

December 2022

# Situation Report

## Media literacy, disinformation & misinformation in the Caribbean

# Acknowledgements

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## Researchers



### **Ava Turnquest**

Ava Turnquest is a literary alchemist based in The Bahamas that uses her prowess as a journalist in the pursuit of an equitable, more egalitarian society. She is passionate about the role of the fourth estate to inform, educate, and sensitise the communities that they serve; and her research interests center on the relationship between news media agenda setting, media uses and gratification, and social development in small island states. Ava worked as a print journalist for 10 years, and is currently Head of Digital at a broadcast and online news agency. Her most notable beat coverage spans, but is not limited to: politics, immigration, human rights (with a concentration on minority groups: women, migrants, and LGBT+), and environmental issues.



### **Esther Jones**

Esther Jones has been a multimedia specialist for over 20 years; working in film, stage, television and digital media in producing, screenwriting, acting, directing, set design, wardrobe and coordinating. A graduate of the Toronto Metropolitan University, formerly Ryerson University's Radio and Television Arts Programme, Esther has worked on several music videos, large-budget studio films, fashion videos and shows, documentaries and public relations campaigns in North America and the Caribbean.

Esther freelanced for several publications, including Island Life Magazine, Arts Etc., Barbados Nation Newspaper, and recently for the Media Institute of the Caribbean and the Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network.

Esther received several awards for her work from the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, the Royal Commonwealth Society's Commonwealth Vision Award and the Pan American Health Organisation. Esther also works on web and social media campaigns for the Government of Barbados.



### **Linda Straker**

Linda Straker entered the profession of journalism in May 1997 as a junior reporter with The Grenadian Voice after completion of a journalism programme at the T A Marryshow Community College. After five years as a print journalist, she became a member of the newsroom staff at WeeFM Radio where she was involved in newsgathering, production and presentation.

Throughout the years Linda attended numerous training, fellowships, conferences, workshops and seminars as part of her pursuit for ongoing education to keep up with trends and styles in the profession. In 2005, she became the first OECS correspondent for the Paris based Reporters Without Borders and continues to serve currently. Meanwhile, since 2007 she has worked full time as an independent/freelance journalist and continues to work as a stringer for the Associated Press's Caribbean Office; a

Correspondent for the Caribbean Media Corporation; and a main contributor for Nowgrenada.com. Notably, Linda possesses a Diploma in Intellectual Property Rights Law from the World Intellectual Property Academy and a Certificate in Journalism from Columbia University, New York.



### **Nazima Raghubir**

Ms. Nazima Raghubir is a print and broadcast journalist based in Guyana. She has been in the media all her working life as a writer, reporter, managing editor and news presenter with stints at Prime News, as editor of the public affairs journal "Insight", and as a stringer/correspondent for several regional and international news organisations.

In 2018, she became the first woman to head the now 77-year-old Guyana Press Association and in 2020 she was elected to head the Association of Caribbean Media Workers which represents national media associations across the Caribbean.

Ms. Raghubir has also authored and edited several print and multimedia productions, including a published guide to the Parliament of Guyana, documentaries covering development and human rights issues, and numerous conference presentations. In her native Guyana, she is viewed as a reliable resource for the mentoring of new and young journalists and as a supporter of human rights.



### **Dr. Corinne Barnes**

Dr. Corinne Barnes holds a PhD in Communication Studies. She teaches courses in Media Ethics and Legal Issues, Media Research and Production, and News and Feature Writing at the Caribbean School of Media and Communication (CARIMAC), The University of the West Indies, Mona. She is also Vice-President of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC Caribe). She has published papers in the areas of Media and Violence, Citizen Journalism, Journalism Education and Health Communication, and has presented those papers internationally at academic conferences. She has conducted training for journalists in the Caribbean on the coverage of HIV and AIDS, Investigative Journalism, among other areas.



### **Colvin Harry**

Colvin Harry is a career radio broadcaster from the islands of St Vincent and the Grenadines and currently works at the state-owned National Broadcasting Corporation, NBC Radio. He started his broadcast career at the age of 17 and never looked back. He has since worked his way up from an Announcer in 2006 to Programme Assistant in 2013, later becoming a Programme Manager in 2014. Most recently, the highlight of his career was during the 2021 volcanic eruptions in St Vincent and the Grenadines where he spent a total of 30 days at NBC Radio along with his General Manager providing 24-hour programming with regular updates on the eruptions and the response. He also provided on the ground reports live for international news outlet Al Jazeera English.

He has a special love for broadcasting and recently began to dabble in television. Outside of radio, Colvin is a tropical weather enthusiast and traces his interest in weather back over 25 years.



## Harvey Panka

Harvey Milton Panka is a Surinamese senior journalist born, raised, and living in Paramaribo. He has 26 years of experience in the field of broadcast journalism. He currently works at ATV-Suriname as a TV show host and news editor.

Born in September 1972, he started his a career as a second year law student from the Anton de Kom University of Suriname at the Suriname Television Foundation (STVS) in Paramaribo. After a year he became aware that journalism was his true passion, so he ended his study at the university to pursue a career in journalism.

He has done many training and internships in his field in Suriname, the Caribbean region, The Netherlands, and China. He also holds a Bachelor of Art degree in Journalism and Communication. Mr. Panka is a lecturer at the Academy of Higher Arts and Culture Education (AHKCO); General Secretary of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM); and the past Treasurer of The Association of Surinamese Journalists (ASJ).



## Kiran Maharaj

Ms. Kiran Maharaj is the President and Co-Founder of the non-profit Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC) headquartered in Jamaica and Founder of the Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network (CIJN). Ms. Maharaj's media industry experience spans 30 years in radio, television, film, print, and events management.

Her media career began as a freelance journalist with local newspapers and CNN World Report. Today – beyond her roles at MIC and CIJN – Ms. Maharaj is the Immediate Past President of the Trinidad & Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association; a Board Director of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce; and the Managing Director of Caribbean Lifestyle Communications.

In 2019 she received the Woman of Courage Award, presented by the US Embassy in Trinidad. She is also a former Debates Commissioner for the T&T Debates Commission. Most recently, she led the research and authorship for UNESCO's pilot study on Media Viability Indicators with Jamaica as the case study.

Ms. Maharaj's current advocacy thrust is focused on creating a Caribbean-wide legislative framework for Freedom of Information Legislation as a mechanism to uphold democracy by encouraging transparency and accountability, especially with regards to procurement and deployment of resources.



## Denis Chabrol

Mr. Denis Chabrol is an award-winning Caribbean journalist based in Guyana. He has been working in the media industry since 1984 in the technical, production, on-air and news and current affairs fields of broadcasting. In the area of journalism, he is the pioneer of Online journalism in Guyana, having founded Demerara Waves Online News.

Now the holder of a Bsc Degree in Communications from the University of Guyana, Denis started his media career as a high school intern at the now defunct Guyana Broadcasting Corporation. During his almost 40 years in the media, he has worked for several Caribbean and international media organisations including Radio Antilles, Christian Science Monitor, Caribbean News Agency, the British Broadcasting Corporation's Caribbean Service and Agence France-Presse.

He is an executive member of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers and the



Guyana Press Association. Previously, he has served as the Caribbean representative on the Global Forum for Media Development and has represented the Caribbean at World Press Freedom Day conferences in Ghana and Indonesia.

He is a strong advocate of ongoing training and education in both technical and non-technical aspects of media as well as adherence to the conventional standards of journalism to counter unethical practices, misinformation and disinformation while pursuing the truth in service of the public's interest.

# Foreword

## Fostering collective action

The Caribbean region is characterised by a diverse and dynamic media landscape dominated by private and commercial operators. Widespread availability of low-cost digital services is lowering access barriers and increasing competition. The combination of market pressures, efforts to increase audience share and the drive to be first-to-publish has led to a rise in sensational, unverified media content. This is fueling the disinfodemic and erosion of trust in the media.

These circumstances are not unique to the Caribbean. Numerous global fora have debated and drawn attention to the proliferation and promotion of disinformation. Access to verifiable, reliable information that empowers citizens to exercise their fundamental rights, supports gender equality, and fosters democratic participation, trust and sustainable development is needed even more than ever. Quality journalism that produces and disseminates public interest information for informed decision making is crucial for these processes. Standard setting instruments such as the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/75/267 establishing Global Media and Information Literacy Week and the Windhoek+30 Declaration, both adopted in 2021, are landmark policy responses to the quality information challenge we are witnessing.

The project, “Developing a Situation Report and Action Plan on Media and Information Literacy and Disinformation in the Caribbean”, aims to improve Caribbean information ecosystems. The project benefitted from the financial support of UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Under the supervision of UNESCO’s Caribbean Office, the Public Media Alliance (PMA), in collaboration with the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC) and the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM), has implemented the project. A multi-country study covering The Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Vincent

and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago enabled a deeper analysis of the media situation in selected countries. Through a year-long process of consultations with a wide range of actors – media professionals, policymakers, academics, as well as civil society actors – research findings were validated; capacity-building workshops for media were also conducted.

The project has strengthened regional cooperation among media organisations and led to the development of an eight-point regional agenda for action grounded in the research findings and strong stakeholder ownership. The agenda foresees, amongst others, the development of a regional media code of practice on disinformation and misinformation, the launch of a public awareness campaign on identifying false information, a regional fact checking network for media as well as the integration of media and information literacy into national education curricula.

By strengthening Caribbean information ecosystems and promoting solidarity we can foster the collective action that that the region’s sustainable development depends on. UNESCO will work with like-minded actors to advance the report’s recommendations.

### **Dr Anna Paolini**

UNESCO Director & Representative  
UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean





# Executive Summary

This situation report herein analyses media and information literacy (MIL), disinformation, and trust in news across the Caribbean. It contains country reports from eight researchers, covering eight Caribbean nations: the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago. In each country, research was undertaken over a period of five months. The methods varied across the countries, and included surveys, desk research, and expert interviews. Separately, research was undertaken to determine the feasibility of a regional trusted news network.

## The situation report highlights:

- **Unique challenges:** No two country was exactly the same and the report highlights the unique challenges of each researched country, as well as the similarities across borders.
- **The need for more regional research:** Notably, the situation report emphasises that more analysis is needed across the region to tackle disinformation, media literacy, and trust in news media. Researchers were faced with the difficulty of procuring information on these issues, which are rarely explored formally in the Caribbean. This limitation was particularly experienced by those researching smaller countries and as a result some research provided more insight than others. This limitation emphasises the need for national or regional investments in research, particularly in Caribbean countries where existing research is scarce or non-existent.
- **Barriers remain:** Our researchers found that barriers remain to achieving media literacy, particularly legislatively. Newsrooms are strapped for resources in an economically difficult environment (further exacerbated by the repercussions of the pandemic) and are working in highly competitive landscapes where there is real pressure to report news before competitors. Other major impediments to improving the landscape identified included low pay acting as a disincentive for more quality journalism; poor media regulation; and competitive challenges in the multiplatform era (social media, big tech)

- **Opportunities abound:** Importantly, the report also demonstrates achievable opportunities for regional media organisations and governments, such as: greater investment in journalistic training and the development of editorial policies; the development of collaborative networks for fact-checking; and the undertaking of assessments of the citizenry's needs in the areas of media literacy and disinformation.

## Major findings

### Building the next media literate generation

Nearly every researcher recommended a more widespread and systemic media and information literacy awareness programme with the integration of media and information literacy into school curriculums, across all levels. "This will more firmly root media literacy and the value of scientific inquiry in society, and in turn, develop more critical consumers of information, and media sources," writes researcher Ava Turnquest of the Bahamas. Kiran Maharaj, researcher for Trinidad & Tobago, recommended the reintroduction of 'Critical Thinking' as a subject; it was removed at the secondary school level more than a decade ago. Critical thinking programmes within the education system can have an implicit impact on improving levels of media and information literacy, Ms. Maharaj said.

It was further emphasised that developed curriculums must be age appropriate, signed off by parents, and must also consider those in far-flung regions, such as in Suriname's hinterland. The recommendations did not just include students as the target audiences – researchers also recommended educators and journalists as beneficiaries of media literacy curriculums. For instance, researcher Dr Corinne Barnes said that journalism schools in Jamaica should introduce media literacy as a part of their curriculum from year one.

### Stronger together

Across the issues of disinformation, media

literacy, and trust in news, the need for collaboration was explicitly recommended by researchers. The recommended collaborations took several forms: there were recommendations for governments and media companies to co-develop relevant media literacy strategies; calls for work between government and an association targeting vulnerable groups such as retired people; and suggestions for collaborations among media houses, government, the private sector, and civil society organisations to create disinformation awareness campaigns.

Notably, there were repeated calls for collaborations among journalists and media houses, whether locally or regionally, and for media houses to work more closely with established fact-checking organisations. The researchers foresaw collaborations leading to improved fact-checking, media professionalism, and ultimately higher public trust in news media. Several researchers recommended the development of a fact-checking platform. "This platform will enable audiences to engage with journalists and researchers and will host background information on journalists and prominent influencers in a bid to build transparency and credibility," says Esther Jones, researcher for Barbados.

