

Perceptions of Media and Misinformation

Summary

Over the past few weeks, our local partners across three provinces (Anbar, Ninewa, and Diyala) in Iraq have collected data to understand public perceptions of media and assess the trustworthiness of media sources.

In brief, here are some key insights from the findings:

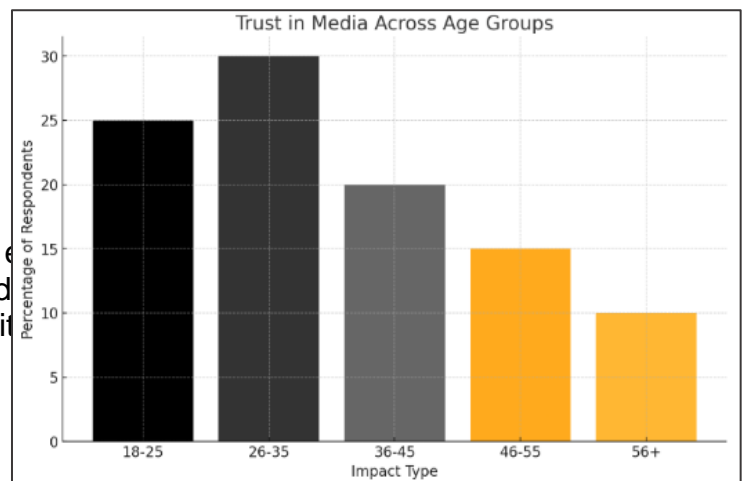
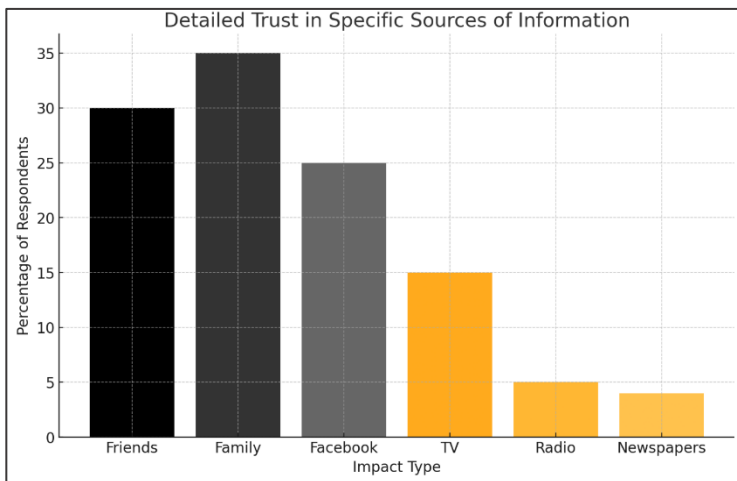
- Many people expressed a lack of trust in social media, indicating a general skepticism towards news sources.
- Friends and family were seen as the most trustworthy sources of local news. Respondents believe their close social circles provide more accurate and reliable information. Facebook and TV channels were also mentioned but were trusted less.
- Respondents feel that the media is often biased, politically motivated, and prone to exaggeration. They believe it covers certain aspects of the community unfairly while ignoring others.
- The spread of fake news is a major concern, as it causes fear, creates division, and leads people to make decisions based on false information. This is particularly true for misinformation about security incidents, regional powers, and humanitarian aid.

Trusted sources of information

A significant portion of respondents expressed a lack of trust in social media platforms, citing these platforms as frequent sources of unverified and biased information.

This widespread distrust underscores the urgent need for enhanced digital literacy and robust fact-checking mechanisms. Misinformation spread via social media not only erodes public trust but also undermines social cohesion.

The majority of respondents indicated that they consider friends and family as their primary sources of reliable information. Following this, Facebook and television were identified as the next most trusted sources

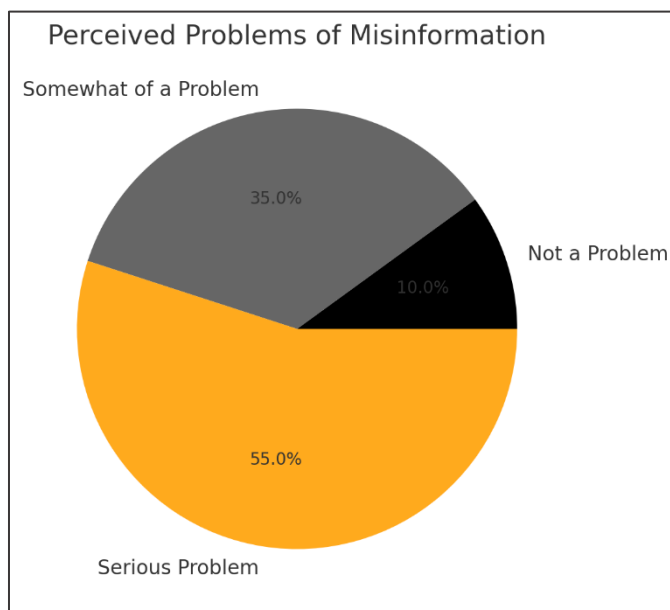


The heavy reliance on personal networks indicates a low level of institutional trust. This situation necessitates traditional media outlets to rebuild credibility through transparency, accuracy, and active community engagement. For those who trusted specific Facebook pages or TV channels, the common reason was the proximity of these channels to the events and their consistent reliability over time.

