

Customer Discovery Report on Misinformation

Entrepreneurial Design Project - McMillon Innovation Studio

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Fundamental considerations for our study:

- We conducted a survey and one on one interviews. The former had the purpose of proving or disproving some assumptions, and the latter had the purpose of letting our interviewees lead the conversation to the topics that interested or worried them the most. Each approach is summarized in the following results.
- For our survey, we adjusted the questions and the format of the survey itself as we received responses and feedback. This means that there are some questions that were only added after suggestions were made (which means that they have fewer responses than others, though we believe the numerical differences are not significant between them), so we are specifying the number of respondents for the questions.
- We want to give as many details of our thought process regarding our customer discovery plan as we consider necessary. Considering this, we have highlighted our most important results through this document. Lastly, our ending section under the name of *summary statements* is what we believe have the strongest importance moving forward in our process.

Problem Statement:

How do people feel about issues related to modern information environments such as misinformation?

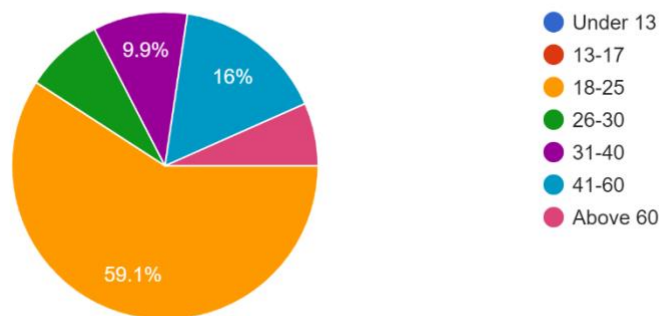
Our problem statement does not look for a solution yet, per our situation of being in a process of discovery. Meaning we are looking for the greatest picture possible on modern information environments and misinformation first. In order to decide which specific problem we want to tackle. Also, we haven't defined a set of potential customers. This means, again that we are open to considering any group of potential customers out there. Finally, our problem statement does not have a why. This all might seem risky at first. However, we want to emphasize that we are aware that we did not start with an approachable problem and rather with an open topic. Why? It seems to be the case that misinformation represents an actual threat to societies and individuals with a global scope. That means that it is necessary for us to do something about this, even though we are still not sure what that something is. We also believe it is okay not to be sure what we need to do yet since this problem seems to be as complicated as it gets, given its nature. Indeed, information (and its negative: misinformation) are inevitably related to almost every aspect of our lives, from healthcare to politics. It is then expected for us to encounter a complex problem. However, we are hopeful to spot things that were at first hidden from us and that will then provide insights that will allow us to advance a solution that is both practical and meaningful.

Report Analysis

Who responded to our survey and interviews? We had a total of 181 responses. However, as mentioned above, some questions did not include all our total respondents as they were included after the first feedback we received. 41.4% of our respondents have some college, and 33.7% have a bachelor's degree. 59.1% of our respondents are between 18 and 25 years old. 61.3% of our respondents are students, and 54.1% of our respondents are employed. 43% and 20% of our respondents got the survey through email and Facebook, respectively.

What's your age?

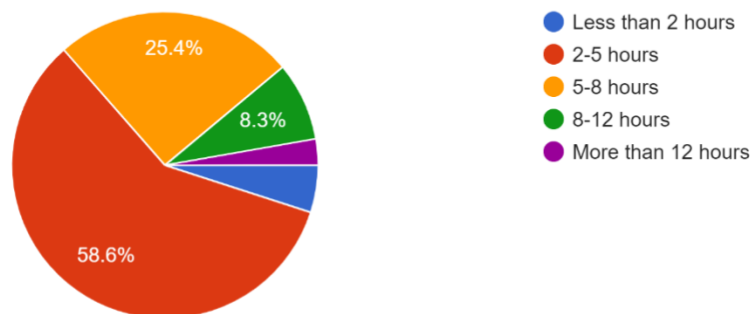
181 responses



Where do our respondents get information from? We found that, among 181 respondents, 58.6% of respondents spend between 2 to 5 hours a day using digital media (search engines, social media, video and audio streaming services, websites, etc.), with a 25.4% spending between 5 and 8 hours. On the other hand, we saw that only 22.7% of respondents spent between 2 and 5 hours a day using traditional media (broadcast TV and radio, printed newspapers and magazines, billboards, direct mail, etc.), and 76.2% of respondents spent less than 2 hours a day using these traditional media.