### **Watching the watchdogs**

Several researchers noted that there are low barriers to entry into the media landscape. While, understandably, social media was a breeding ground for "citizen journalists" to share information with little to no qualifications, it was also pointed out that established media houses (print, television, radio, and online sites) similarly struggled with recruiting qualified media workers. In Grenada, for example, researcher Linda Straker explained that it is not uncommon for those entering media careers locally to do so immediately following graduation from secondary school. Luckily, she added, an Associate Degree in Media Studies is offered by a local community college and several newsroom staff at print media outlets have obtained this certification. But it becomes more difficult to find broadcasters or announcers who have pursued the associate degree level certification and, as a result, many announcers or DJs are untrained before entering their professions. Similarly in St Vincent & the Grenadines, researcher Colvin

Harry found that on-air radio hosts serve as conduits for disinformation.

Hence, with low barriers to entry, regulating formal media organisations was put forward by several researchers as a way to curb the impact of irresponsible journalism, lower disinformation and promote media literacy, and build trust in news. In their recommendations, researchers called for legislative changes, such as an update of the URCA Code of Content and penal code in The Bahamas; amendments to access to information, cybercrime, and broadcast laws in Guyana; and review of the Newspapers Act to include online publications in Grenada.

Recommended regulation was not limited to legislative changes. Some researchers also recommended improved regulation through media associations. For instance, Barbados researcher Esther Jones recommended the creation of a professional association that accredits journalists and disciplines "malpractice" by media workers. Meanwhile, in Grenada and St. Vincent & the Grenadines where there are no media workers' associations there were calls for the establishment of such bodies, while in The Bahamas it was recommended that the powers of the existing media association be expanded.

# Introduction

The project “Developing a Situation Report & Action Plan on Media and Information Literacy and Disinformation in the Caribbean” aims to improve the capacity of media workers to promote media literacy and thwart disinformation.

The Caribbean has a vibrant and diverse media landscape, with rapidly developing digital services. However, mis- and disinformation have increased across the region, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and crises, posing a threat to the regional media environment and to the lives and wellbeing of its citizens. Improved media and information literacy is a necessary and a pivotal way of tackling disinformation in society, along with trust in verified independent news and citizen engagement.

Meanwhile, the potential for collaboration in the Caribbean media landscape remains relatively untapped. One solution is to create a strong Caribbean-wide network of affordable and accessible sources of verified news. The project explored the viability of cross-border collaboration for fact-checking initiatives that support media literacy and fight disinformation while improving the capacity of Caribbean media workers to promote media literacy and thwart disinformation.

The project’s final objective was to contribute towards improved media and information literacy in the Caribbean by laying the foundation for more careful reporting, fact-checking, transparency regarding media ownership, and increased regional collaboration.

## **The project was split across three key activities:**

- A situation report and analysis of media literacy, disinformation, and trust in news across the Caribbean. The research covered eight Caribbean countries: The Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, St Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago.
- A two-day virtual workshop for journalists to reinforce their capacities and skills and

improve the ability of news media to promote media literacy and combat disinformation. Under the theme “Media literacy in the age of disinformation”, the workshop was used to develop an eight-point action plan aimed at better supporting Caribbean media workers as they navigate challenges related to media literacy and disinformation.

- An in-country panel discussion and roundtable meeting held in Tobago for senior Caribbean managers to discuss mis- and disinformation, media literacy, the eight-point action plan, and the feasibility of a Caribbean-wide trusted news project.

## **Process and methodology**

By the time this research project began, the regional media were well into two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed both journalists and media houses in the path of many challenges. These challenges include, but are not limited to, loss of income, threats to the viability of media houses, threats to the safety of journalists, trauma, and additional duties as they tackled growing misinformation and disinformation.

This project started by assessing the levels of misinformation and disinformation in the region, whether there is scope for media literacy, and whether there is the need to build trust in news. The project initially targeted 10 Caribbean countries of The Bahamas, Barbados, Cayman Islands, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Vincent & The Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, and Turks & Caicos. However, due to the unavailability of researchers in some jurisdictions, the hospitalisation of one researcher, and the unfortunate passing of another, there were some changes: the final selection of researchers were recruited from eight countries – The Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago. These researchers carried out their studies over a period of five months. The

research was also extended to include a study by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) on the feasibility of a regional trusted news network.

One of the report's main aims was to research the media landscape and conduct quantitative and qualitative research that included interviews with policymakers, academics, the media, and civil society members. This resulted in the production of several detailed "situation reports" that examine the threat of mis- and disinformation, challenges to combating both, and examining how to rebuild trust in news.

The research proved at times to be difficult due to the lack of previous research on the subject but by using varying combinations of desk-based research, regional and in-country interviews, and a questionnaire, each situation report sought to map the state of media and information literacy, disinformation, and trust in news media in the targeted territories.

To protect the privacy of some of the those who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for the research, it was important keep their identity anonymous and some have been referred to by their job titles only.

The researchers, through the use of both primary and secondary data, also sought to identify and recommend sustainable and effective standards and potential solutions for media and information literacy and disinformation in the Caribbean.

Additionally, the project benefited from input from other media professionals. In July, 23 journalists from 11 countries participated in an online workshop aimed at crafting a disinformation action plan. Aspects of the action plan were later presented to media owners and managers for feedback at a special roundtable at the Caribbean Broadcasting Union's 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Assembly in Tobago.

The eight-point plan calls for the development of a regional code of practice on disinformation and misinformation, the launch of a public awareness campaign on identifying false information, the training of media professionals, and more. The launch of this eight-point plan as well as report will guide Caribbean media professionals, policymakers, and partners on challenges facing media houses in fighting mis- and disinformation and crafting media literacy programmes, ultimately with the aim of rebuilding trust in news media.

# The Bahamas

By Ava Turnquest

## Country Overview

The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation with 49 years of independence under its belt, and a little over 30 years of private broadcasting. It has a population of just under 400,000 people who primarily access the internet using a mobile phone (Public Domain)<sup>1</sup>. Based on recent studies on media consumption, WhatsApp is the most common media used in daily life, across all age groups.

The country enjoys a stable democracy with a parliamentary system that has shifted between two major political parties since the 1992 general elections, with both the Progressive Liberal Party and the Free National Movement not holding more than one term each since 2002. The country has been highly rated as “free” by Freedom House, scoring highly on both political rights and civil liberties in both 2021 and 2022 rankings<sup>2</sup>. The islands are in the midst of recovery from twin crises of Hurricane Dorian and the COVID-19 pandemic that represented severe hits to the nation’s economy, and economic stability. Both disasters necessitated high levels of trust in both public institutions<sup>3</sup> and the media as the public relied heavily on information from the government in the immediate aftermath of the deadly storm in 2019, and during the pandemic lockdowns. The use of online news media rose significantly during the pandemic due to shutdowns that resulted in reduced or limited broadcast and print media. Government notices on storm relief and early pandemic messaging, alongside increased use of digital platforms, served as both a breeding ground and accelerant for disinformation due to the widespread uncertainty regarding the pandemic<sup>4</sup>.

## Media and information literacy

Non-governmental organisations like the Organisation for Responsible Governance have hosted education campaigns and workshops on media literacy, and the government has launched aggressive public education campaigns

to combat misinformation about the pandemic, and other health-related issues like the AIDS and non-communicable diseases (Evans, 2022)<sup>5</sup>.

Bahamians generally recognise the power held by news media, particularly as it relates to political influence, and are critical of perceived agendas. The broadcasting sector was liberalised in 1992 shortly after a general election (Smith, 2008)<sup>6</sup>. During that campaign, the sitting government was heavily criticised for its use of the state broadcaster as a propaganda tool (ibid) and the move to open the airwaves was one of the first changes made by the incoming Free National Movement government. This historical context brings more depth to analysis of the lengthy consecutive terms enjoyed by political parties before the media industry was liberalised in contrast to swing voting trends over the past two decades.

While political news content as it relates to decision-making is more heavily scrutinised, information related to government notices, scandal, or corruption are readily consumed as fact (Evans, Wallace, 2022)<sup>7</sup>. Post-Dorian, there has been a significant shift in the use of social media by credible news organisations who are also competing for online engagement (Wallace, Noel, 2022)<sup>8</sup>. While the unprecedented impact of the twin crises necessitated Bahamians become more discerning of media sources, information on politics and social issues like crime and immigration are still most skewed by “fake news” websites that blend disinformation with factual reporting from reputable news agencies. Based on their own level of media literacy, it can become increasingly difficult for consumers to decipher between factual online news agencies, amateur news blogs, and harmful fake news websites as they largely mirror the same content, style, and formatting.

## Disinformation

Media disinformation is believed to be generally widespread, and far reaching (Evans, Wallace, Noel, 2022). The most common forms of disinformation are believed to center around politics and governance or decision-making like procurement, vulnerable groups (Haitian migrants, LGBTQIA+) and more recently health and the environment, namely natural resources. These likely experience the most disinformation as they are the most frequent news topics over the past three years due to the country's stance on climate change in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, and the global pandemic.

Disinformation is significantly widespread (ibid) and presents in several different ways. There is a large body of fake news websites, and news blogs reportedly run by entrenched political agents that mirror established news media in content and style, but also include erroneous or exaggerated reporting intermixed. There is also disinformation put into the public sphere by mainstream political actors who are hoping to shift public attitudes surrounding a government decision to gain traction. These disingenuous political claims may be rooted in truth but are designed to cast aspersions on an issue and create an environment for other forms of disinformation to thrive.

Another significant challenge for newsrooms was identified as fake news sites that steal reports from credible agencies and disseminate without credit (Noel, 2022)<sup>9</sup>. These sites benefit from the use of credible reports from reputable agencies without attribution that gives the appearance of factual, timely, and consistent reporting on national issues. This builds public following and trust as a credible online media source that can then be used to disseminate fake news, malicious political agenda, or disinformation.

Meanwhile, WhatsApp is the primary medium used to spread disinformation due to its ease of use, and extremely high penetration among a wide cross-section of Bahamians. The style of messaging via voice notes, allows users to send gossip in a way that appeals to deeply rooted oral traditions of information sharing (that is, gossip, grapevine, "sip-sip"). This form is also completely free from censorship or any form of content regulation and can be broadcast

without requiring the consent or subscription of the receiver. This allows disinformation to be spread widely and at a high frequency, and the consistent repetition of the messages reinforces public perception of these messages as more truthful or at the very least rooted in truth (Wallace, 2022)<sup>10</sup>.

## Trust in news media

Television news media is the most trusted source of information for Bahamians (Public Domain, 2021)<sup>11</sup>, closely followed by print, with local online news growing in credibility as the use of digital platforms becomes more mainstream. As an archipelagic country with limited development on far-flung Family Islands, the level of trust in public state broadcasting reflects the physical reliance on the services they provide to inform about vital government services. In times of natural disasters, the national broadcaster ZNS (a TV and radio service) becomes a lifeline for cut-off communities and this role the broadcaster has played almost exclusively.

This trust in broadcast media is likely maintained due to the regulatory framework<sup>12</sup> governing the broadcast sector that monitors and prohibits erroneous or malicious content, and the country's criminal libel and defamation laws that also govern print media. These enforceable rules and regulations limit the opportunity for disinformation or fake news to thrive, and in turn, builds public trust and expectations in established media. Trust in online news media is slowly building as all broadcast and print news media have established an online presence and distribution of their news products. Established media organisations have transitioned to some form of online news distribution, placing them in direct competition with fake news and opinion blogs for views, engagement, and advertising dollars. Of all local TV channels, the state broadcaster ZNS remains the most regularly watched across all age categories and is the preferred choice for local news across all age groups (Public Domain, 2021)<sup>13</sup>.

However, most young people have indicated they do not watch local news at all. This trend is not followed in the radio sphere, where the preference shifts to private radio broadcasters and young people have a decidedly greater



listening interest than any other group. Radio talk shows are typically enjoyed most by middle-aged people earning less than \$30,000 annually, and controversial hosts or shock jocks lead in the rankings. Most people read the newspaper

at least once per week with the highest uptake coming from older high-income earners. On social media, Facebook is the most used following WhatsApp, with the highest users under the age of 30 (Public Domain, 2021)<sup>14</sup>.

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## Recommendations

**1**

### **Media literacy should be integrated into the school curriculum**

Instead of a separate course, media literacy training should be integrated into school courses based on age and grade level to build on skills for discernment and critical analysis of media sources, but also to teach ethical media standards. Media studies can be incorporated into subject areas like history and social studies. This will more firmly root media literacy and the value of scientific inquiry in society, and in turn, develop more critical consumers of information, and media sources.

**2**

### **URCA Code of Content and penal code should be updated**

The country's laws should be updated to include regulatory oversight of digital news media to provide more accountability for online media. Criminal libel laws should be repealed, and the Freedom of Information Act enacted, to bring the country in line with best practices. The country's broadcasting and utilities regulator has embarked on a working group to consult and update its content regulation code.

