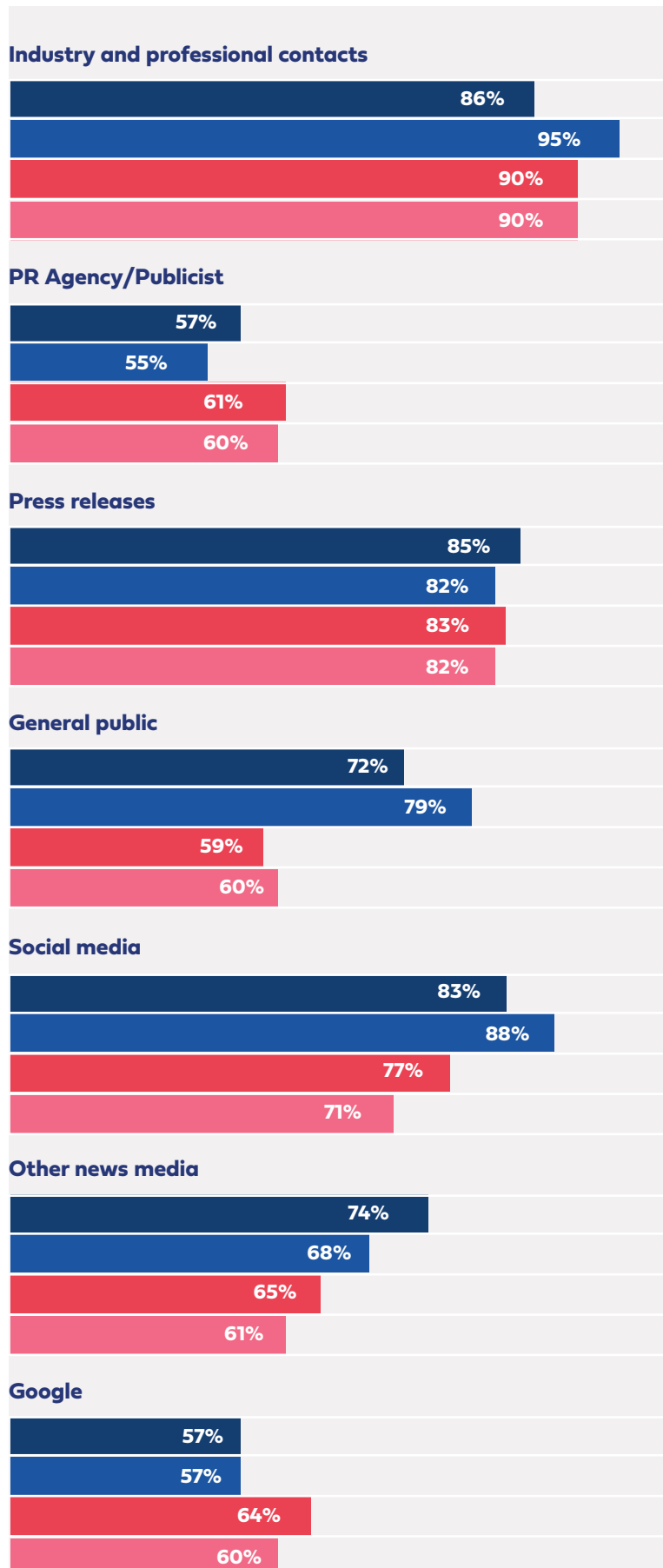
83%
87%
92%
85%
93%
82%
86%
85%
86%
87%

FIGURE 5: Percentage covering each 'subject/topic' who use press releases

Digital and print journalists were more likely to use PR agencies/publicists and search engines to source stories.

TV journalists, however, used industry and professional contacts, the general public and social media as their main story sources.

Journalists working in radio were the most frequent users of press releases and other news media when sourcing stories.



- Radio
- TV
- Digital
- Print

FIGURE 6: Sources used by journalists depending on sector

Social Media

In 2020 Facebook remained the most widely used social media platform for surveyed journalists, however the percentage of journalists using the site for work has dropped slightly (from 88% to 83% of respondents) since Medianet’s 2019 Journalism and Social Media survey. It is anticipated that the News Media Bargaining Code will affect journalists’ relationship with Facebook in 2021.

Twitter remained the second most popular social media site, followed by Instagram then LinkedIn. 11% of respondents also said they used Reddit in their professional work. 3% of respondents said they use no social media platforms in their work, which is consistent with the findings from Medianet’s 2019 survey.

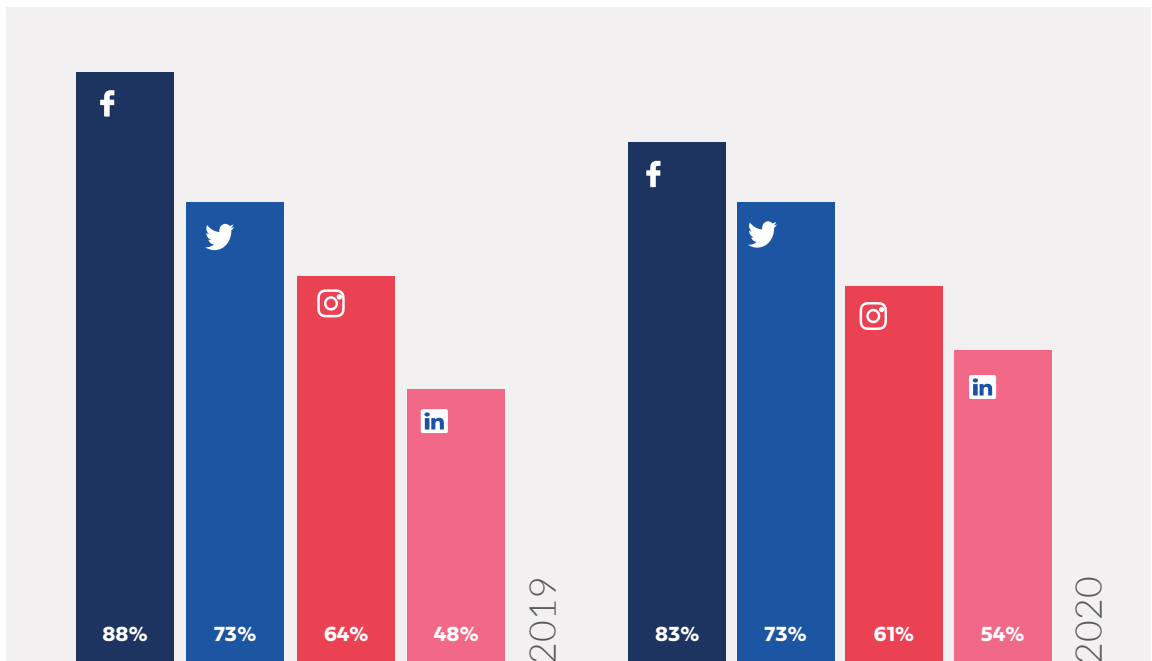


FIGURE 7: 2019 vs 2020 social media usage



Facebook has continued to be the most widely used social media platform for surveyed journalists.