How much time do you spend per day using digital media? This includes search engines, social media, video and audio streaming services, and websites.

181 responses



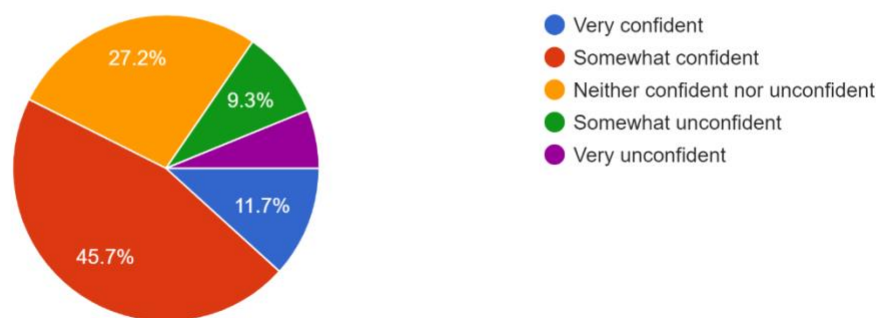
Among these 181 respondents, 71.8% get their news from social media, and 49.2% got their news from search engines, 40.3% get their news from newspapers' websites or magazines' websites, 35.9% get their news from podcasts (audio streaming), 29.3% get their news from broadcast TV, and 22.1% get their news from video streaming services, with only 12.7% and 8.3% getting their news from broadcast radio and printed newspapers or magazines, respectively.

When asked to explain why they used these types of news media instead of others, the most popular reason was *convenience or ease of access*. Now, even though trivial, it might seem a good idea to also explore the question of why these news media are more convenient or easy to access than others. For that, we could then try to look at the other given reasons. First, we see that some respondents valued the flexibility of topics and time access, as well as a curated service, i.e., *they valued the possibility to access the news any time and easily navigate and curate the content (topic) of their news*. Another reason mentioned at least once was the ease of sharing. Also, a reason mentioned was that some respondents were not interested in all the news, which relates to the curated/flexibility of content reason.

However, a reason that was only mentioned a few times in our survey was trust or reliability. Indeed, only a few respondents (8 out of 181) directly referred to trust (in positive or negative terms) when asked why they use these news media instead of others. This might entail that the respondents don't consider it an important reason or that it is rather implied and given whenever these news media are used. We then asked the respondents how confident they felt to trust these news media. 45.7% said they felt somewhat confident to trust these media, and 27.2% said they felt neither confident nor unconfident. This distribution seems to suggest that for most of our respondents, high levels of trust are not required when it comes to deciding which media to use. Trust might still be regarded as a valuable feature when it comes to looking for news, but it seems not to be the primary reason.

How confident do you feel to trust the news media you use?

162 responses



Next, we wanted to see which sources or media people felt they could trust the least and why. It wasn't surprising to find that among 162 respondents, 80.2% of them felt that they could trust social media the least, and 50% of them felt that they could trust broadcast TV the least. When asked which sources or media they felt they could trust the most, respondents followed a less

prominent inclination to which source or media they considered to be more trustworthy, with 30.9% of respondents having mentioned newspapers or magazines' websites, 30.2% of respondents having mentioned search engines, and 29% of respondents having mentioned printed books. This suggests that more people would agree on which sources or media we can certainly trust the least, but that wouldn't be the case for the sources or media that seem to be trustworthy. Indeed, fewer people agreed on this latter. This is interesting because it supports the idea that *we wouldn't usually know what source to trust*.