These perceptions of bias necessitate media organizations to adopt more balanced reporting practices and transparently disclose potential conflicts of interest. Strengthened journalistic standards and accountability are crucial to regaining public trust.

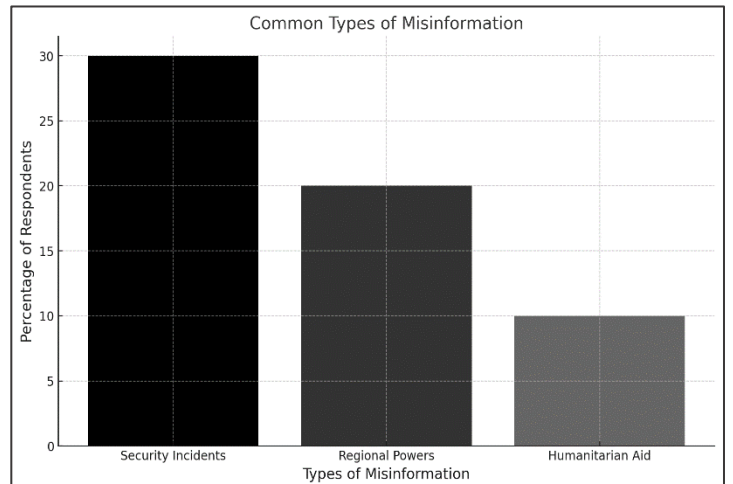
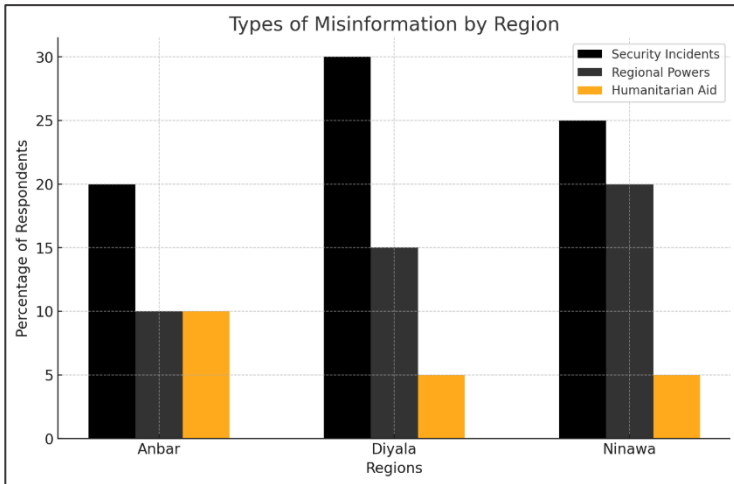
Misinformation

The majority of respondents indicated that misinformation is either a serious problem or somewhat of a problem in their area, as illustrated in the graph below:



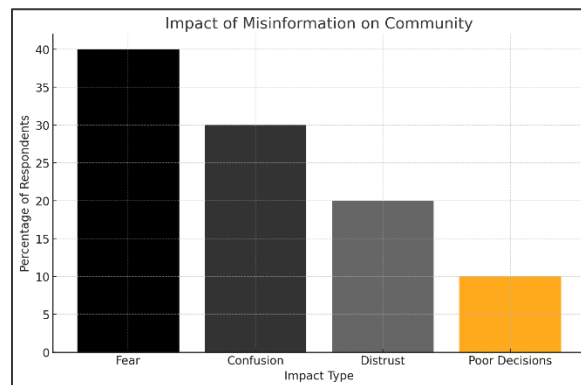
A minority of respondents stated that misinformation was not a problem in their area. This group believes that people in their community are adept at distinguishing between real and fake news.

Regarding the most common types of misinformation in their areas, the majority of respondents identified issues related security incidents as the most prevalent. This was followed by misinformation concerning the presence of regional powers, and humanitarian aid and development, as illustrated in the graph below.



The prevalence of misinformation in these areas reflects the broader issues of trust and information verification in the media landscape. Addressing these misinformation types requires targeted interventions to restore public confidence.

The impact of misinformation is profound, instilling unnecessary fear and panic among the public, eroding trust within the community and towards information sources, and leading to poor decision-making based on inaccurate information, which can have serious consequences.



The detrimental effects of misinformation highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to combat fake news, including public education campaigns, collaboration with tech companies, and the establishment of reliable information hubs.

Recommendation

To address the pervasive issue of misinformation and rebuild public trust in the media, a multifaceted approach is essential. First, launching nationwide media literacy programs can equip the public with the skills to critically evaluate information, identify credible sources, and recognize misinformation. Establishing independent media watchdogs to monitor and report on media bias and accuracy will foster accountability and enhance public trust. Advanced technologies such as AI should be utilized to detect and counteract misinformation in real-time. Finally, rebuilding public trust in traditional media through initiatives that emphasize journalistic integrity, transparency, and public engagement is imperative. Public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of credible journalism and the role of media in a democratic society will play a significant role in this effort. Through these strategic recommendations, stakeholders can create an informed and resilient society capable of navigating the complexities of the modern information landscape.