Other

Of the 3% of respondents who selected ‘Other’ social media platforms, Pinterest, TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat were the most commonly used.



Stories are now focused more on the reaction to an event, rather than the event itself. Social media commentary is now a story, and a popular one at that.

highlights

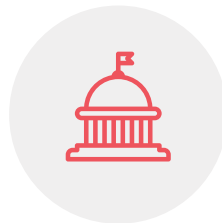
85%
Beauty



84%
Regional news



84%
Politics



86%



SPORT

Sports journalists were the top users of social media to source stories, followed closely by those in beauty, politics and regional news. Journalists working in TV were the highest users of Twitter, Instagram and Reddit in their professional work.

National news	82%
Regional news	84%
Property	80%
Lifestyle	81%
Beauty	85%
Sport	86%
Entertainment	82%
Business	75%
Finance	73%
Politics	84%

FIGURE 8: Percentage covering each 'subject/topic' who use social media to sources stories

Journalists' sector and social media

Radio journalists were the highest users of Facebook, and journalists working in digital media were the top users of LinkedIn. Overall, TV journalists used the most social media professionally, and print journalists used the least.

- Radio
- TV
- Digital
- Print

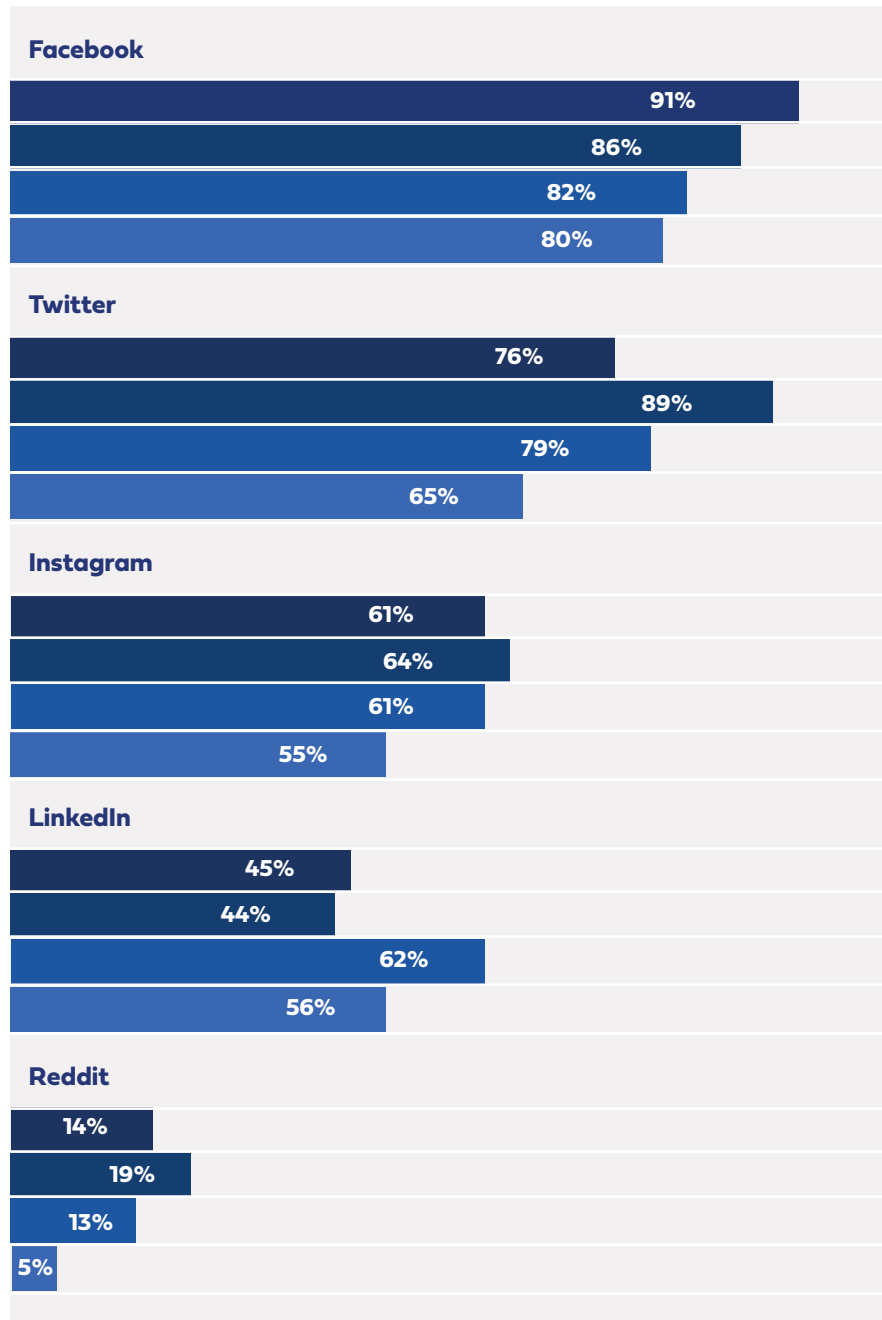
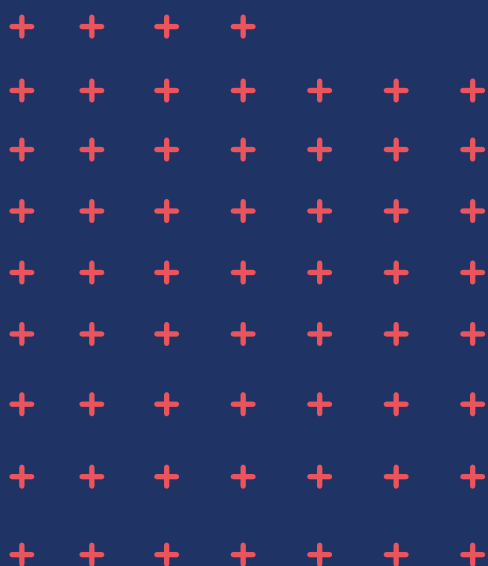


FIGURE 9: Sources used by journalists depending on sector

93%

BEAUTY



Respondents producing beauty-related content were overwhelmingly the top users of Instagram, with 93% of journalists who work in that area using Instagram professionally.