**3**

### **Establish a working media association**

A working media association would offer training, oversight, and regulation of the news media industry. It would support efforts to maintain integrity and ethics and introduce best standards that would engender greater accountability and increase public trust. Currently, there is a press club (The Bahamas Press Club) that hosts an annual awards ceremony but does not provide technical support or engage in watchdog functions. A working media group would bolster the industry's ability to support best practices and elevate the quality of journalism.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Public Domain, 2021. The Bahamas Media Consumption Survey: Partial Report, Nassau, Bahamas: Public Domain

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House, 2022. Freedom in the World 2022: The Bahamas. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bahamas/freedom-world/2022> [Accessed 21 August 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Eyewitness News, 2022. Dorian Restoration Investigation: DRA performing forensic audit of storm contracts. [Online]. Available at: <https://ewnews.com/dorian-recovery-investigations-disaster-reconstruction-authority-dra-bahamas-performing-forensic-audit-of-storm-contracts> [Accessed 18 August 2022]

<sup>4</sup> Eyewitness News, 2021. Misinformation fueling vaccine hesitancy, PAHO director says. [Online]. Available at: <https://ewnews.com/misinformation-fueling-vaccine-hesitancy-paho-director-says> [Accessed 18 August 2022]

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# Barbados

By Esther Jones

## Country Overview

Barbados is the most easterly Windward Island nation located in the Lesser Antilles, just outside the island chain. Persons living in Barbados are called Barbadian or, in local parlance, "Bajan". English is the official language, but Barbadians speak "Bajan creole" in relaxed settings. Barbados is a democracy that transitioned in 2021 to a Parliamentary Republic.

According to the Barbados Statistical Department, as of 2021 Barbados has a population of 269,806, predominately of African descent<sup>1</sup>. Barbados is the most densely populated nation in the eastern Caribbean, with at least one-third living in urban locations, and Barbados has a high literacy rate of 99.6% (see complete statistics).<sup>2</sup>

There are two daily newspapers, The Nation Barbados, and The Barbados Advocate, and one state-owned television station, the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Along with these news outlets, there are online dailies such as Barbados Today and Loop News, news blogs<sup>3</sup>, and several radio stations<sup>4</sup>.

The digital impact research website, Datareportal<sup>5</sup> reports that by January 2022, there were 235,400 internet users in Barbados (81.8% of the population). The report also reveals that there are 243,700 social media users. An Antilles Economic Inc. 2018 study found that more people used social media than read the newspaper, with Facebook being the most used platform.<sup>6</sup>

Barbados ranks highly on the Freedom House 2022 listing<sup>7</sup> and above average on the USAID indicator on "censorship, misinformation and digital rights"<sup>8</sup> (also see United States Government Report on Human Rights in Barbados)<sup>9</sup>. In the 2020 UNESCO E-Government Survey, Barbados ranks 63 out of 139 countries in e-governance. Barbados is ranked jointly at 55/180 in this year's Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index alongside fellow members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)<sup>10</sup>.

The Barbados Constitution guarantees<sup>11</sup> access to information, freedom of expression and association. Several Acts support these constitutional guarantees<sup>12</sup>. Barbados has yet to pass the 2008 Freedom of Information Bill<sup>13</sup>, the Integrity in Public Life Bill<sup>14</sup> and a draft Cybercrime Bill 2021 (not yet publicly available)<sup>15</sup>. There is also a call for legislation to address "Fake News"<sup>16</sup>.

As part of this research report, eight interviews were conducted with journalists, media managers, communication specialists, and lecturers.

## Media and information literacy

Barbados has a high literacy level: at least 99% of the population at age 15 can read and write. However, according to those interviewed, media literacy does not mirror the literacy percentage.

The [Center for Media Literacy](#) defines media literacy as "building an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy." However, according to that definition, respondents believed Barbadians still have room to develop their media literacy knowledge.

Historically in Barbados, one's day was usually set around the evening news and purchasing a paper in the morning; however, respondents said there has been a noted change. People are now receiving information from several sources, creating a type of information overload. This reality is making it more difficult for people to process the information they are obtaining.

Culturally, Barbadians are not encouraged to challenge authority, especially in the classroom. Typically, teachers dispense a lesson while students accept the information. The Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training is addressing this teaching style with upcoming curriculum changes and education reform<sup>17</sup>.

Further, one respondent noticed that students did not fully understand how to conduct online research, and they mostly went online to check social media statuses and keep up to date on the latest trends for later conversations with friends. The respondent suggested that it is vital to instruct young people on how to research, think critically, and question facts.

In all cases, respondents believed that the Barbadian public needed to understand how media works and what is involved in getting a story.

Most respondents did not recall any noticeable efforts to increase media literacy for the public. Yet, a few mentioned professional training for media personnel provided by the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC)/Public Media Alliance (PMA), and the Barbados Association of Journalists and Media Workers (BAJMW). Some respondents also pointed out that the Ministry of Home Affairs and Information posted reminders during the COVID-19 pandemic and hurricane events, advising the public to trust “official sources”<sup>18 19 20 21</sup>. But one interviewee saw the reminder as dictatorial and felt the government had no right to list “trustworthy” news sources. Although not mentioned by those interviewed, the government provided media literacy-type workshops for teachers, the elderly, and entrepreneurs.

All interviewed believed that the public would benefit from a robust media literacy campaign, and they acknowledged that the approach must differ between age groups. They identified persons in vulnerable groups like youths, the elderly, and those who “bear the brunt of society” would benefit most from any campaign. They felt media personnel would also benefit from training in media literacy.

## Disinformation

Although Barbadians understand that some people use information to deceive, the popularity of the term “disinformation” came to the forefront during the Donald Trump administration in the United States. The former President’s attention to the term “fake news” popularised its meaning worldwide; Barbados was no exception.

Some of the respondents felt the constant

claims made by the US President made everyone conscious of “truth in stories” and “made people aware that stories had to be checked even to verify what he was saying.” It showed Barbadians, even though it was happening in the United States, that people in power, along with the media, could distort facts, and they had the power to check. Also, respondents pointed out that it is now easier for persons to send out information anonymously, with few outlets to corroborate.

Most interviewees did not believe that disinformation was widespread before the COVID-19 pandemic. To them, the pandemic changed the prevalence of disinformation in Barbados. Only a few of the respondents thought disinformation was not widespread because younger people “don’t get caught up in those kinds of things.”

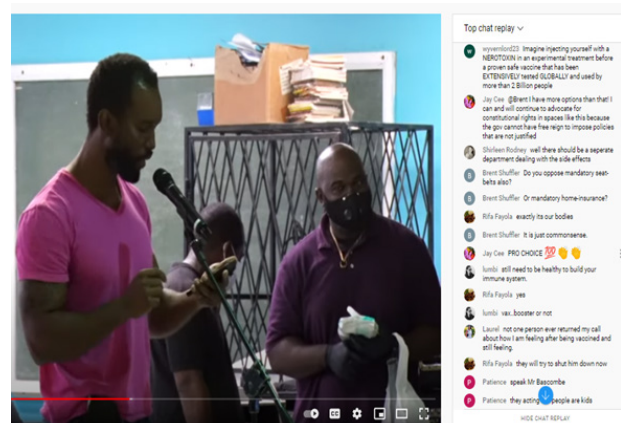


Image 1 Public comments made on a [video](#) livestreamed by the Prime Minister’s Office of Barbados on 16 August 2021. The government held four town hall meetings prior to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Several comments on the video are rife with misinformation.<sup>22</sup>

Across the board, those interviewed believed that politics and government significantly influence messaging in Barbados. “Partisan politics is like religion” in Barbados, said one respondent; many disinformation topics surround the political structure, personal attacks, and allegations. According to the respondents, politics could also cloud how people view media houses and their alliances with certain parties. They found that Barbadians question if they are getting the real story or just a side of the story that benefits the media house’s political connection.

Another main topic of disinformation dealt with COVID-19 and vaccinations. Barbadians received information from the Ministry of Health and Wellness but also contradictory information from international news agencies, partisan blogs, and online documentaries. Respondents found that other topics affected by disinformation are crime rates, 5G technology, celebrities or any topic that has some uncertainty.



Image 2 PUBLISHING OF FAKE GAZETTE – As an April Fool’s prank (2020), a WhatsApp was sent around announcing a shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notice the alteration of the graphic (first one real)<sup>23</sup>.

All respondents pointed out what they believed was Barbadians’ love of gossip – including sharing what they “feel” about a topic at barbershops, hairdressers, rum shops, call-in programmes, and get-togethers. The respondents said social media was just another tool in gossip lovers’ arsenal, though they considered word of mouth as still very popular. Leading disinformation platforms were cited as WhatsApp and other chat groups, followed by social media networks Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Respondents believed that tackling disinformation started with the media’s approach to their stories. They suggested that the media produce more investigative journalism and balanced reports, not opinion pieces. They also said that established entities should continue “pushing the facts”, not just online but also face-to-face at “church, youth or community group meetings.”

## Trust in news media

For some time, long-standing media outlets have been the trusted word on news in Barbados. People would wait for the 7 p.m. newscast to authenticate stories they would hear throughout the day. For the most part, this remains the case, albeit with some exceptions.

Some respondents described a hierarchy of trust among news outlets with their credibility lowering based on their affiliations to public figures or companies. Those interviewed observed that some media houses might bury a negative story of an advertiser, friend, or political party. They mentioned that Barbadians tend to know which journalists get their details correct and which ones prefer getting the story out quickly, checking facts later.

According to those questioned, they mentioned that trust in the media takes a hit during elections. Despite set policies regarding fairness and transparency, there tends to be unfair time allotments and one-sided coverage.

They also saw trust in the media erode during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was not uncommon for audiences to compare information across sources, and it was found that some media houses did not go beyond government statements at press conferences.

Based on those surveyed and interviewed, Barbadians are slowly moving away from traditional sources of information and exploring other methods. The respondents opined that the younger generation infrequently consume content from established outlets; instead, they seek information from bloggers, influencers, and via word of mouth. But this can be a dangerous approach, as seen with a blogger who was brought before the courts after one of her reports almost caused a mistrial<sup>24</sup>.

Many responders cited fear of retribution as influencing trust in the news media. In a small society, investigative reporting could put media personnel in the crosshairs of influential people who threaten their careers, they said.

Then, there is the sheer volume of news and information. Citizen journalists, vloggers, bloggers, and the proliferation of smartphones make the pressure to be first and grab viewers’ attention while keeping to good journalistic standards

more difficult for career media personnel.

Some of those interviewed revealed difficulties obtaining information, especially from government sources, yet the same sources are readily available to international media. When audiences read or hear facts about Barbados from international sources not seen in local news, it degrades their trust in the ability of local media houses.

Respondents also looked at the structure of media houses. They found that newly recruited personnel see media as “something to do after graduating”, using it only as a stepping-stone to another career. They found that low salaries and the need for people to work “across the board”

are detrimental to high-quality end products – “you wonder why your campaigns are not as strong as somebody else’s because you have people trying a thing.”

Mostly, respondents did not think media houses were actively working to change people’s perspectives; instead, just looking at getting the story and hoping that when aiming towards accuracy, that trust would “just happen”.

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## Recommendations

**1**

### **Develop media literacy, research techniques, and critical thinking curriculum with the Ministry of Education, Technological and vocational training for Barbadian students (preschool to tertiary)**

- Have media literacy training taught to teachers at the Erdiston Teachers’ Training College
- Design an NVQ and CVQ (National Vocational Qualifications/Caribbean Vocational Qualification), which qualify citizen journalists in basic journalistic standards

**2**

### **Create a sustained campaign to sensitise the public on the basics of media literacy and design tools to detect mis- and disinformation**

- Run media literacy workshops aimed at those most vulnerable to disinformation, such as in collaboration with the Barbados Association for Retired Persons (BARP)
- Collaborate on the creation of a regional fact-checking site (like a Caribbean Snope) geared individually at several Caribbean countries. This platform will enable audiences to engage with journalists and researchers and will host background information on journalists and prominent influencers in a bid to build transparency and credibility.

**3**

### **Create professional avenues for media personnel to train, accredit, monitor, and provide tools to enrich themselves in their profession**

- Create a professional association based on agreed standards (similar to lawyers and doctors) that accredits journalists and disciplines for “malpractice”
- Develop and disseminate a fact-checking resource virtual space for media workers, with the goal of improving collaboration and connection with other regional professionals
- Media houses should ramp up in-house training for newly recruited journalists



- Create specialist journalists with beats and an investigative journalism unit within media houses
- Where possible, media houses should offer improved remuneration packages to attract and retain long-term media workers
- Acquire buy-in from station/newspaper owners to conduct regular training sessions in media literacy

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# Grenada

By Linda Straker

## Country Overview

Located in the Southern Caribbean, Grenada is a member of the United Nations (UN), CARICOM, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and the Windwards Islands. Grenada became a sovereign state in 1974 from Great Britain. Today, its population is approximately 112,000. Its system of governance is Westminster style.

As a member of the United Nations, the island has signed several UN conventions and treaties that focus on human rights, media freedom, access to information, and freedom of expression. These include the Human Rights Declaration, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the Escazú Agreement.

The latest Universal Period Review, dated 13 January 2020<sup>1</sup>, notes that one of the new and emerging issues for the population is the right to information. Chapter one of Grenada's constitution<sup>2</sup> outlines the fundamental rights and freedoms entitled to every person in Grenada. There is no special privilege for the media, but every citizen has a right to freedom of expression.