When asked why they felt that they could not trust these sources, respondents seemed to gravitate toward certain reasons among several. Those reasons were that the respondents identified the sources or media as being biased, not requiring certification or credentials to publish, being opinion-based and highly individualized, being created to profit rather than to share quality news, is owned by the wealthy and powerful, being easy to manipulate, and people usually not checking what they share on there.

Did our respondents ever feel they were exposed to misinformation? Most of the respondents, more than 80% said that they had felt or believed that the information sources or news media they were using were at some point misinforming or misleading with some of its content. *This shows that misinformation (as a characteristic of information environments) is evident for most of our respondents.* Supporting these results, the site Pew Research Center published that “two-thirds of U.S. adults say they’ve seen their own news sources report facts meant to favor one side.” Among 162 respondents, 89.5% of them said that social media was the type of media or source that they had found to be misleading at some point. Followed by broadcast TV (60.5%), newspapers or magazines websites (50.6%), search engines (42%), podcast (37%), broadcast radio (36.4%), printed newspapers or magazines (34. Among 162 respondents, 89.5% of them said that social media was the type of media or source that they had found to be misleading at some point. 6%), and video streaming (30.9%).

Have you ever felt or believed that the information sources or news media you were using were at some point misinforming or misleading with some of its content?

181 responses



The following question was about how they had realized that those sources or media were misleading. The reasons were several and various. However, three of them were mentioned

several times. First, inconsistency or contradiction between information from different sources was found to be a primary way to spot misleading sources. Second, sources that were biased, polarized, scripted, or with an agenda were the hint for the respondents to spot them as misinforming. Finally, some respondents referred to these misleading sources as opinion-based, sensationalized, or not backed by backs, which became their criteria to spot them.

Now, we also wanted to know if the realization of those sources or media being misleading had made the respondents feel disappointed or frustrated or had affected the respondents' level of trust in these sources. A significant number of respondents said they felt indeed disappointed or frustrated. Also, some respondents said they took things with a grain of salt after that, and others said they do not use those sources.

Then we wanted to know if they had shared this with their friends, family, or contacts, and how they had reacted. It was surprising for us to see the various responses we got when respondents did share their insights on misinformation with others. This variety of reactions does show that information and misinformation are complex, broad, and connect many dots. Indeed, if information were a simple feature of human interactions, we wouldn't expect as many reactions from others. This also suggests that the problem of *sharing information that is true* represents a difficult task, probably even more difficult than structuring truthful information. We found that about 28% among 167 respondents did not share their findings or tell anyone about them, which represents an interesting figure to look at. The question is inevitable: why did they not tell others about their insights on misinformation? In absence of any clear suggestions, we prefer to avoid speculations.

Do our respondents believe that misinformation is a problem? Probably the question with the most complicated set of answers happened to be whether the respondents had ever considered that misinformation is a problem? If so, we asked, why do you think it is a problem? Given the variety of answers that we received, we believe it was a good criterion to classify them by whether 1) the respondents explicitly included themselves as being affected or part of the problem, 2) the respondents referred to the public or other consumers of information without including themselves, 3) the respondents did not refer either to themselves or other consumers of information. This criterion, we believe, gives us the chance to see whether the respondents felt that misinformation was a problem they wanted to be solved. In fact, including themselves in the statement of the problem, would suggest that they would value a solution to it since it is somehow affecting them.

Considering that, our survey offers an interesting perspective. Most of our respondents did not explicitly include themselves as directly related to the problem, neither as part of the problem nor as affected by it. In fact, most of the respondents referred to the problem of misinformation in terms of others. For instance, they would gravitate towards *themes* such as these ones: 'people trust the first things they see/hear without fact-checking,' 'misinformation forms their perspectives, informs their votes, and shapes the way they see the world,' or 'it is dividing our society.' Specifically, we can cite statements such as "I think *it is a problem for those* that may have difficulty discerning right from wrong or factual from fallacy," "Absolutely, because *it influences people* to make bad decisions when they don't have all the facts," "Yes. *People hear one thing* and run with it whether it's true or not. This is due to their lack of time to do their own research or simply just laziness." These statements show the distance most respondents create between themselves and

the problem, which is a pattern we should carefully understand in order to move to our next phase.