Journalists' content and social media



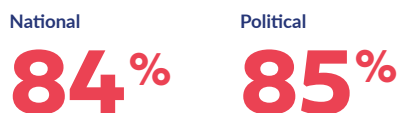
REGIONAL NEWS

Journalists working in regional news were the top users of Facebook professionally.



National & political

Journalists in national and political news emerged as the biggest users of Twitter.



LinkedIn was also highly used by journalists reporting on beauty, as well as property, finance and business journalists.



Respondents working in national news, finance and beauty were the top users of Reddit.

Communication

Unsurprisingly, the survey demonstrated a significant change in how journalists prefer to interact with sources and colleagues in 2020. 54% of respondents said they preferred face-to-face communication in 2019, but only 20% said it was their preferred method of contact in 2020, with preferences for emails and phone calls rising significantly. Only 3% of respondents preferred to communicate using social media, although this is a slight increase from the results of last year's survey.

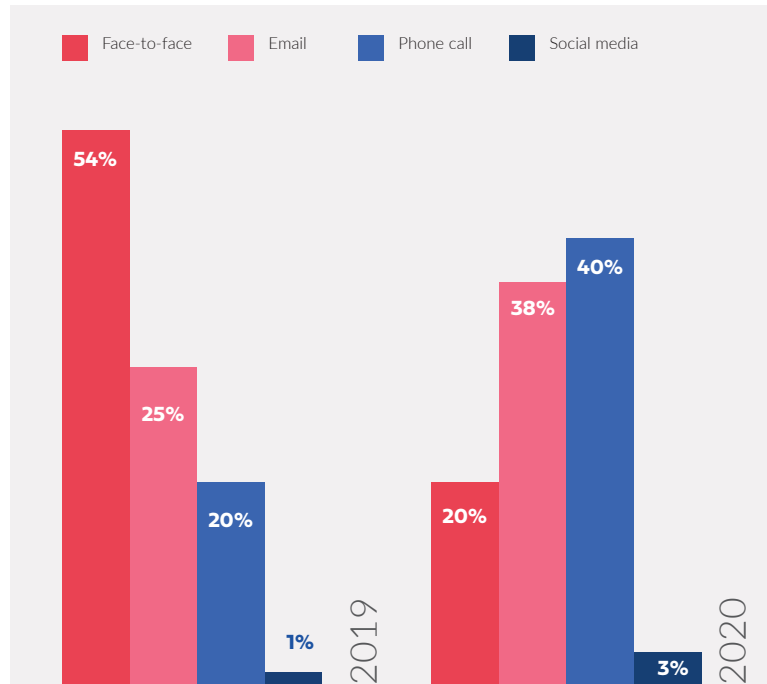


FIGURE 10: Journalists' preferred communication method in 2019 vs 2020

A phone call was the preferred method of interacting with colleagues and sources for journalists across all sectors. This was followed by email for radio, digital and print journalists. Face-to-face communication, however, was preferred by TV journalists over email.

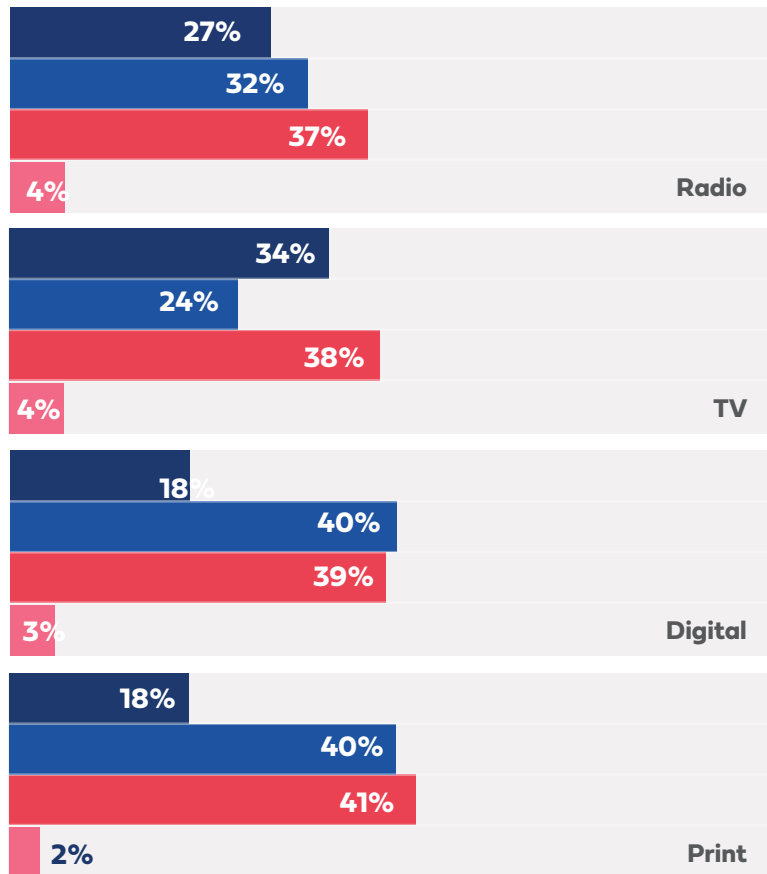


FIGURE 11: Journalists' preferred communication method in 2020 depending on sector

- Face-to-face
- Email
- Phone call
- Social media

FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

54%



2019

20%



2020



40%

of journalists now prefer to be contacted by phone



**Everything I write
now relates in some
way to the impact
of COVID**

Media content

Content changes for journalists in 2020

77% of journalists responded that the focus of their work has changed this year. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these respondents noted that COVID-19 and the effects of the pandemic have dominated their coverage or influenced the angle of most stories.

Many respondents said that the cancellation of events such as sporting competitions caused the biggest change in their content. Several also highlighted an increased focus on creating content that

generates revenue, or the most “clicks” and subscriptions. Changes in methods of communication and contact, such as covering more online events or meeting virtually, were also frequently cited as impacting on the content produced by journalists.

Many journalists spoke of making attempts to source stories unrelated to the pandemic, due to either audience fatigue or a sense of responsibility to provide the public with some positive news stories. Some journalists also responded that their level of focus changed from a local lens to a national or global focus, or vice versa.