Grenada remains one of the few countries in the Caribbean without a Freedom of Information act, the Grenada Broadcasting Network reports<sup>3</sup>. According to Freedom House's [2022 report](#) on Grenada, this is despite government pledges to introduce such an act. Legislation that can be used as a guide to media operations are the Companies Act, the Criminal Code, the Libel and Slander Act, the Copyright Act, the Newspaper Act, the Electronics Crimes Act, and the Telecommunications Act but there is no legislation governing broadcasting<sup>4</sup>, though there was a Grenada Broadcasting Corporation Act that was repealed in 1998<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM), there are 65 media workers in Grenada<sup>6</sup>. As of August 2022, the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC) identifies 34 radio channels on its broadcast register to operate on the island<sup>7</sup>. NTRC categorises these 34 radio channels as

commercial FM radio broadcasts (31 channels); community FM radio (2 channels); and AM radio (1 channel).

NTRC further identified four television broadcasters: the Grenada Broadcasting Network; Grenada Wireless Communications Network Ltd.; Moving Target Company; and Grenada Family Network. The Grenada Broadcasting Network, the public broadcaster, is noteworthy for its position as the "premiere and largest network"<sup>8</sup> in Grenada. It is jointly owned by the Government of Grenada and One Caribbean Media, with a forty percent and sixty percent split, respectively.

There are also three weekly online newspapers: [Grenada Informer](#), [The New Today](#), and [The Grenadian Voice](#). There is one periodical business newspaper called The Barnacle News ([thebarnaclenews.com](#)).

Meanwhile, there are three nationwide news websites:

1. [Now Grenada](#)
2. [Mikey Live](#)
3. [The LEAD Newspaper](#)

A variety of talk shows use the internet as a medium of communication. In an interview with the researcher, an NTRC official explained that there is no licensing or regulatory system in place for internet-based communication and broadcasting. The Government Gazette<sup>9</sup> also publishes weekly government notices and is used as a news source.

Meanwhile, in Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index, Grenada is grouped and analysed under the OECS, with a ranking of 55/180 in the 2022 index<sup>10</sup>. In Freedom House's Freedom in the World ratings, Grenada was deemed "free," earning a score of 89/100 in both 2021<sup>11</sup> and 2022<sup>12</sup>.

There is no system in place for filing complaints against the media when audiences feel aggrieved. While there is an Office of the Ombudsman, this role simply handles matters pertaining to public servants.

The main channel used to seek a solution is a civil lawsuit because Grenada repealed the law that provided for criminal defamation, though seditious libel is still included in the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act of 2012<sup>13</sup>. The penalty for seditious libel is two years' imprisonment.

## Media and information literacy

Media and information literacy has been on Grenada's radar for some time, though significant efforts to tackle it have not materialised despite public appeals. For instance, there have been calls for the development of a Media Literacy Education Programme. In May 2018, in an open forum with then Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, staff of the Ministry of Education noted the need for the introduction of a Media Literacy Education Programme and a National Library<sup>14</sup>. But to date, such a programme has not been introduced.

Despite the vital role the media generally plays as a media literacy partner, the Grenadian media landscape is unable to make serious in-roads. The situation facing newsrooms, which will be explained in detail below, often means that journalists themselves are not well-trained or educated enough – or are just too strained – to be effective media and information literacy practitioners. While media literacy enables audiences to better understand and contribute to public discourse on important matters, on too many occasions media workers are unequipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively communicate, particularly on issues that affect democratic life, thus leaving the public deprived of literacy opportunities.

It is not uncommon for those entering media careers in Grenada to do so immediately following graduation from secondary schools. In January 2011 the T.A. Marryshow Community College began offering an Associate Degree in Media Studies and consequently, in the past ten years, more media workers have sought to obtain the College's Associate Degree.

Currently, several newsroom supervisors at print media outlets said that their staff have obtained this associate degree. But many media workers who have attained qualifications and certification beyond the associate degree level opt to not

continue working in the media and instead branch into other fields of communication, such as public relations or marketing. Low salaries paid by media houses was often cited as a reason for this phenomenon.

It becomes more difficult to find broadcasters or announcers who have pursued the associate degree level certification. As a result, many announcers or DJs are untrained before entering their professions. In some cases, they remain untrained long into their careers.

This exodus of media workers into other fields has created an environment where many newsrooms do not have senior reporters with more than ten years of experience. In some cases, there are newsrooms where marketing personnel are in charge. This has resulted in these newsrooms producing content that largely reflect public relations statements.

The researcher was unable to find a single Grenadian newsroom that currently has employees with the job titles of news director, managing editor, copyeditor, proof-reader, or fact-checker. In one media house, the most senior post is referred to as Newsroom Supervisor or Newsroom Coordinator. While it is possible to find employees who conduct tasks related to a news director and other jobs, due to a lack of traditional certification or qualification they cannot be named to the positions under their traditional organisational structures.

Meanwhile, media workers in Grenada are often expected to demonstrate multiple skills related to the journalistic process. Reporters or journalists are – regardless of their industry or sector – expected to not only gather and author articles but are also called upon to proofread, contribute to the production of a radio and television newscast, take photographs, and even publish content.

The researcher was unable to find any media house in Grenada that has a dedicated team for investigative reporting. This was confirmed with the heads of local newsrooms. Generally, there is little to no investigative journalism in Grenada and there are no regulated media with programmes that research, deeply examine, and investigate issues and concerns beyond regular newscasts. However, it is not uncommon to find people on social media platforms, particularly

Facebook, who post their own “investigations”. These posters are not known journalists attached to media houses, and often do not even refer to themselves as citizen journalists.

Further, even in established media outlets local news items are regularly uncritically sourced from press releases, interviews, news conferences, and other media-related activities, largely due to issues such as staff shortages. Other sources include public reports and documents that are presented in Parliament. Many news items are from one source, and rarely feature two or more sources. For many of those interviewed as part of the research, this state of affairs could only be classified as mediocre and fall short of the quality seen in international news outlets. Ultimately, the professionalisation of the media would largely benefit media and information literacy efforts in Grenada.

## Disinformation

Disinformation is false information deliberately spread to deceive people. It is sometimes confused with misinformation, which is false information but is not deliberate. In 2013, the then government, New National Party (NNP), approved the Electronics Crimes Act<sup>15</sup> which aimed to criminalise various electronic crimes as the use of ICT was becoming a norm. The Electronic Crimes Act was one of five pieces of legislation approved to fight online crimes.

The legislation faced strong objections from the media and other political advocates who saw parts of it as a way of reintroducing the criminalisation of libel and slander. Within months of the legislation being approved in Parliament an amendment was made – specifically of section six, sub-titled “Sending offensive messages through communication services.” The amendment was welcomed<sup>16</sup> by organisations such as the International Press Institute (IPI) who had noted the “possible chilling effects these three sections in particular could have on public speech” as well as concerns of how it would impact journalists and media freedom.

Nonetheless, the Electronics Crimes Act is used today to discourage the spread of misinformation. Between 2021 and early 2022, there were

some five lawsuits involving journalists before the court<sup>17</sup>, with one case involving a sitting government minister and a media house. Meanwhile, in its June 2022 refutation of false claims, the Royal Grenada Police Force reminded citizens that “transmitting of false information violates the Electronic Crimes Act, and as such, strongly discourages the formulation and transmission of misinformation.”<sup>18</sup>

These attempts at curbing the spread of mis- and disinformation happened long before COVID-19 hit Grenada. COVID-19 therefore added a new dimension and challenge to Grenada’s approach to false information. For instance, the Ministry of Health has also had to condemn “fake news” related to COVID-19<sup>19</sup>.

Notably, Social Scientist Lornadale Charles said the pandemic contributed to a surge in conspiracy theories and misinformation about the virus, thereby increasing levels of vaccine hesitancy<sup>20</sup>. “The conspiracy theories and vaccine hesitancy were more effective than the authorities in convincing the majority of people to get vaccinated and adhere to COVID-19 protocols,” Ms. Charles said.

Recent research has also shown the impact misinformation has not just on health services but also on disaster management. In a study examining how misinformation disseminated over social media can directly and indirectly affect the efficiency of the disaster management process in Grenada, Hagley (2021) notes<sup>21</sup> that some social media users felt inclined to spread misinformation before and during a disaster.

“The results show that misinformation contributes to the Grenadian respondents’ sense-making, by compensating for the lack of timely information from the relevant authority. It was also found that misinformation complicates the disaster management process by creating unnecessary panic, wasting resources, and undermining the authority of the disaster management team. The study presents a unique opener for how social media can be included in a nation’s disaster management plans.” (ibid)

Fortunately, there are existing initiatives to curb the spread of misinformation and disinformation in Grenada, though it is unclear how well-

used and effective they are among citizens. [Get Safe Online Grenada](#) is based on the UK Government's own Get Safe Online site and is funded through the UK Commonwealth Cyber Security Programme, working in partnership with the Grenada government<sup>22</sup>. According to the initiative, it is "the leading source of unbiased, factual and easy-to-understand information on online safety." The site also offers tips and resources on how users can protect themselves from misinformation and disinformation and differentiating between real and "fake" news<sup>23</sup>.

### Trust in news media

As part of the research project, a survey was sent to more than twenty people. However, only one person submitted a response. Nonetheless, discussions with a wide cross-section of people, including some who had been sent the survey, revealed that there were mixed reactions to trust in the news. These conversations also revealed two key points: **trust is tainted by perceived political associations** and **trust is tainted when journalists do not abide by good standards and professionalism**.

The most recent elections in Grenada, held in June 2022, demonstrates these two key points well. In the middle of election campaigns,

the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp were instrumental for the two main political parties. During the final two weeks, dozens of messages circulated widely, spreading disinformation about each political party. Studies into the impact these messages had on voters' decisions are yet to be conducted. Some of the circulated messages were subsequently developed into news items published in a local newspaper – a media outlet that has been accused of ties to the now government, the National Democratic Congress.

Meanwhile, radio stations' talk show programmes have become avenues for audiences to air their grievances and on many occasions, references are made to news items in a television newscast, thereby demonstrating a level of trust in what is heard on these newscasts. Still, there are people – mainly political activists and champions – who accuse specific media workers of spreading false information, though it is unclear if these accusations are valid or are simply based on a dislike of the content itself.

In general, low trust in the media is not yet an issue of concern in Grenada.

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## Recommendations

### 1 Serious consideration should be given to the establishment a publisher's association in Grenada

It must be noted that there is a Media Workers Association of Grenada.

### 2 There must be greater collaboration among the government, media workers, and media owners towards the realisation of a broadcast policy and/or legislation

Developed legislation should also consider the establishment of a complaint commission for media infractions.



### 3 The Newspapers Act<sup>24</sup> must be immediately reviewed

The review should consider the publication of online newspapers and other guidelines for establishing a newspaper.

### 4 Where possible, media houses should employ fact-checkers to bolster the quality of their in-house content

These fact-checkers should also actively analyse public information (both on social and from public officials) to lend to media and information literacy efforts. Alternatively, media houses should collaborate to develop a fact-checking initiative.

### 5 Media Houses should develop and implement editorial policy

Policy should outline how information attained from social media should be used as news, considering values such as accuracy, credibility, and transparency.

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# Guyana


By Nazima Raghubir

## Country Overview

With an area of 214,969 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 782,766, Guyana is the only country in mainland South America where English is the most widely spoken language. Despite its geographic location, Guyana's history and culture is more associated with the Caribbean. Guyana's GDP per capita is USD 9,250.

The country has approximately 120 media workers, 21 radio frequencies, and 21 television stations. In the print media, there are four daily newspapers, one weekly, and one monthly publication. There are five digital news services<sup>1</sup>.


Guyana moved up 17 spots to 34 in the press freedom ranking when Reporters Without Borders (RSF) released its World Press Freedom Index in May 2022<sup>2</sup>. According to the RSF report, Guyana protects freedom of speech and the right to information. However, it pointed out that journalists who oppose the authorities face intimidation and cyberbullying.



Guyana's journalists are respected and allowed to do their jobs freely and independently. They are generally well accepted and protected. While media professionals have faced legal intimidation and suspensions, they are rarely the target of physical acts or violence, the report said<sup>3</sup>.

The State of the Caribbean Media Report published by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (May 2022) described the press in Guyana as fairly free and open<sup>4</sup>. The report pointed out that the Guyanese media landscape is often reflective of the political division in the country and media houses often show a political bias or slant in their reports<sup>5</sup>. The report also listed several challenges faced by the media in Guyana. These include, but are not limited to, access to information, cyberbullying, intimidation by politicians, and a lack of press engagements with officials. Additionally, the report highlighted other issues affecting the media landscape, including challenges to economic viability and high job turnover in newsrooms. For this report we engaged several persons including media

professionals, academics, one politician and a member of the civil society.



## Media and information literacy

There is no known media literacy guide or plan in Guyana. The Guyana Press Association (GPA) — the only media advocacy and representative body for media workers — continues to train all media workers, said veteran journalist, media owner and Guyana Press Association Executive, Denis Chabrol. However, that training is limited to only media workers. Along with its training on media ethics, the GPA has a code for covering mental health and suicide<sup>6</sup> and has done training on covering the court system, crime, women and children, and other social issues. Additionally, editors are encouraged to sign codes of conducts for covering general elections<sup>7</sup>.