Next, we wanted to see how respondents identified with the following statements related to whether they believed misinformation was a problem and if it was affecting them. Our results are interesting. First, we found out that *most respondents agreed that misinformation was a problem*. Indeed, the statements were organized in decreasing order of agreement with the highest agreed statement being that “Misinformation is a critical problem,” and the least agreed statement being that “Misinformation is not a problem.” Supporting these results as well as our results regarding the consideration by our respondents that social media are the source that they could trust the least, we include the results from the page *Statista* in the article “Fake News in the U.S.- statistics and facts,” that states that *67% of Americans “believe fake news causes a great deal of confusion.”* Also, the website Pew Research Center published that “*64% of Americans say social media have a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. today.*”

Which statement do you identify with the most?

157 responses



Nevertheless, when it came to identifying themselves with the other set of statements, the respondents showed what we were expecting from our open-ended question of whether they believed misinformation is a problem. Indeed, instead of identifying with “Misinformation affects me a lot” (which was ranked second), most respondents identified with the statement “Misinformation affects me somehow,” and (ranked third) the fewest of them identified with the statement “Misinformation does not affect me.” These results, we believe, have important consequences. Indeed, we suggest that *these results entail that most of the respondents think of misinformation as a distant problem that only touches and affects them indirectly as members of a society that is directly affected by the problem.*

Which statement do you identify with the most?

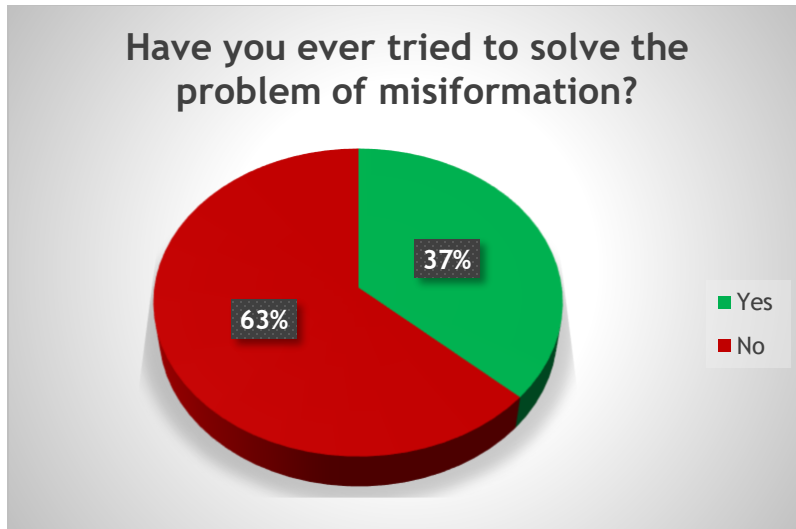
157 responses



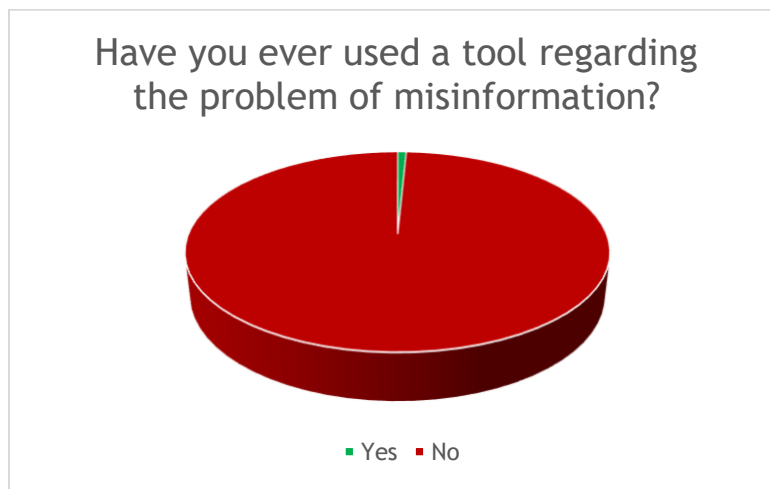
Moreover, we found that among the 117 respondents that said that misinformation was affecting them (from a group of a total of 171 respondents for this specific question), *16 respondents said that it took too much time or effort to analyze information and identify whether something was true or not*, and some said that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of information that there is out there.