There were times when it wasn't appropriate to mention the pandemic. Other times it was unavoidable.

77%



of journalists responded that the focus of their work has changed this year.

Content changes for journalists in 2020

I have always covered the news of the day, but the topics we cover and the way in which we cover them has shifted a bit in the wake of the pandemic.

The pandemic has reduced the acceptable broadcast quality standards which has opened us up to the possibility of using remote guests within Australia and overseas. This has improved the diversity of on-screen talent.

We write with the sole aim of getting page views (clicks) and subscriptions.

It is a greater focus on explaining what the CURRENT situation is to be clear and precise so people know what to do right NOW. Beforehand it was more holistic talking about past, present and future.

Since a lot of community events (the majority, in fact) were cancelled this year, I had to much more actively go out and seek news stories as I didn't want my whole newspaper to be COVID-related (which it easily could have been!). I found that, as time went on during the pandemic, people wanted less focus on COVID and more "good news" stories. So that's what I aimed for.

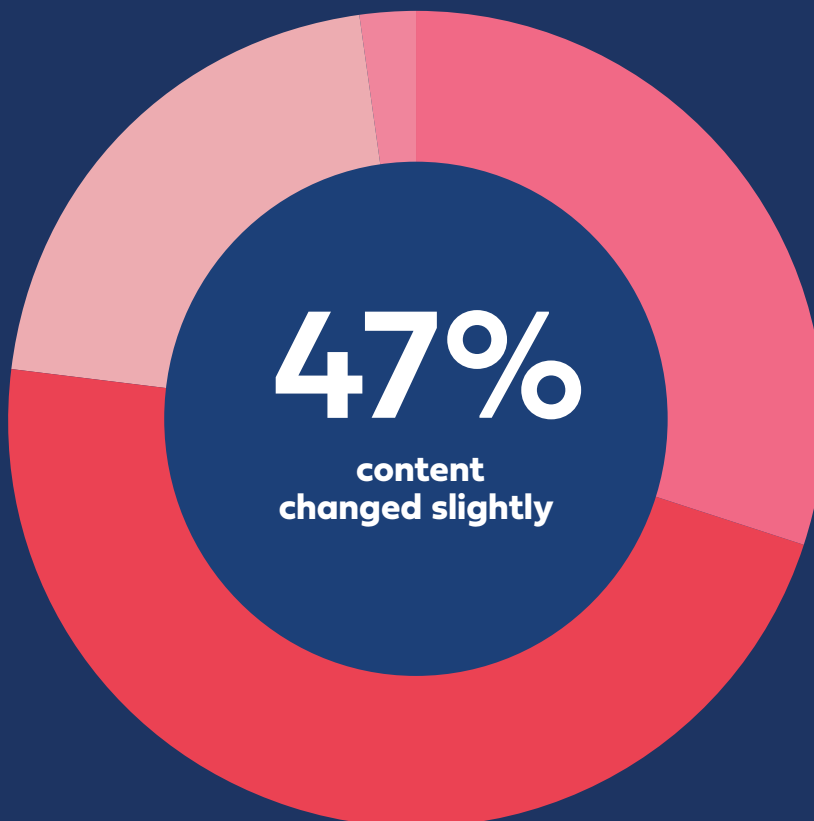
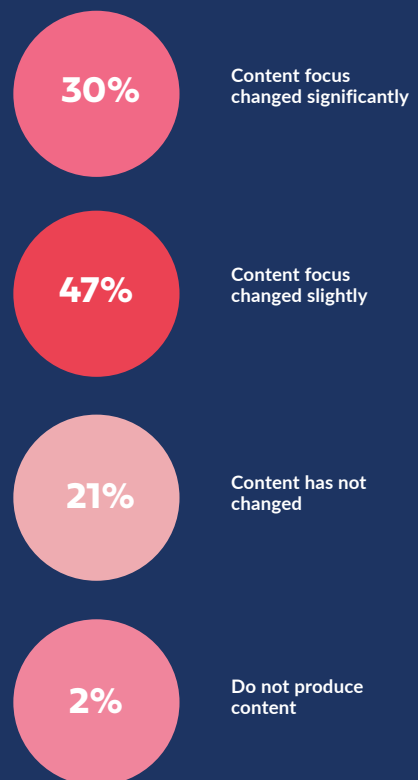


FIGURE 12: Content changes for journalists in 2020



Content changes for media organisations in 2020

These changes were most frequently credited as either a response to the need to cut operational costs and generate revenue, or due to the editorial focus on the pandemic.

80%



of journalists said the content produced by their organisation has changed this year.



Once again, many journalists highlighted an increased demand for positive news stories to counteract the pandemic coverage

The results showed that the style or format of content also changed within some journalists' organisations, for example they produced more 'explainer pieces' or blogs. Aside from the pandemic, the summer bushfires and US election were the most common topics for media organisations this year, according to journalist comments.

TV journalists reported the most significant changes to their organisations' content, with 40% responding that their content has changed significantly, and 47% responding that it has changed slightly. Journalists working in print reported the lowest levels of content changes at their organisation.

Changed significantly 40%

Changed slightly 47%

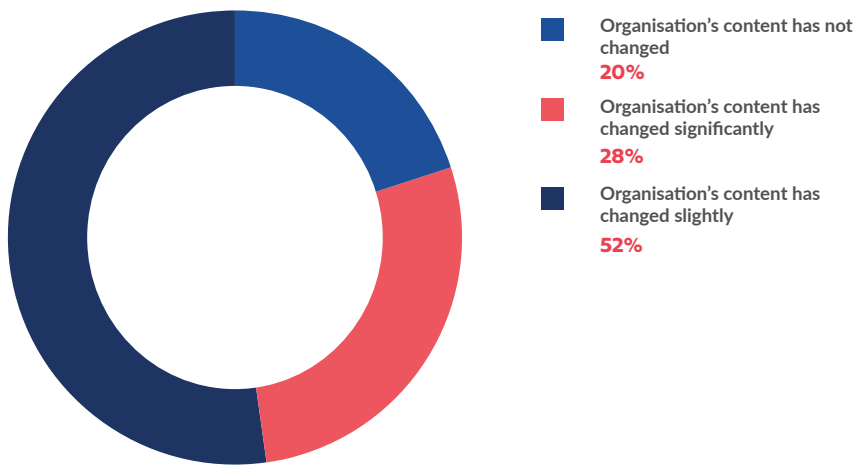


FIGURE 13: Content changes for media organisations in 2020

Note: Responses do not include surveyed freelancers.