When asked how media "literate" the population could be considered, Chabrol said, "On a scale of one to ten, I'll say about four out of ten, five out of ten. And that is because we have had a growing phenomenon here in Guyana where people seem to believe what they hear or see on social media."

Chabrol pointed out that members of the public often find it difficult to separate fact from fiction, with them often believing whatever is seen on social media. Chabrol said too that news literacy in particular is an area of concern, with many people not understanding or knowing the roles of journalists and how different those roles are from social media personalities. "We are seeing a virtual crisis in that sense, where people see you in the streets and ask, 'what you not saying so and so about so and so', while we are not here to say anything unless perhaps in an editorial or a commentary. But they expect you to be propagating their line in consonance with what they have said or read on social media."

"People have a view of what they think is media, what they think media should do and how they go about getting their information," Leeron Brumell, Editor in Chief for the state

radio and television broadcaster, the National Communications Network, said. "We are actually perceived based on what people say about us." Brumell called for awareness that allows people to understand the "boundaries" media have and ethics local media outlets must be guided by.

Joel Simpson, the Managing Director of the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD), does not believe the Guyanese population is very media literate. "Often people do not know how to check and verify sources and that is a real issue. Like anything can be put out there with a source that is not credible," Simpson said.

Nelsonia Persaud, a University of Guyana lecturer in the Department of Communications, said from her experience there are pockets of people who understand media literacy, the credibility of sources, and know how to analyse news reports critically. However, there is a significant number of persons who do not, she pointed out.

Lack of resources and lack of access prevent persons from improving their understanding of media and fact checking stories, Andrew Kendall, Head of Department, Language and Cultural Studies, University of Guyana pointed out: "Many persons are living below the minimum wage, they have no access to the internet." Kendall believes that economically disadvantaged groups would most benefit from media literacy. "We are all vulnerable but poor people suffer the most and it is not an incentive for the ruling class [to teach media literacy]. Everybody that is well off, they benefit from poor people becoming and remaining ignorant," Kendall said. He continued, "Unless there is a real groundswell of the proletariat class rising up and taking action and taking control of the world, we are really not going to see that kind of change."

Further, Persaud said that access to education can aid with media literacy. With people seeking tertiary education, their media literacy is expected to increase, Persaud pointed out. "One of the things about higher education, you are able to do better research, learn how to investigate, utilise information from different sources to do analysis and critical thinking," she said. Further, Politician and Opposition Member of Parliament, Sherod Duncan, said there was the need for more access to information and access to the internet.

## Disinformation

Misinformation has been defined as false or inaccurate information, ranging from rumours, insults, and pranks. Disinformation has been defined as a more deliberate act of spreading information and includes malicious content such as hoaxes, spear phishing and propaganda. The latter, in particular, spreads fear and suspicion among the population<sup>8</sup>. There are no studies or data to suggest the levels of misinformation and disinformation in Guyana. But both have been listed as "major" challenges in Guyana affecting the media as well as the wider population by several persons we interviewed. Social media is seen as the main channel for both misinformation and disinformation.

Ms. Persaud pointed out that while disinformation is rarely seen in "traditional media" there is a prevalence of both misinformation and disinformation on social media, mainly through social media sources and or social media influencers. "It is a regular occurrence," Persaud said<sup>9</sup>.

The "dynamics" of disinformation is different in Guyana according to Mr. Kendall. Kendall feels there is no "commitment" to disinformation in Guyana when compared to places like the United States where, Kendall said people are "committed" to disinformation in "different ways". Kendall pointed to access to information, ethnic issues, and access to digital and new media which could all be fostering disinformation. "Many people do not have the opportunity to have a wide range of resources," Kendall posited, "so disinformation is widespread, but the context is different when compared to North America."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, Mr. Chabrol believes that disinformation is widespread, particularly in politics. He opined that social media is a "channel" or conduit. "Politicians on all sides of the political arena essentially seek to amend facts, even though slightly amending them. But those amendments can have a major impact on meaning or interpretation to the messages," Chabrol said<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, Chabrol feels that politicians mainly contribute to misinformation: "There are those who take that information now and further seek to propagate it as fact. Then there are those who spout information or material that has no basis in

fact, purely rumours, but they coach it in such a way that it ends up being considered as factual material by members of the public. This is done mainly through social media.”

Leeron Brumell, Editor in Chief for the state radio and television broadcaster, the National Communications Network, while examining disinformation as an issue on a scale from 1-10 said that it could be an eight: “It could also depend on what the issue could be at hand,” he said.

As the Managing Director of SASOD, Mr. Simpson has represented the LGBTQIA+ community for decades on varying issues. Simpson considers disinformation widespread, “especially when it comes to public information that citizens should have to be able to participate in state decision making processes.” Simpson considers this a “huge challenge” as he said information is usually misrepresented and the lack of investigative journalism can help to foster disinformation and misinformation.

Simpson also listed politics as among the issues prone to disinformation, with social media among the many drivers of both misinformation and disinformation. “There are a lot of these social media pages that nobody knows who are behind them, unlike a media house that prints something or puts out a video, you know who is involved,” Simpson pointed out<sup>12</sup>.

Mr. Duncan, also considers disinformation to be widespread. He said that governance issues are more prone to misinformation and disinformation. “People are not getting the full truth of what is happening and in the way that they need to have,” Duncan said, “there is a lot of spin out there.”<sup>13</sup>

Among the issues listed as being prone to both misinformation and disinformation are crime, politics, the COVID-19 pandemic and other health issues, and the environment. Some interviewees also listed race, gender, and sexuality while some believed that no topic is off limits to both misinformation and disinformation. “Anything that’s vulnerable” is prone to misinformation and disinformation Kendall said.

Meanwhile, newsrooms are facing many challenges when it comes to thwarting both misinformation and disinformation. Brumell of NCN Guyana listed timely responses as among

those challenges. It is difficult to “access some persons to get information; some persons are accessible but in our profession we know if a person or interviewee is not too familiar with whoever is trying to contact them to get the required information, they are either going to stone wall or ignore the call all together,” Brumell explained<sup>14</sup>.

Chabrol, who also heads a newsroom and is a media owner, said the challenge is to convince people that what they are reading or hearing elsewhere is not factual. “For me, because I follow the strict rules of verification and authentication, I do not fall prey easily to what is being said on social media or even told to me prior to the social media age,” Chabrol said. He said it is time consuming to verify some of the information “almost on a weekly basis”.

University of Guyana lecturer Persaud feels that newsrooms must do “proper investigative journalism,” pointing out that false information spreads faster than truth or facts. Persaud pointed out too that getting access to information and getting access to sources to verify information could be a challenge. Kendall questioned whether it is within newsrooms’ “best interest” to challenge misinformation and disinformation. “Our present reality is one where the idea of journalism or media is a net positive inherently is not realistic,” Kendall said. He continued, “Persons have their own agenda and I think that the first question is ‘are newsrooms interested in thwarting misinformation?’”

Member of Parliament Duncan feels that newsrooms operating in the digital and social media age are “trying to be first to put out information out there”. He pointed out, “at the expense of accuracy.” SASOD’s Managing Director Simpson pointed out that disinformation can be very deliberate, especially on the part of political actors. Simpson said that when media houses often challenge or try to correct that disinformation, “they face all types of backlash.” Simpson listed reports of politicians calling editors and journalists to “sanction” them about reports coming from the press. “That is a real issue,” Simpson emphasised.



## Trust in news media

"It depends on which side of the coin you are looking at," Brumell said when asked how trusted the news media are in Guyana. "Either the people are pro-government or anti-government, so if I am leaning to a particular side, I'll believe what that side says," Brumell said. The editor-in-chief further said that audiences are more likely to believe something if they see it as it happens.

Persaud believes that "there is some level of trust" in certain news media as persons trust the media based on their own biases or influences.

It was also noted that many media houses have political affiliations. Chabrol said, "Once you are aligned politically, you would be seen as having an alliance as far as racial and ethnic preferences are concerned and that compounds the situation." This informs the need for public interest media, Chabrol further pointed out. "Public interest media that is representative of all shades of opinion that would be regarded

ultimately as credible, regardless of whether you are from one party or the other, business organisation. That once it is said, or reported, that indeed it comes with a higher degree of credibility and believability," he concluded.

Following a survey conducted as part of this research, across the 14 respondents between the ages of 19-45, most respondents agreed that family members and social media commentators were the least trusted sources of information and news. Word of mouth, social media, and WhatsApp were listed as among the main sources of misinformation.

Print media was identified as the most trusted source within the media sphere. Most respondents claimed that they try to assess the information being communicated and to investigate the source as much as possible. Asked who should be responsible for tackling misinformation, respondents listed media houses, government, and library services among the top choices.

## Recommendations

### 1 Greater investment in journalism

There should be continued training for media professionals; notably, there should be greater investment in media associations to allow for training and improving capacity. Further, a trusted news initiative or project should be developed, with a focus on improving fact-checking capacities, such as through fact-checking programmes or fact-checkers within newsrooms.

### 2 Media and information literacy in the education system

Media and information literacy should be included from early education to the university level.

### 3 Legislative changes

There should be support for legislative changes to Access to Information, Cyber Crime Laws, and Broadcast Laws.

### 4 Differentiating media workers

There should be a clear distinction between accredited media workers and social media commentators/influencers.



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<sup>14</sup> Brumell, L., 2022. Situation Report on Guyana. Interview by Nazima Raghubir, September 2022

# Jamaica

By Dr Corinne Barnes

## Country Overview

Jamaica is the largest island in the English-speaking Caribbean with a population of just under three million, comprising people of African, European, East Indian, and Chinese descent. Since 1780, the media landscape has diversified beyond the 34 newspapers recorded then to over 32 radio stations, three free-to-air television stations, and one public broadcasting cable television station. There are currently three daily national newspapers<sup>1</sup>: The Gleaner, The Jamaica Observer, and The Star. Many newspapers have emerged and failed while struggling to break into the limited advertising market.

In its World Press Freedom index 2022, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [ranked](#) Jamaica 12th out of 180 surveyed countries<sup>2</sup>. Although it was the only country in the Caribbean to be placed in the top 20, the new ranking represented a decline - from the 7th place in 2021 and 6th in 2020<sup>2</sup>. Some analysts attributed this decline to public lockdown orders.

When RSF's 2022 index is analysed by categories, Jamaica lands the top spot in the socio-cultural context, with a score of 95.00. This context seeks to measure the lack of pressure on journalists not to question the powerful in society. Jamaica ranked 8th in the context of safety of journalists, 14th in the context of economic constraints, 24th in possible legal restrictions on the media, and 32nd in media autonomy.

Generally, Jamaica is considered one of the safest places for journalists to practise their craft. Physical attacks on the press are rare, and media practitioners can criticise government officials without fear of recriminations<sup>3</sup>. However, since social media is available to all, inaccurate information is posted online, and people are not immune from disinformation or misinformation.

This preliminary work to address disinformation, media literacy and trust in media was launched using a sample of participants (N=21). 75% of the 16 participants who responded to the survey were female, a mean age of 37-years-old, and 87% middle-income earners. Half of the group

named radio and television as their most trusted sources of news because of "balance and consistency with ethical journalism."

Participants in the survey indicated that false information on social media is solely for egocentric and mercenary reasons, which has been an unfortunate pervasive phenomenon. Members of this cohort admitted vulnerability to false news information as their media literacy was not at the competence level to detect fabrication, hence being at high risk for deception and might have more far-reaching implications for citizens as described in another study<sup>4</sup>. In fact, 62% did not know what "clickbait" implied. However, the respondents were not derailed in the scheme of trickery and fraudulence; instead, they sought different approaches to validate or protect themselves from inappropriate content on social media - a responsibility that they think should be for the government, which suggests a likely a change in social media policy<sup>5</sup>, and with the help of traditional media houses.

The researcher also conducted five interviews with media managers (MM1 and MM2), civil society leaders (CSL1 and CSL2), and academics (A1 and A2) who spoke candidly on the areas of disinformation, media literacy, and trust in media.

## Media and information literacy

There were mixed views on the issue of media and information literacy, but all interviewees had one thing in common: they all agreed that more effort needs to be invested in creating a citizenry that not only understands how the media work, but for media practitioners themselves to have a good grasp of the value of their work and the place of journalism in upholding democracy. That is, all participants believed that news literacy ought to be a priority for Jamaica.

For the participants, "media literacy" meant an understanding of the operation of media, in terms of content creation and consumption. Defined in that way, some participants felt that the level of knowledge about how the media

work varies based on socio-economic factors and demographic details. However, others believed that while many Jamaicans are fairly media literate in some areas, the biggest gap exists with critiquing content. The lack of critical analysis of media content is not unique to Jamaica but is what one refers to as a “western pandemic”.

“Media literacy will help people to determine and ask the question, ‘what is the source of this information?’ It goes back to people, the consumers of the information being made literate, so that they can understand the source of the information. Who is saying it? Where is it coming from? If people are left to consume everything they get, which is what is happening now, then that is the challenge of media literacy,” said CSL1.