The other common answers we got from respondents regarding the question of whether misinformation was affecting them or not was that misinformation affects 1) societies, 2) others, 3) interpersonal relationships, 4) policymaking, and 5) stress or feeling annoyed. However, we believe that these problems are either too broad or unspecified to be tackled by a startup. Also, a theme mentioned three times was that misinformation affects their jobs (journalism, healthcare, and digital media). Regarding this last topic (jobs), it seems that there are two problems. First, people (customers) might not to trust their expertise (of the respondents) because the former are misinformed, and second, it might be hard for themselves (the respondents) to identify what is true or not in their working environments.

If any, what are our respondents doing to solve misinformation? Another fundamental question for us to ask was whether the respondents had ever tried to solve the problem of misinformation (given that they believed it was a problem). We did not specify what we meant by 'solve the problem,' and we left the question open to interpretations. Among 147 respondents, 37% of them had tried to solve the problem. However, in most of their answers, the respondents talked about fact-checking, checking other sources, and doing their own research when they meant 'to solve the problem.'

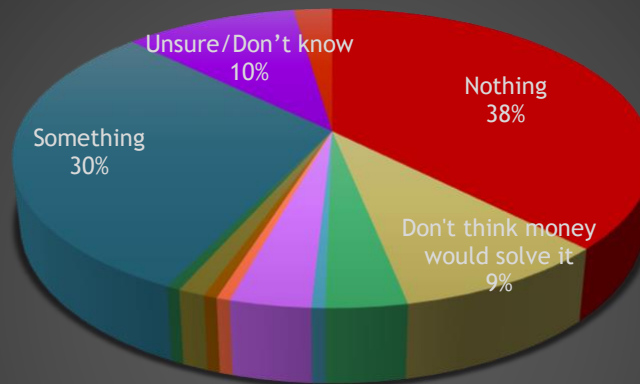


Then, we wanted to know if the respondents had used any tool. Again, we did not specify what we meant by 'tool' in this regard, and we wanted this to be also an open-ended question. Our results were expected, but truly surprising. Only 1 person among 128 respondents had ever used a tool, and this person had research interests on the topic. This suggests that respondents did not consider fact-checking as a tool, and they were considering this question in the sense of a third party that would provide a solution. This might also suggest that we are in front of an untapped market given that there are solutions out there, such as tools, available for the public, but they are not aware of them, even though some respondents are clearly frustrated by this problem and would pay to solve it. Indeed, we know that some respondents would pay to make this problem go away, and that was our next question.



Then, a big question: how much would you pay to make this problem go away? It was reasonable to expect that some people would pay a certain amount to make this problem go away since some people said this problem was affecting them a lot, and our results were consistent. Indeed, 30% of people said they would pay a certain amount to make this problem go away. However, it was larger the group of people that said that they would not pay to make this problem go away. Indeed, this latter group included a section of more than 50% of respondents.

How much would you pay to make this problem go away?

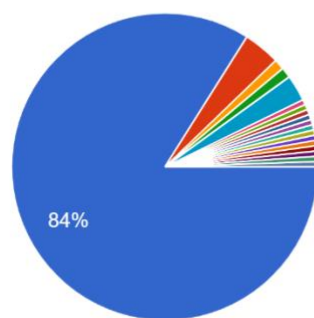


- Nothing
- Shouldn't pay to get the truth
- Impossible for it not to exist
- Media and journalists responsibility
- It's a community problem
- Unsure/Don't know
- Don't think money would solve it
- None. It's my responsibility
- Not even a problem
- Depends on the solution
- Something
- Jokes

Finally, we asked our respondents how much they were currently spending to address this problem and what budget they were allocating to solve it. The results were consistent with our expectations: about 84% of our respondents had neither allocated any budget to solve this problem nor were spending any money to solve it.