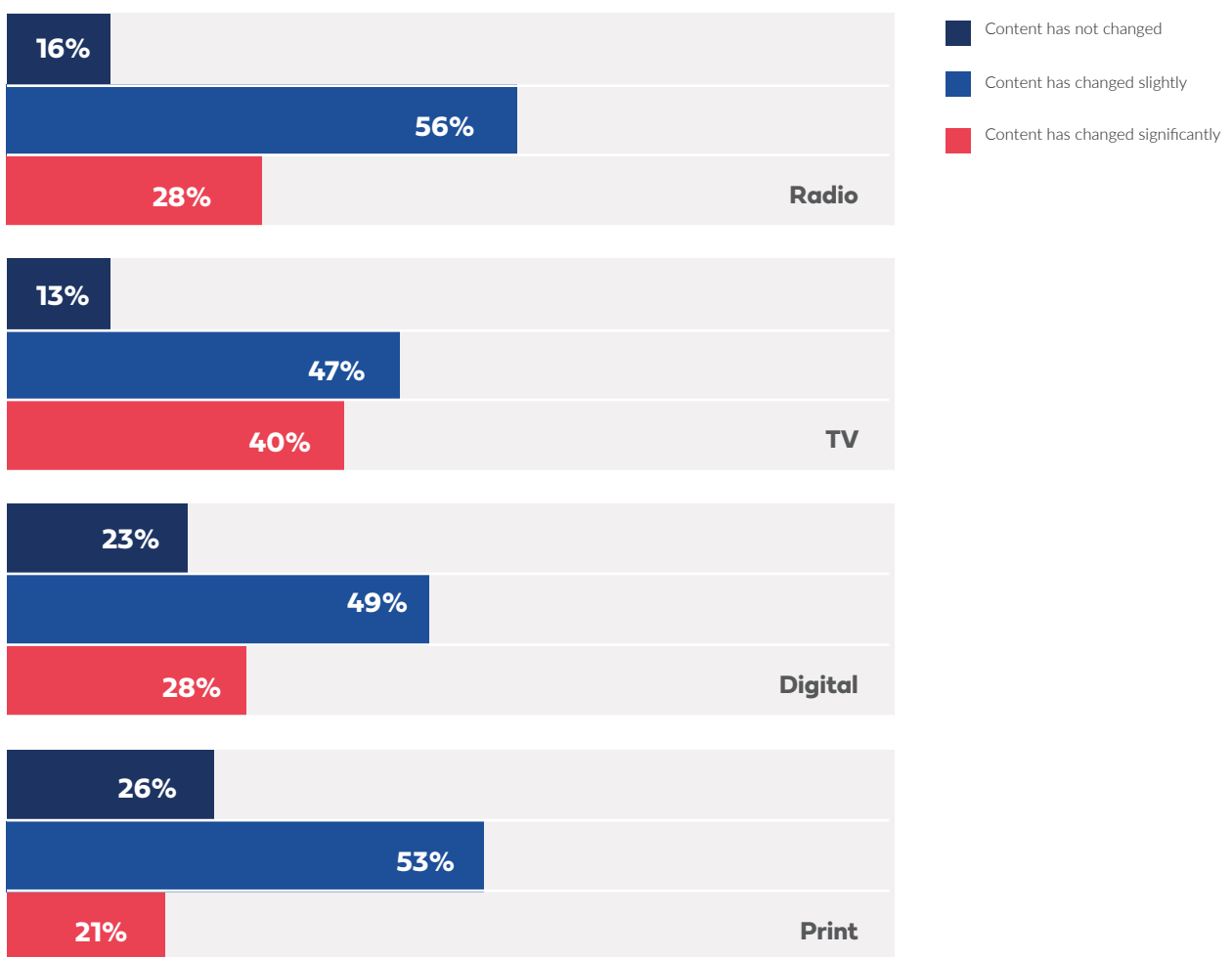
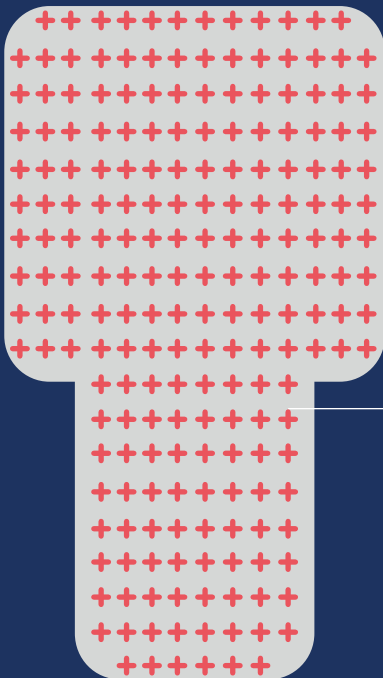


FIGURE 14: Content changes for media organisations in 2020, depending on sector

02.

Impact of the pandemic
on journalists and the
media



90%

of journalists said the
pandemic heightened
threats to public
interest journalism.

76%



of journalists experienced a change in workload in 2020. This included an overall increase in workload for journalists in permanent positions and a decrease in work for freelancers.



16%

OFFICE

of journalists worked in the office throughout all of 2020.



25%

HOME

of journalists worked entirely from home from March to December 2020.



The job security of women and non-binary people has been most adversely affected by the pandemic. Freelance, casual and contract workers have also been far more affected than journalists in permanent positions.

95%

of all survey respondents said that the pandemic has impacted journalists' ability to work effectively. Financial impacts of the pandemic on media organisations and restrictions on freedom of movement caused the greatest impacts to journalists.





We've never been so focused in on one subject, but, strangely to offset the seriousness of that, the rest of our content has become more viral/lightweight.

Public interest journalism

The survey results indicated that a majority of journalists believe the pandemic has heightened threats to public interest journalism, with 90% of respondents citing at least one threat increased in 2020.

The most commonly acknowledged threat was the closure of media companies and newsrooms, followed by an increase in disinformation and the concentration of media ownership.