It was agreed that getting those with less formal education to understand that not every posting on social media is credible, regardless of the source, is one of the greatest challenges facing those who seek to minimise the level of disinformation in the society. For the most part it was agreed that the consumption of false information could be equivalent to the overall literacy rate in Jamaica. As the overall literacy level improves and the ability for people to think analytically and critically and develop appropriate filters, society should experience a decrease in the promulgation of false information.

Even as participants grappled with ways to thwart disinformation, they were divided on the level at which this important topic should be taught. While some believe that education needs to be a part of the primary school curriculum, others felt that if it were introduced then, it would be far too late to create the required impact.

“Children are using media and devices before they can even talk, and cognitively they are already consuming content before they are able to create content so then where do we make that intervention? Is it at the primary school level, is it at the high school level or for those adults, those digital migrants who have already passed through those stages?” questioned A2.

Participants were also concerned that if a decision were taken to begin teaching media literacy in the country, there would be the added difficulty of deciding on the method, level, and

approach such a programme should take.

“Is it something that they would have to sign up for? Is it that we would have to do a lot more PSAs [public service announcements], a full-on campaign teaching people that not everything is to be believed? And the other thing is how do you make educational content just as appealing as content that people like to consume and like to share? That is a significant flaw in many of the interventions that we create and while the information is well-placed and well-meaning it doesn’t have that stickiness, it doesn’t have that viral feeling and the ability to spread just as fast as the misinformation,” said A2.

## Disinformation

All interviewees agreed that there are entities within the country that are bent on deliberately spreading false information. All respondents were convinced that those organisations did not include traditional media, but rather via social media. They were of the view, however, that since most traditional media in the country also publish on social media platforms the potential is there for them to be a part of the disinformation “pandemic”:

One academic (A2) said, “I think [disinformation] is widespread for two reasons; one because it is so easy. We live in an information age and society. It is so easy for information to be put up and put out. Two, it’s information without borders, so it is not just information that you have access to in your own locale, you have access to information outside of your space and related to your space or not.”

Some interviewees were concerned that many consumers, not being social media savvy, do not understand how algorithms could perpetuate disinformation in the virtual space, and that once a platform recognises that a user is engaging with a particular content, it will continue to push that content into the consumer’s sphere, thereby leaving a user vulnerable to a bubble of disinformation. “The algorithm creates an environment in which you feel that the information that you are getting is actually factual information and fact-checking becomes impossible because the individual is fact-checking using another platform or site or

another algorithm that is also not factual," said A2.

"If you go on Facebook, if you go on Instagram, there are so many companies, organisations, platforms that put out information and because on the business side of it — it is based on clicks, likes, and follows — there is really no need or interest to put out something that is factual, as long as it is salacious. There are quite a few entities like that. In fact, today I just deleted my social media accounts because there is so much false information and misinformation that it gets overwhelming for someone with a communication background. It gets very, very heavy, tedious sometimes," the academic added. Similar sentiments were expressed by others in this process.

The participants further argued that while traditional media houses in the country, such as the RJR Gleaner Communications Group and the Jamaica Observer, aim to publish stories that are accurate and balanced, there have been instances of misinformation. "I have seen it a couple times, not a lot ... when the journalist is given information from social media then the traditional news story carries something that is wrong to begin with. The race to be first with the story in a highly competitive media landscape is one reason for media houses getting information wrong, in the first instance, as fact-checking is compromised," said MM1. It was noted, however, that there is normally an apology or retraction once the false information is acknowledged. Repetition of corrections also appears to be helpful for reducing the continued effect as seen in other studies.<sup>6,7</sup>

Meanwhile, the views on the factors contributing to the spread of false information were wide-ranging, but political, economic, and personal factors emerged at the top. Online disinformation tends to skyrocket during the election periods as opposing parties seek to score political points. Then there are those who post outrageous information to elicit views to generate income through increased subscribers. It was also acknowledged that there are some people who are bent on spreading falsehoods online to advance their agendas, while others are mere mischief-makers.

Politics, gender, sex, and intimate relationships were presented in the interviews as the topics

that are most prone to disinformation. "Those are the things that get people going a lot more. But I don't think it is unique to Jamaica. I saw it in the US in the run-up to the last election," said one interviewee. There is also a fair amount of disinformation as it relates to sports, with uninformed people presenting themselves as experts in different sporting activities and presenting their views as facts, rather than opinions. Participants noted the irreparable damage that can be done during such high emotional periods.

All interviewees agreed that the traditional media have a role to play in thwarting the volume of disinformation and misinformation that is being spread, especially on social media. They agreed that while it is difficult, the professional media practitioners are making special efforts to address the situation. "One way that traditional media can protect itself is to become more professionally rigorous in the content it delivers; that it reduces the frequency of errors; that it produces fact; does not tell people what to do or tell them half a story and leave them to come to their own conclusion. To that extent it is also the responsibility of traditional media to make sure that what they are doing is really up to standard," commented CSL1.

The creation of fact-checking websites by media houses was also suggested as one way to address the spread of disinformation online. The sole purpose of such websites would be to collate factual information on those subjects that are prone to disinformation so that when erroneous postings are made, people may easily access those websites and ascertain the fact. It would also be a convenient resource for traditional media to use to spot disinformation and take corrective measures.

## Trust in news media

The views on the level of trust in the media were varied, with most participants agreeing that generally there is a high level of trust in traditional media, but since many of those entities also publish online, with the added pressure to be first with the information, has meant that the regularity of disinformation and misinformation is multiplied.

"I would say generally yes, [there is trust in the media] once they don't touch certain kinds of topics or once it is not around an election period because then that's when people start to question and say The Gleaner belongs to green [Jamaica Labour Party] and Observer belongs to orange [People's National Party], and that sort of thing. That's when scepticism comes up, but other than that I would say generally there is trust in the traditional landscape. But in the social media landscape I would say Gleaner is taking a major hit in terms of trust. When I look at the comments, most of the comments are like 'here is Gleaner doing it again', 'Gleaner is gone to the dogs'. It's interesting because now we have to really look at the idea of segmenting the population," said A1.

Hence, the consensus is that while there is a high level of trust in the physical newspapers and traditional media houses, that trust decreases when it comes to content that is published

online. Some participants saw this decrease as positive for media literacy as it suggests that Jamaicans are becoming more au fait with the elements that comprise a well-researched and accurately produced journalistic product. The citizens, however, need to be encouraged to move beyond the point where they not only point out errors and are able to spot disinformation or misinformation, but are able to articulate reasons for mistrust - reasons that many hope would go beyond inherent bias.

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## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this pilot work, and with the limitations associated with such initial effort, the results are promising. The recommendations are consistent with previous works done using larger samples, and the referenced authors in different disciplines are also seeking to make a difference in this topic of interest.

- 1 A fact checking medium, as a collaborative process between the government and media houses, is strongly recommended.**
- 2 The relationship between subject experts and media houses should be developed so that disinformation and misinformation in the public sphere may be addressed expeditiously.**
- 3 An extensive media literacy campaign is recommended. The campaign must consider key stakeholders, including media workers and educators.**
- 4 Media literacy as a subject (or a module in a course) should be introduced at all levels of the education system.**

- 5** Journalism schools in Jamaica should introduce media literacy as a part of their curriculum from Year 1.
- 6** To improve the level of trust in the press, media houses need to maintain accuracy, fairness, and balance, particularly in stories published on their online platforms.
- 7** A larger cross-sectional sample including citizen journalists and using the same overarching questions might yield robust solutions.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jamaica Broadcasting Commission, n.d.. Broadcast Licensees. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.broadcastingcommission.org/services/radio-tv-cable-services/licensees> [Accessed 4 October 2022]

<sup>2</sup> Reporters Without Borders, 2022. RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index: a new era of polarisation. [Online]. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0> [Accessed 11 September 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Ecker Ullrich K. H. et al., 2011. Correcting false information in memory: manipulating the strength of misinformation encoding and its retraction. *Psychonomic Bulletin Review* 18 (3), pp. 570-578

<sup>4</sup> Eckert S. et al., 2018. Health-related disaster communication and social media: mixed-method systematic review. *Health Communication* 33 (12), pp. 1389-1400

<sup>5</sup> Bode L., Vraga E.K., 2015. In related news, that was wrong: The correction of misinformation through related stories functionality in social media. *J. Communication*. 65 (4), pp. 619-638

<sup>6</sup> Tucker J.A. et al., 2018. Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: a review of the scientific literature. [Online] Available at: <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Media-Political-Polarization-and-Political-Disinformation-Literature-Review.pdf> [Accessed on September 8, 2022]

<sup>7</sup> Bode L., Vraga E.K., 2015. In related news, that was wrong: The correction of misinformation through related stories functionality in social media. *J. Communication*. 65 (4), pp. 619-638



# St Vincent & the Grenadines

By Colvin Harry

## Country Overview

St Vincent and the Grenadines is a multi-island state in the Eastern Caribbean made up of 32 islands, the largest and northernmost being St Vincent, which measures 133 square miles. According to data from the United Nations (UN), the population of St Vincent and the Grenadines stands at 111,699 as of 30 August 2022<sup>1</sup>. The island is made up primarily of people of African ancestry (more than 50%) with the remaining percentage split among those of Garifuna, East Indian, European, and mixed descent. Its official language is English.

St Vincent and the Grenadines is a constitutional monarchy and representative democracy within the Commonwealth. Currently, there are two major political parties – the Ruling Unity Labour Party (ULP) and the opposition, the New Democratic Party (NDP). Elections were last held in December 2020 where the ULP was returned to office for a fifth consecutive term. The elections were deemed free and fair<sup>2</sup>.

According to the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC) license register<sup>3</sup>, St Vincent and the Grenadines currently has 11 licenced commercial FM and five community radio stations, one free-to-air television channel. There are three weekly newspapers, two of which have online publications. There are also three functional online news blogs/websites which service the islands and the diaspora.

In its Freedom in the World 2022 assessment<sup>4</sup> of St Vincent and the Grenadines, Freedom House identified the island state as “free”, with a score of 91 out of 100. The score was further broken down: 36 out of 40 for Political Rights and 55 out of 60 for civil liberties.

Though St Vincent and the Grenadines is not captured individually by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in its annual World Press Freedom Index, it is captured under the broader

Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); citing a ranking of 55 out of 180 analysed states, RSF said<sup>5</sup>, “The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) has struggled to maintain a strong press freedom record despite editorial censorship and growing political influence.”

Meanwhile, there is currently no functional media association in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Attempts were made to revive a once active association which was established and functioned for a few years more than a decade ago, but that failed to materialise and there has not been a known attempt since.

Journalists in St Vincent and the Grenadines are rarely, if ever, not allowed to carry out their journalistic duties and both the print and electronic media continue to enjoy mostly unrestricted access to reaching the masses.

## Media and information literacy

From data gathered, media and Information Literacy (MIL) in St Vincent and the Grenadines appears to be an area of concern that requires urgent action. During the interviews conducted with heads of news organisations, educators, and civil society leaders, it was discovered that while opinions differ as to where the country stands with MIL, there is common ground that more needs to be done to better inform the masses in this area.

The head of a TV news outlet opined that while “everyone wants to be a journalist these days”, some may not be credible, and this adds to the confusion. Another journalist who runs an online news agency said that on many occasions, discussions – particularly on social media – revolve around a particular statement by an individual and not necessarily on the issue itself. He pointed out that more needed to be done to educate persons on the core principles of

journalism. This need to foster news literacy in the Vincentian population was also expressed by other interviewees.

Meanwhile, the editor of one of the country's weekly newspapers expressed concern about the trend of a lack of media literacy and of private media being painted with a political brush based on the way they report, thereby putting those in authority in a negative light. The editor further pointed out an example where photojournalists may be inhibited from capturing photos in a public space; this she says is mainly due to ignorance on the issue.

One interviewee, who represents a prominent non-governmental organisation, had a different opinion regarding how widespread media literacy is thought to be. They opined that public participation is far and wide especially on call-in programmes and particularly on social media where more Vincentians are aware of the issues and are able to share opinions. A senior teacher said that while things have improved markedly over the years, there is room for improvements as it relates to media literacy, but it is not considered a lost cause. A minister of the gospel, who is also a recently retired educator, also expressed that more work needs to be done in the area of media and information literacy.

All interviewees expressed that they were unaware of any targeted approach being taken by any individual or organisation to improve media literacy in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Another area of common ground is on who stands to benefit from an improvement in media literacy in the country; they all agreed that the country as a whole stands to benefit.

In summary, from all indications, media literacy is an area seldomly traversed and greater and more wide-reaching discussions are required from the various stakeholders to equip the masses with the information they need to be more media literate and make wiser choices as it pertains to media consumption. Greater news literacy is seemingly the most pressing MIL need in St. Vincent & the Grenadines. Addressing this need not only lends to a more media literate population but also benefits journalists who may currently face anti-media sentiments and actions, which can be impediments to their job.