How much do you currently spend to address this problem?

181 responses



- \$0
- \$1-\$10
- \$11-\$25
- \$25-\$50
- \$50-75
- More than \$75
- Personally I don't have the resources t...
- not sure

▲ 1/3 ▼

What budget do you have allocated to this?

181 responses



Thoughts on misinformation:

- ❖ The solution is education but not only education. Media literacy is a big part of it. However, the solution is to also create better tools to adapt faster to the technology world.
Mario Troncoso
- ❖ Misinformation is tied to other big problems like getting followers and validating their beliefs. A solution to this problem is a way to save democracy.
Caleb Talley
- ❖ If people have journalists' procedural/structural education or knowledge, then they can better stop the spread of misinformation. If we reduce our focus of attention on misinformation to a bucket, then we can tackle it to expand our system.
Aron Shelton
- ❖ "The crisis we face about 'truth' and reliable facts is predicated less on the ability to get people to believe the *wrong* thing as it is on the ability to get people to *doubt* the right thing."
Jamaia Cascio, Pew Research Center
- ❖ "We were in this position before, when printing presses broke the existing system of information management. A new system emerged, and I believe we have the motivation and capability to do it again."
Jonathan Grudin, Pew Research Center

Summary Statements:

✚ 59.1% of our respondents are between 18 and 25 years old. 61.3% of our respondents are students, and 54.1% of our respondents are employed.

✚ Among 181 respondents, 58.6% of them spend between 2 to 5 hours a day using digital media (search engines, social media, video and audio streaming services, websites, etc.), whereas 76.2% of them spent less than 2 hours a day using these traditional media.

✚ Among these 181 respondents, 71.8% *get their news from social media*, and 49.2% got their news from search engines, 40.3% get their news from newspapers' websites or magazines' websites.

✚ When asked to explain why they used these types of news media instead of others, the most popular reason was *convenience or ease of access*.

✚ Only a few respondents (8 out of 181) directly referred to trust (in positive or negative terms) when asked why they use some news media instead of others. Trust might still be regarded as a valuable feature when it comes to looking for news, but it seems not to be the primary reason.

✚ Among 162 respondents, 80.2% of them felt that they could trust social media the least, and 50% of them felt that they could trust broadcast TV the least.

✚ When asked which sources or media they felt they could trust the most, respondents followed a less prominent inclination to which source or media they considered to be more trustworthy, with 30.9% of respondents having mentioned newspapers or magazines' websites, 30.2% of respondents having mentioned search engines, and 29% of respondents having mentioned printed books. This might support the idea that *we wouldn't usually know what source to trust or not*.

✚ Most of the respondents, more than 80% said that they had felt or believed that the information sources or news media they were using were at some point misinforming or misleading with some of its content. *This shows that misinformation (as a characteristic of information environments) is evident for most of our respondents*.

✚ Among 162 respondents, 89.5% of them said that social media was the type of media or source that they had found to be misleading at some point, followed by broadcast TV (60.5%), newspapers or magazines websites (50.6%), search engines (42%).

✚ Inconsistency or contradiction between information from different sources was found to be a primary way to spot misleading sources. Second, sources that were biased, polarized, scripted, or with an agenda were the hint for the respondents to spot them as misinforming. A significant number of respondents said they felt indeed disappointed or frustrated when they found out that that source was misleading.

✚ We found that about 28% among 167 respondents did not share their findings or tell anyone about them, which represents an interesting figure to look at.

✚ We found out that *most respondents agreed that misinformation was a problem*.

✚ Most of our respondents did not explicitly include themselves (neither as part of the problem nor as affected by it) when asked whether they did consider misinformation was a problem or not.

Instead of identifying with "Misinformation affects me a lot" (which was ranked second), most respondents identified with the statement "Misinformation affects me