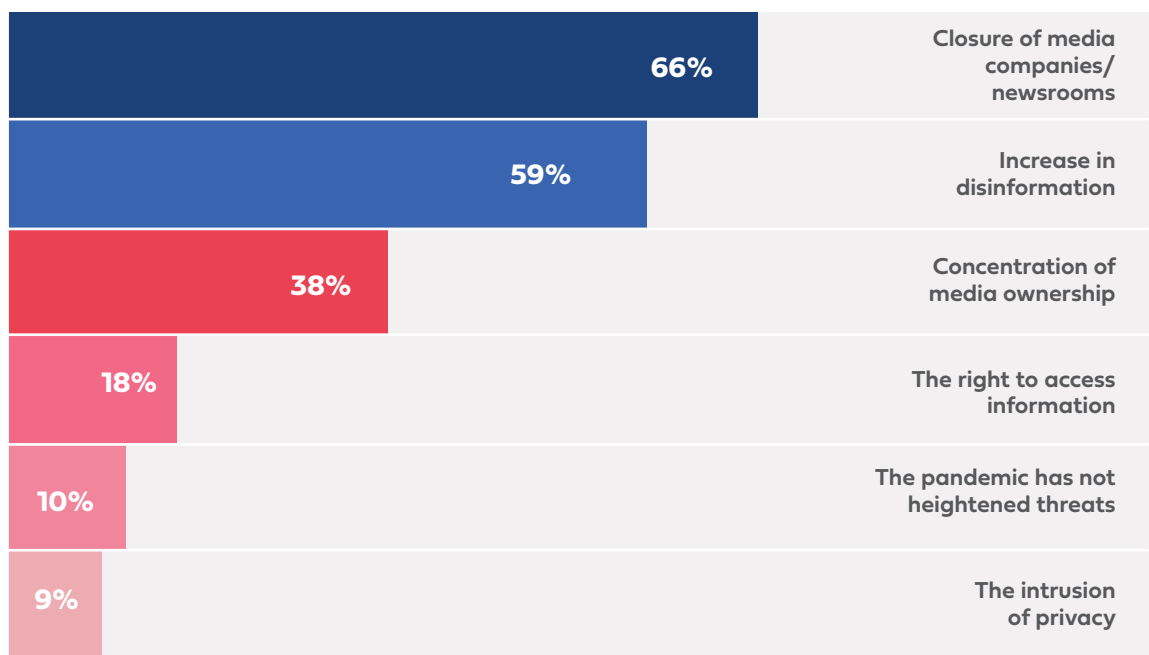
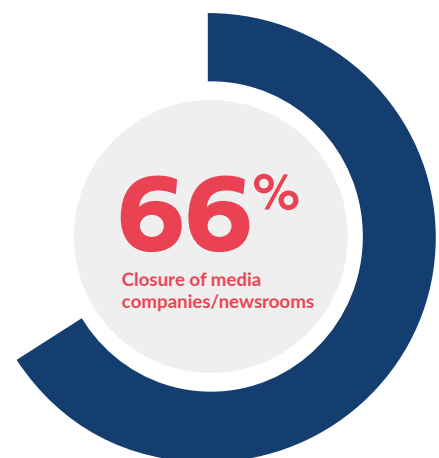


FIGURE 15: threats to public interest journalism heightened by the pandemic

Many journalists noted the impact the closures of media companies and newsrooms have had on remaining media, such as increasing pressure on journalists to produce content quickly, reducing the depth of coverage and placing further stress on resources. Many also expressed concerns about an increase in conspiracy theories circulating on social media, and how the spread of disinformation or misinformation may have interfered with public health messages.



Work locations



A quarter of all respondents worked entirely from home since COVID-19 arrived in Australia.

20%

worked partly from home

16%

of respondents worked from the office throughout all of 2020.

Worked from home since the pandemic began	25%
Worked from home and the office since the pandemic began	20%
Worked from home since before the pandemic	18%
Worked from the office throughout all of 2020	16%
Worked from home and the office since before the pandemic	10%
Returned to working in the office after working from home during the pandemic	9%
Other	2%

FIGURE 16: Where journalists worked in 2020

Job security & ongoing employment

More than half of the survey respondents said their job security has been affected by the pandemic. This includes 30% of journalists who responded that they have slightly less job security, 19% who said they have far less job security and 4% who reported an increase in job security.

The survey also found that the job security of women and non-binary people has been most adversely affected by the pandemic. Freelance, casual and contract workers have also generally been far more affected than journalists in permanent positions, and digital and print journalists have been more affected than TV and radio journalists.



55% of female journalists and 42% of male journalists said they have less job security because of the pandemic.

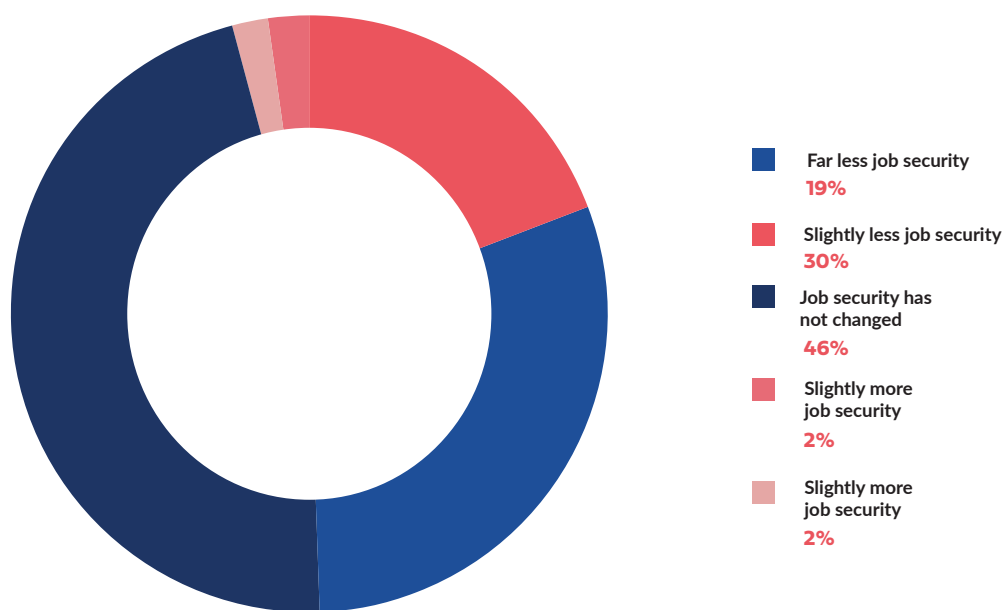


FIGURE 17: Impact of the pandemic on journalists' job security

61%



61% of freelance journalists reported a decrease in workload, while 61% of journalists in permanent positions experienced an increase in workload.

76%

of survey respondents reported a change to their workload since the beginning of the pandemic.