Further, audiences are relatively engaged with

local issues, making use of call-in programmes and social media conversations to interact with information. Hence, it is important that MIL efforts focus on turning that engagement into well-informed discourses. Engaged audiences also present an opportunity for MIL educators to meet audiences where they are – whether it be online or via traditional media such as radio.

## Disinformation

There were mixed responses from interviewees as it pertains to disinformation. There also appears to be some confusion between disinformation and misinformation as was observed during the various interactions. Disinformation is information that is intentionally false and intended to deceive or mislead while misinformation refers to false or out-of-context information that is presented as fact regardless of an intent to deceive. They however share a common ground in that they both involve sharing inaccurate information with varying intents and purposes.

Relating to the question of how widespread disinformation is in St Vincent and the Grenadines, the radio station manager said that the level of disinformation is of great concern to him and to many Vincentians. Interestingly, similar sentiments were expressed by the TV News editor, weekly newspaper editor, and editor of the online news outlet interviewed.

The differentiating voice on this was that of the NGO representative who pointed to call-in radio particularly as a likely source of disinformation. She opined that irresponsibility of some talk show hosts and ill-informed callers all contribute to this. The retired principal interviewed noted that there is always thirst by media consumers for "juicy" or "spicy" issues. He opined that rumours and hearsay is to blame on many occasions for public disinformation.

All of the interviewees agreed that the main culprit of disinformation stems from social media. The radio manager further solidified his point by opining that mainstream radio and television account for very little of the disinformation that takes place.

As it relates to the topics that are prone to disinformation, personal issues, religion and

church, the country's economic performance, and information from emergency response agencies were among the areas mentioned by interviewees where disinformation occurs. There were however two areas that stood out across most of the interviewees – politics and the COVID-19 pandemic. There were strong positions and agreement that these two in particular are responsible for a large chunk of the disinformation that exists in the Vincentian context.

The task of tackling disinformation was noted as tumultuous for the media to undertake as it is so pervasive in society. There were several areas that were recommended as possible ways of dealing with the issue, including building trust among the masses and a focus on factchecking. An interviewee stressed the point that there is a need for the media to differentiate facts from opinions. On the other hand, a radio manager outlined the barrier in getting clarity on issues. He believes this barrier can contribute to audiences making assumptions, which in turn translates to disinformation because of missing bits of information.

In summary, disinformation continues to plague the media landscape across all formats but appears to be more focused on mainstream call-in radio programmes and social media-based discussions, which may be based on assumptions rather than facts.

## Trust in news media

From all indications the level of trust in the media is stable. There were areas where the trust of news media was brought into question. This was primarily on politically related issues and the COVID-19 pandemic where there were many different ideologies floated. In the mix of things there were media houses who had particular biases based on their individual agendas.

The radio broadcaster interviewed expressed that recently there was a decline in trust in the media, with some media houses skewing the truth to make it appear a particular way. The newspaper editor begs to differ as she is of the opinion that the majority of Vincentians still maintain a high level of trust in the media, with eight out of ten as the measured level of

trust. The editor of the online newspaper also agrees that there is a great trust in the local news media. He was quick to note, however, that the public may have their assumptions about the biases and agendas of the various outlets. The television news editor during her interview pointed to the issues related to lack of trust stemming from misleading information and sometimes from potentially incredible sources.

Most interviewees were of the view that the level of audience trust in the media houses locally are closely related to assumptions of the political alignment of media houses. Also of note is a media outlet's history of reporting factual information, with those having a poor reputation tending to be on the lower side of the spectrum of trust. One interviewee mentioned that he is concerned that when inaccurate stories are published, even as the facts come to light and prove it to be so, little is done to retract or apologise for misleading or misinforming the public.

As it relates to what is being done to correct the distrust in the media, the interviewees generally agreed that appears to be no direct or concerted effort. Each interviewee noted that the eruption of La Soufriere in 2021 shed light on the strengths of the local news media and assisted in rebuilding some of the trust in the media, with audiences turning more to local media houses for up-to-date and lifesaving information. This is so because most of them stepped up and actively played a part in relaying important information to the masses. The interviewees all said that more work is required by the news media to improve on the issue of trust, but there is some hope as some are taking the necessary steps to improve on credibility.

In tackling the issue of mistrust in the news media, there were varying opinions on this matter. One of the interviewees highlighted the problem of end users trusting or mistrusting an outlet because of the messenger and not necessarily the message itself. In connection to the question of what the media can do to improve trust, one interviewee opined that in order for the media outlet to gain and maintain trust, they must present the information to enlighten and not to influence. He added that it should be real, factual, on-the-ground information and no "pie in the sky" type assumption when delivering the

message. Another interviewee similarly pointed to the perceived biases that sometimes causes the message to get lost in translation.

In summary, it is the belief of most interviewees that looking beyond the surface in reporting is one of the keys to maintaining trust, in addition to being factual and within the interests of the stakeholders.

## Survey findings

A survey of 15 respondents was conducted as part of this research. The survey covered several age groups. There were two or more samples in each age group as follows: 13-18 years, 19-25 years, 26-40 years, and over 40 years. This revealed some rather interesting findings about how different age groups consume and think about the purpose of the media.

On the issue of trust, respondents were asked about their level of trust in different platforms, including the print and electronic media. Radio was identified as the most trusted source of information in St Vincent and the Grenadines, followed by television. Lower down the ranks are newspapers and social media, with family and friends ranking at the very bottom of the list of trusted sources. When asked what contributed to the identified levels of trust, responses varied: proper factchecking, fact-based reports, political coloration, well-researched and accurately presented information, credibility, transparency, and accountability were some of the keywords that spanned across the age groups.

When asked to rate the trust in the media as a whole in St Vincent and the Grenadines on a scale of 1-10, the responses indicated an above average level of trust; the majority of respondents rated 5 or more, while two rated their trust at 10. Interestingly – when asked to what extent they agreed that they questioned the accuracy of the published content they come across on platforms – the majority of those surveyed (on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being “completely agree”) responded with 5 or higher, indicating a greater degree of scepticism. This is a cause for concern and highlights an area that needs immediate remediation. Additionally, when asked if the level of trust has shifted over the years, many responded that it either remained

the same or declined for reasons such as the lack of investigative journalism, regurgitated content, and authorities attempting to limit the level of bad publicity for the government.

On the matter of disinformation, almost all the respondents could not draw the line between disinformation and misinformation and classified it as one and the same. They also overwhelmingly stated that the term “fake news” equates to disinformation in their view. All except one believed that disinformation is deliberately produced to mislead or deceive. Similarly, almost all those surveyed thought disinformation and propaganda go hand-in-hand. Furthermore, most of the respondents were of the view that disinformation was either equivalent to or worse than misinformation.

As to who is responsible for tackling the issues of misinformation and disinformation, respondents were of the view that this responsibility lies on the government and the established media houses. The majority of those surveyed agreed that disinformation and misinformation have worsened over the past three years due to varying reasons. The recent elections and statements made during this time, the COVID-19 pandemic, stories that were not accurately reported, social media personalities, and conspiracy theorists were among the cited reasons for the perceived increases.

There was an almost 50/50 split on whether end users feel equipped to handle false information when they encounter it. A lack of training and access to educational material on the subject were noted as two of the key areas that detract from the public differentiating facts from mis- and disinformation and filtering it out. A few respondents mentioned comparing the reporting of various outlets, factchecking, and personal research as ways in which they mitigate the impact of false information.

When it comes to who is responsible for blatant “fake news” those surveyed were strongly of the view that word of mouth conversations with family, friends and acquaintances is the way in which false information is generally spread. It was followed closely by groups on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, either by way of public or private groups and personal pages. 60% (9 out of 15) respondents felt empowered or sufficiently informed to

tackle everyday problems and democratic issues through the information and media they consumed. There were two respondents who felt completely unempowered or uninformed by what the media puts out generally. On the issue of advertising, most of those surveyed said they were fairly confident in recognising advertising when they see it in the media. Further, some of those surveyed were of the view that the main factors that influence whether something on social media is believable hinge on if they have heard about it before elsewhere and how professionally it is presented to them. Meanwhile, their confidence in a report would be bolstered if the story could be verified via other sources.

Almost all the respondents were confident that search engines like Google are funded by advertising. A few respondents indicated that they did not know how search engines were funded. Similarly, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that internet users should be protected from seeing inappropriate or offensive content. When asked about whether users should have the right to hide their identity online to express their views anonymously, there was almost a balance between those who believed that one should be able to be anonymous online to those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. All except one agreed that when they find information online (such as on search engines

like Google), they questioned whether the information is truthful.

All fifteen participants in the survey stated that only some of the information they see online is truthful. It was discovered that the trustworthiness of a source was heavily based on checking different websites to see if the same information appears on them all.

As it pertains to search engine queries, most respondents were of the view that the authenticity of the information would be based on the perceived bias of the publisher and, to a lesser extent, by how prominent the results are placed on the search engine. All respondents were aware of the use of cookies to collect information and also via social media platforms – that is, collecting information about users, interests, location, etcetera. Finally, on the issue of clickbait, all except two respondents knew what it was. There was an even split in responses as to how a clickbait headline may influence whether or not the user clicked to read more. While some did not trust clickbait headlines at all, others stated that it decreases their trust in what is contained in the article. A total of five of the fifteen respondents stated that it was not the deciding factor on whether they trusted the information shared.

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## Recommendations

This research project was a great revelation professionally and brought to light many of the issues and concerns that are seldom discussed locally. Most of it was related to the roles and functions of the media and how content is put out by media houses and how it is interpreted by the end user. As efforts continue to address them in an effective way the hope is that the information contained in this report will assist in this process.

### 1 Media and information literacy

From the gathered data, it is clear that the status of Media and Information Literacy requires some attention. Some of the reported misgivings stemmed from some level of confusion as to what constitutes 'media literacy'. It is recommended that a targeted approach be made by media houses to enhance this area. This cannot be achieved alone and assistance from regional media partners, such as the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) and the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC), will play critical roles in equipping media houses to address the issue, especially due to St Vincent and the Grenadines' lack of an established media association.



## 2 Disinformation

There seems to be a particular challenge with disinformation on political talk shows and social media. It is recommended that the hosts of these programmes share only factual information and not assumptions and do proper factchecking before taking to the airwaves. It is recommended that these practitioners receive adequate training in the areas of factchecking and verification. As it relates to social media, the Cyber Crimes Bill of 2016 ought to be re-examined and modified to assist in tackling issues of disinformation.

## 3 Trust in the media

Based on the mixed feedback received on the issue of trust in news media, it is clear that some entities are seen as biased and need to do more to correct this, such as improving transparency of their economic and political interests and newsgathering process. A greater effort is required particularly by those who are perceived to be biased or operating with agendas. It is recommended that they utilise their platforms to discuss matters from all angles with different points of view in order to assist in changing the perception of the public. Though this is not a quick fix, the investment in striking a balance will redound to the level of trust placed in them by the public.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Worldometer.info, n.d.. Population of St Vincent and the Grenadines. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/saint-vincent-and-the-grenadines-population/> [Accessed on 30 August 2022]

<sup>2</sup> CARICOM, 2020. CARICOM election observation mission declares the St. Vincent and the Grenadines elections free and fair. [Online]. Available at: <https://caricom.org/caricom-election-observation-mission-declares-the-st-vincent-and-the-grenadines-elections-free-and-fair/> [Accessed 4 October 2022]

<sup>3</sup> National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, n.d. Licence Register [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ntrc.vc/providers/licence-register/> [Accessed on 30 August 2022]

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House, 2022. Freedom in the world 2022 - St Vincent and the Grenadines. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/st-vincent-and-grenadines/freedom-world/2022> [Accessed 30 August 2022]

<sup>5</sup> Reporters Without Borders, 2022. OECS. [Online]. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/country/oecs> [Last accessed on 30 August 2022]





# Suriname

By Harvey Panka



## Country Overview

According to the World Bank<sup>1</sup>, Suriname is a small, natural-resource rich, upper-middle income country in South America. The economy is driven by its abundant natural resources, with mining accounting for nearly half of public sector revenue and gold representing more than 80 percent of total exports. This makes Suriname extremely vulnerable to external shocks. Strong economic growth, averaging 4.4%, was recorded from 2001 to 2014, mainly due to favourable commodity prices. This made the country one of the fastest-growing economies in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region with per capita income rising to nearly US\$9,350 and a decline in poverty rates.

On the UN's Human Development Index<sup>2</sup>, Suriname ranked 97 out of 189 countries in 2019 at 0.738, which puts the country in the high human development category. Beginning 2015, Suriname's economy contracted, and the budget and balance of payments came under severe distress. Government revenue from mining fell sharply, foreign reserves were drained, and GDP growth contracted. By 2020, a severe fiscal and balance of payments crisis began to unfold in Suriname, which continued into 2021. Domestic vulnerabilities were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a sharp GDP contraction (15.9 percent in 2020), and increasing unemployment and poverty. In 2021, Suriname had a GDP per capita of US\$5,166, below its peak of US\$9,350 in 2014 and well below the LAC regional average of US\$15,092.

According to the World Bank about one in four people in Suriname (26% of the population) live on less than US\$5.50 a day<sup>3</sup>. The poverty rate is much higher in the interior region where more than half the population live in poverty. Extreme poverty (percentage of the population with income below US\$1.9 a day) was estimated at 5%.