Workload

76% of survey respondents reported a change to their workload since the beginning of the pandemic. The majority of journalists (54%) reported an increase to their workload, while 22% reported a decrease. However, responses significantly differed depending on employment type.



54%

Increase to workload



22%

Decrease to workload

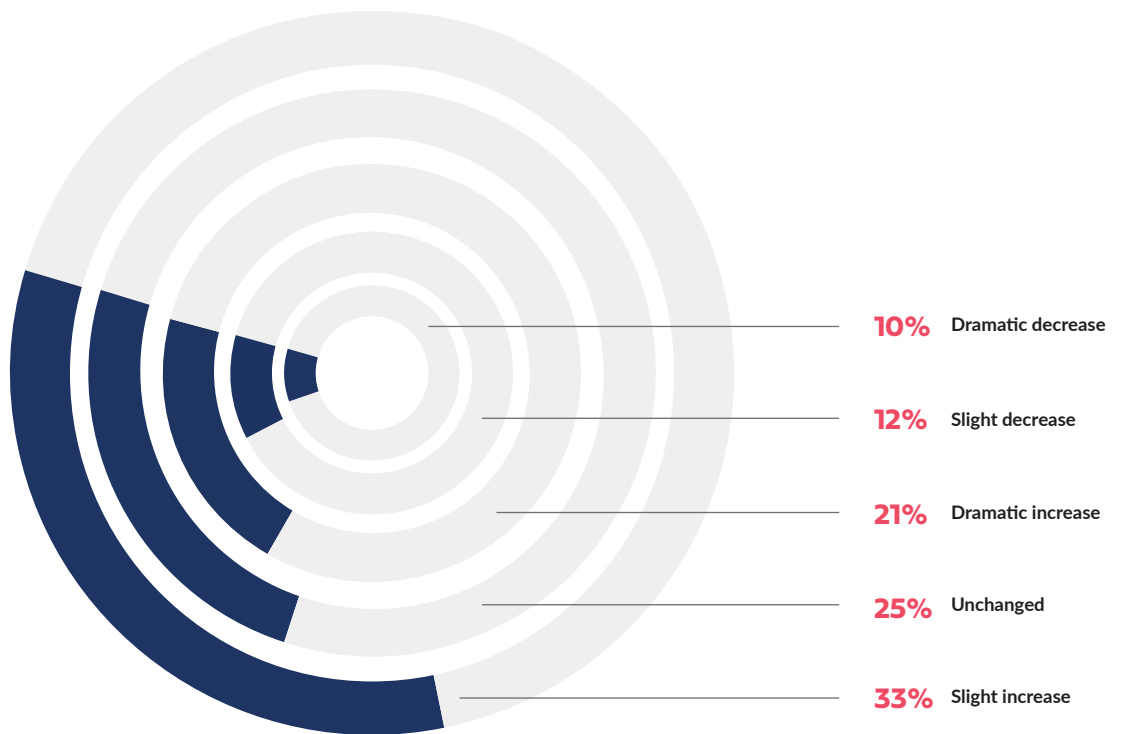


FIGURE18: Workload changes since the beginning of the pandemic

Work efficacy and barriers

29% of the respondents said the greatest disruption to their work was the financial impact of the pandemic on media organisations, and 22% said the greatest disruption was restrictions on freedom of movement. A smaller number cited either risks to the physical health and safety of journalists or an increase in harassment/undermining of the media as having the greatest impact. 37% said all of these factors had a negative impact.

95%

of journalists said that the pandemic has impacted their ability to work effectively.



Journalists highlighted that the financial cost to media organisations has both impacted the quality, depth and focus of the content produced, and also cost many journalists their job, leaving the remaining journalists stressed and overworked.

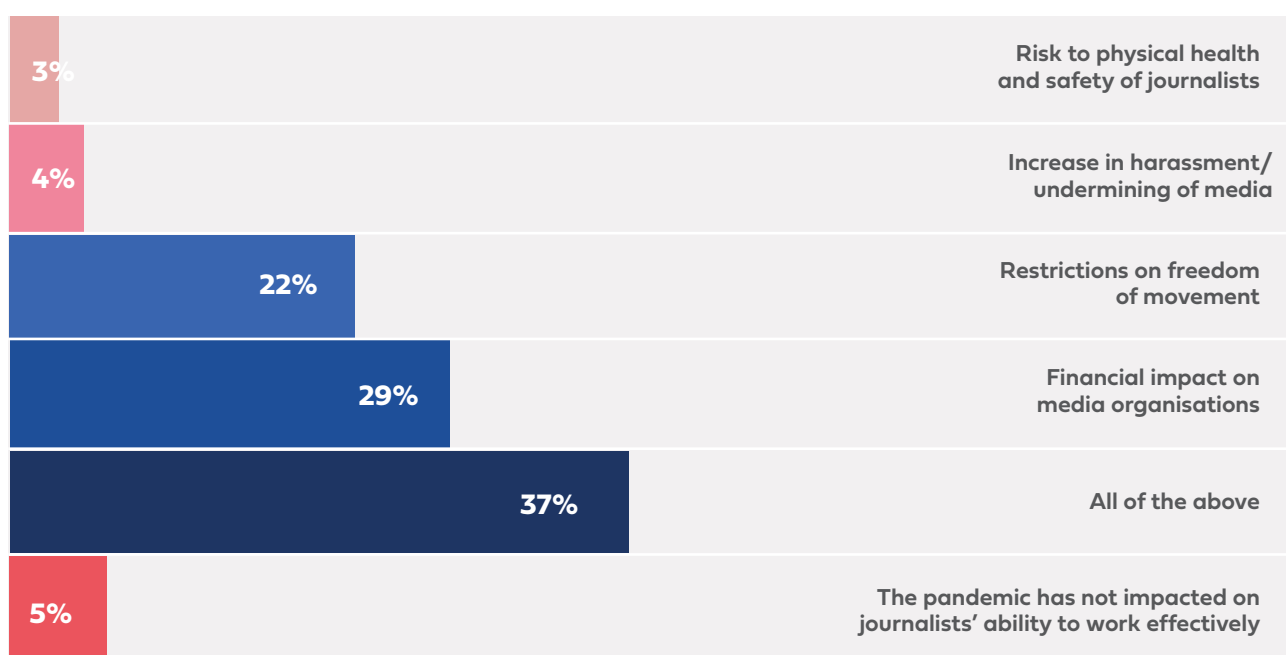


FIGURE 19: Greatest pandemic-related impact on journalists' ability to work effectively



**Chasing down stories
[is] particularly
difficult. There is less
money in it, which
impacts what we can
do. There seems to be
a growing segment of
the population that
does not trust the
media.**



I believe journalists were already in a position where lack of resources and staffing were an issue, but the pandemic accelerated that. It leads to the content itself suffering. I work as the only journalist at our station and this isn't just limited to the pandemic, but we just don't have the ability to cover everything in our region. There are times where I can't cover a story to the extent that I would like because I don't have the time to undertake effective research and I'm sure I'm not alone in that thinking.

Personal challenges

The biggest challenges in 2020 for surveyed respondents were lack of peer contact, changes in workload and mental health. Of the 8% of respondents who noted other challenges, uncertainty about the future was a common theme, as was the challenge of juggling work while homeschooling children.

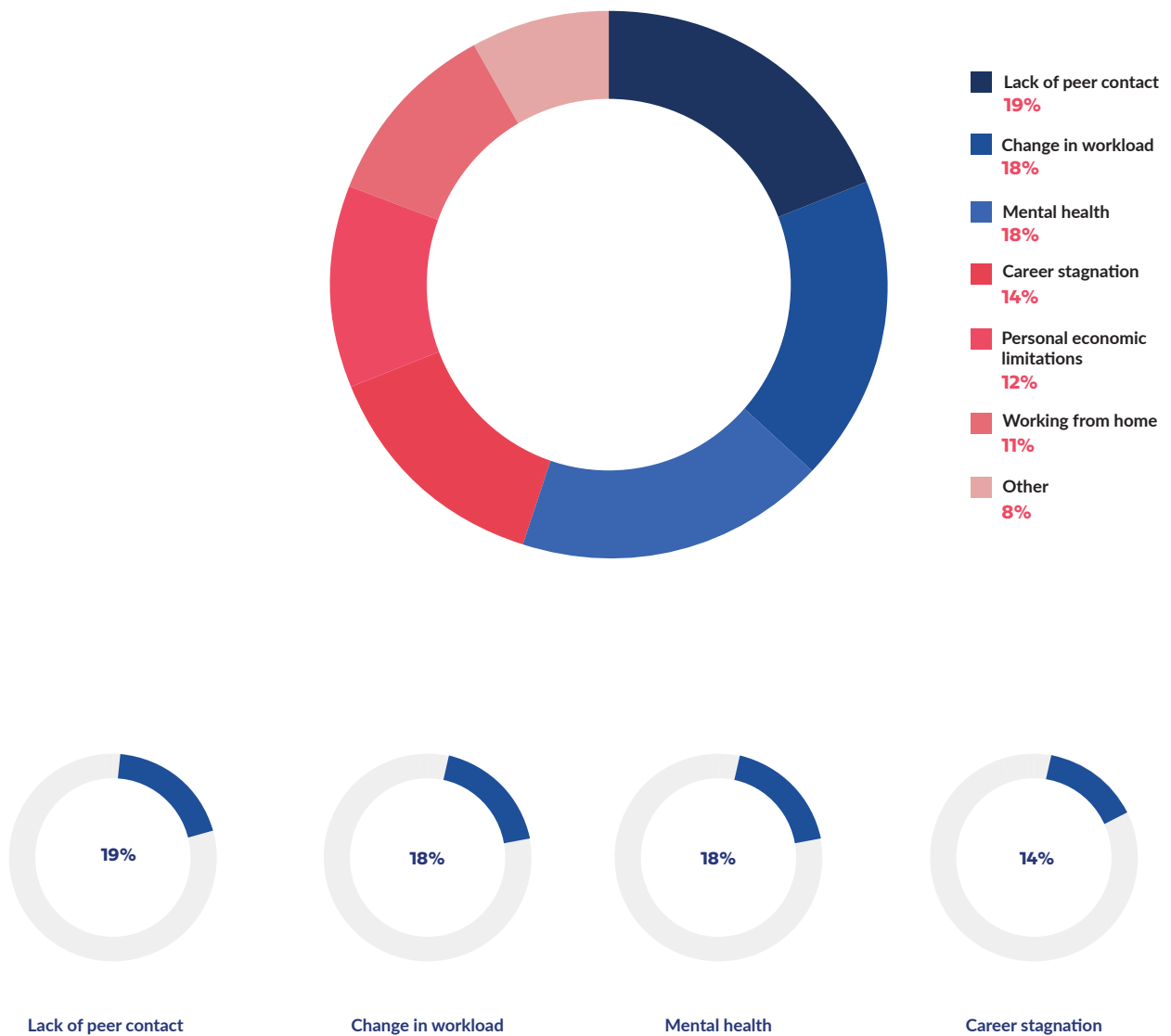


FIGURE 20: Biggest challenge for journalists in 2020

About Medianet

Medianet, a division of Mediality is a provider of PR software and media intelligence solutions to both the media and public relations industries.



Medianet holds a unique position central to all media, providing a 360-degree approach to connecting organisations with the media and measuring impact. With a team dedicated to media research, we provide rich information sets and new insights daily into the ever changing media landscape.

Target the Media Media Influencer Database

Medianet's Contacts Database is the ultimate insight tool for professionals engaged with the media in Australia. Discover information-rich profiles of Australian and New Zealand-based journalists, and effectively manage contact lists, organise your favourite searches, create tasks and distribute media releases.

Share Your Story Press Release Distribution

Medianet's Press Release Distribution portal provides you with access to over 1,400 ready-to-use media lists as well as web and social publishing options to help your stories connect with Australia and the world. Further maximise your campaign by implementing Multimedia News Releases, Audio News Releases and International Releases, and never miss out on a pitching opportunity.

Understand your Impact Reporting and Media Analysis

Receive personalised feedback on releases distributed via Medianet with our exclusive Medianet Editor Feedback. Learn what worked well in your press release and areas to improve for future pitches. Discover how to further progress and shape your media and communications strategy with our media analysis arm, Mediaverse. Receive tailored reports and daily newsletters to understand and enhance your media performance.

Connect with the Media Events and Training

Medianet's Masterclass series connects you with key influencers and newsrooms from across all media sectors and industries to share their insights and knowledge on the media and how to best connect with them. Additionally, build your pitching and writing skills at Medianet's Writing and Pitching to Journalists Workshop held throughout the year. Discover what you will need to ensure your press releases gain the media's attention to get the run it deserves. All events and training courses are created to help all media professionals learn key ingredients journalists look for and how to strategically plan your next release.

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