Suriname was heavily impacted by the pandemic, worsening the existing domestic vulnerabilities. Critical sectors, such as mining and oil, took major hits. Many employees in the services and

sales sectors experienced temporary job losses. Significant pressures were put on government revenues and expenditures, in addition to the fiscal imbalances the economy was experiencing prior to the pandemic.

The pandemic has also adversely impacted learning due to school closures and limitations in rolling out distance learning. This learning loss will weigh in on labour productivity going forward, putting the students of low-income households in a disadvantageous position. Meanwhile, though the government has been able to ensure there is a sufficient stock of COVID-19 vaccines, as of June 2022, only about 40.5 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated.

[According to the Association of Caribbean Media Workers](#) (ACM), there are 27 radio frequencies and 28 television broadcasters in Suriname while there are four newspapers and two journals. The country has nine major sources of digital news and 55 media workers.

Suriname has not done well in the field of press freedom, certainly in the past two years since the Santokhi government took office. According to the 2022 World Press Freedom index, published by Reporters Without Borders<sup>4</sup>, the country has fallen by 33 places when compared to its 2021 ranking. Suriname in the years before fluctuated between the 19th and 21st places on this ranking. The steep decline is partly the result of the mistreatment of de Ware Tijd journalist Jason Pinas on December 14, 2021<sup>5</sup>. This incident has caused outrage both locally and internationally among journalists and press organisations<sup>6</sup>. Freedom House, in its 2022 Freedom in the World report on Suriname<sup>7</sup>, also mentions this incident. In addition to the conviction of ex-president Desi Bouterse, Freedom House also calls the mistreatment of journalist Pinas a "key development" of 2021 in Suriname.

Although the Constitution of Suriname guarantees freedom of the press, daily practice is different. Recent protests by the Surinamese Association of Journalists (SVJ) and individual journalists are proof of this. However, Reporters

Without Borders reports that the press regularly publishes reports critical of the government. This sometimes leads to pressure from the authorities and intimidation of journalists, which leads to self-censorship. RSF also concludes that Suriname has an extremely strict defamation law<sup>8</sup> that provides for sentences of up to seven years in prison for “public expression of hatred” against the government. Since its introduction into the World Press Freedom Index in 2008, the country has mostly risen in the rankings, jumping more than twenty places from the 42nd place in 2009 to its highest ranking at 19th in 2021. But Suriname saw a steep decline in the 2022 index, coming in at the 52nd place.

When it comes to media and information literacy, trust in news, and disinformation, there are little to no official bodies that conduct research on these matters. Hence, for this research project, a small survey of 11 respondents was conducted across several age groups. There were two or more samples in each age group as follows: 13-18 years, 19-25 years, 26-40 years and over 40 years. Of each group, there were at least two respondents.

## Media and information literacy

In Suriname there is no official body that conducts research into media and information literacy. This makes official figures difficult to determine. However, it can be said that the country generally has a low-educated population.

Much of the population relies on information that is shared via the traditional media. At the same time, the community is also very sensitive to fake news that is quickly shared via social media. Especially in the hinterland, residents have limited access to reliable news sources, which means that they are more dependent on messages shared via WhatsApp and Facebook, particularly voice messages. The dangers of disinformation and misinformation are therefore greatest in these regions of Suriname.

In Paramaribo and other parts of the coastal area, the power and importance of media and information based on accuracy is sometimes underestimated by some. In particular, politicians often level criticism at the media when reporting is critical or does not fit their agenda. This often

results in parts of the population parroting the views and criticisms of their political leaders. This is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon facing journalists and newsrooms.

Meanwhile, newsroom executives still take the position that they should simply adhere to the basic principles of good journalism. In a survey conducted by the researcher, all respondents agree that audiences would most benefit from greater media awareness.

## Disinformation

Most respondents (approximately 95%) were not familiar with the word disinformation, with only those who worked in the newsrooms capable of speaking on it at all. According to those who could speak on disinformation, there is virtually no difference between the concepts of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. Of all the editorial staff of various media houses who were interviewed (11 respondents), only the managers (4 respondents) knew exactly what the concept of disinformation meant. However, it should be noted that the word “disinformation” is not widely used in Suriname. Instead, “fake news” is the term best known to refer to false information.

Opinions are divided on the topics or issues that are susceptible to disinformation. Almost all editorial staff believed that news about politics offered the least resistance to disinformation. This is because politicians themselves deliberately spread misinformation, the respondents said. In addition, news from parastatal institutions, criminal cases, and medical cases are mentioned. At least half of the respondents did not have a proper answer to the question of which topics can easily be manipulated.

Meanwhile, research by students of the Academie voor Hoger Kunst- en Cultuuronderwijs, during their master theses, show that newsrooms are more than ever confronted with social media challenges<sup>9,10</sup>. Through these channels, the news is spread much faster and much more news — whether it is true or not — is publicly available. Numerous posts are shared every day. This also means that traditional newsrooms must invest much more time into fact-checking information.

With the small newsrooms in Suriname, that is a huge challenge and one of the biggest challenges for Surinamese newsrooms. Facebook was noted as the biggest culprit.

Clear punishments against those who deliberately spread misinformation are seen by some as an ideal way to combat this phenomenon<sup>11</sup>. The government stated that the 'Electronic Legal Transactions Act', passed in parliament in 2017, would change the spread of misinformation. However, this has not delivered the desired result so far<sup>12</sup>. Some parts of the media are even considering this law tightening the muzzle laws that are fiercely criticised<sup>13</sup>.

## Trust in news media

Although there are no formal institutions and bodies in Suriname that conduct research into Media and information literacy, this research has been able to gain a greater insight on media literacy in Suriname based on master theses of students graduating from the Academy for Higher Art and Culture Education (AHKCO); a 2019 poll by research agency Nikos<sup>14</sup>; and interviews with various people, including editors-in-chief.

According to the information gathered, the media can be said to still generally enjoy considerable trust from the public, with 61% of respondents responding positively. This applies to newspapers, radio, television, and online news sites. Radio was cited as having the highest level of trust (59% of respondents), followed by television (50%), the print media (47%), and finally online platforms. Notably, images and sound still give that extra credibility to what is reported. With the radio, the interviews are often longer, and people hear themselves speaking, thus boosting the credibility of news reports. In comparison, television interviews are shorter or often use images without letting people speak.

The level of considerable trust in local media, even without a strong tradition of investigative journalism, is a promising sign and it is expected that strong investigative journalism would further increase the public's trust. There is very little real investigative journalism in Suriname, due to the low number of journalists and limited knowledge, skills, and financial resources. Issues are often not sufficiently explored or addressed and

remain superficial or unclear, thereby persisting.

The Nikos research also shows that 93% of Surinamese citizens think that journalists, with a little more diligence or perseverance, would execute their jobs better. In the eyes of many users of the journalistic products, the quality can therefore be better if journalists probe questions more deeply and research better. It is also common for journalists to uncritically quote what a source says. It is not uncommon for the microphone to simply be held open to directly broadcast what has been said, without the asking of a single critical question or follow-up messages, thereby leaving audiences with questions. Often, interviews are not even shortened. It is not uncommon for a story to appear in the news for a moment, a whole spectacle is made of it, and then you hear nothing more.

The Nikos report shows that a significant proportion of journalists are afraid of losing their jobs, thus resulting in them doing what their editors-in-chief or owners ask of them without question. In the same report, it is stated that journalists are regularly afraid of resentment from their employer. This is especially the case with state media. This leads to self-censorship, which means that few critical questions are asked. These are issues that gnaw at the credibility of journalists and can cause trust in the media to drop.

Some media companies have been working to maintain or increase the trust of their audiences by responding to their own audiences and bringing what the public wants to hear, see, or read, instead of responding to it the other way around. The COVID-19 pandemic has not had a significant influence on the trust in the media. On the other hand, the elections and the economy have influenced trust in the media since several media companies and individual journalists do not keep a professional distance from politics.

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## Recommendations

This research has made it clearer what has been known for some time: that not enough is being done in Suriname and there must be more research into the media scene in all facets in Suriname. The research was an eye-opener for the researcher as well and, as an active journalist, the researcher hopes that the issues covered in this report will help to bring about the necessary changes that need to be made in the media landscape in Suriname and the Caribbean as a whole. The key recommendations are:

### 1 Investment into media literacy education

Public authorities should invest more time and money into the education of citizens and ensure greater access to reliable information, especially in the hinterland.

### 2 Professionalisation of newsrooms

Newsrooms and media companies should pay more attention to recruiting qualified and well-trained media workers and journalists or should provide more training to their new and existing journalists. In addition, newsrooms must extend their capacity where possible to improve investigative journalism and the accuracy of news through verification and factchecking.

### 3 Media literacy collaboration

Both government and media companies should try to emphasise the importance of media literacy among the population. Both parties should collaborate and develop relevant strategies.

### 4 Countering disinformation

Measures to counter disinformation should be introduced and must protect free expression; should only be used when necessary to protect other fundamental values; and should be proportional to the specific threat at hand.

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# Trinidad & Tobago

By Kiran Maharaj

## Country Overview

Considered the most cosmopolitan and southernmost of the Caribbean countries, Trinidad and Tobago's population of 1.4 million people belong to a "parliamentary democracy with vibrant media and civil society sectors"<sup>1</sup>.

The president, the largely "ceremonial head of state" (ibid), is elected to a five-year term by a majority in the combined houses of Parliament. The prime minister serves as head of government and is leader of the majority party in Parliament. There are two main political parties among the few which exist: the People's National Movement (PNM) and the United National Congress (UNC). As the smaller island of the twin island republic, Tobago's internal affairs are overseen by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

The country's GDP per capita in 2021 stood at USD \$ 15,243.10<sup>2</sup> making it one of the wealthiest nations in the region due to its oil and gas economy.

In 2022, Trinidad and Tobago improved on the Press Freedom Index<sup>3</sup> and moved to a ranking of 25. The 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>4</sup> by Transparency International ranks them at 82. The Freedom House rating<sup>5</sup> is 82 out of 100, and deems the country to be "Free" in terms of its political rights and civil liberties. Meanwhile, the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2021 Democracy Index<sup>6</sup> categorises the political model as a "flawed democracy" with a global ranking of 41. Similarly, the Democracy Matrix<sup>7</sup> defines the country as a "deficit democracy."

With thirty-seven radio stations, five national television stations, fourteen broadcast cable players, thirty-seven radio stations and 1.09 million internet users, the media landscape is extremely competitive<sup>8</sup>. In a DataReportal report, GSMA Intelligence indicates that many people have more than one mobile phone with mobile users at 1.92 million<sup>9</sup>. The Trinidad and Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association (TTPBA) is composed of media owners and managers and focuses mainly on regulatory and legislative advocacy and consultation. The Media

Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT) is the representative body of journalists.

## Media and information literacy

There is no official data on media and information literacy in Trinidad and Tobago. The statement by veteran journalist and founder of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, Wesley Gibbings, summed up the sentiments of all interviewees: "media literacy is closely aligned to functional literacy. So, though in the Caribbean we have a high level of basic literacy – reading, writing and numeracy – because of mandatory primary education, there has not been corresponding competency in critically applying such knowledge. Digital and media literacy expand the notion of traditional literacy that existing school curricula do not appear equipped to manage."

Interviewees also propositioned that there is an urgent need to address this issue via inclusion of a structured approach in the school curricula from as early as Montessori levels. "Parents put these devices in the hands of toddlers and the children are growing up with a lack of discernment and this is part of the misinformation debacle." It is noteworthy that at the secondary school level, there is no subject area which deals with critical thinking as it was removed over a decade ago. The Chairman of the local chapter of Transparency International, Dion Abdool, made the point that, "in our society, a lot of us are hanging on disinformation... many are gullible", because there is a lack of understanding and awareness of the need to decipher what is seen or heard. Critical thinking programmes within the education system can have an implicit impact on improving levels of media and information literacy.

The necessity for the private sector to be involved was also cited with regards to sensitising the adult population of Trinidad and Tobago. One media manager articulated the point: "We seemed to have lost a generation to ignorance who were embraced by the speed of the



internet and had no guidance. They are now in the workforce, and they have bad habits. To break that we must find a way to reach out to them." The idea of a public campaign through various targeted strategies was suggested as one respondent lamented the lack of a coordinated approach that could have a long-term effect. "It cannot be a case of a scattered strategy. A combined and systematic campaign is needed."

Meanwhile, two civil society non-governmental organisation representatives were uncertain of the definition of the term media and information literacy. They admitted that this is not an area addressed at the grassroot levels. They noted that in some of these areas there is unreliable internet in a classroom setting and, most recently, children were disadvantaged during the pandemic with online learning. This made the point that while we speak of media and information literacy, universal access to information is beleaguered in some areas and instances.

"Where are the resources and who will lead the charge?" One interviewee questioned whether or not there is political will to address the issue. "Many people raise all these issues and want solutions but where is the priority when we have an escalating crime rate and increasing food prices? Who has the resources or will take the responsibility for follow through and proper implementation?" As rhetorical as this seemed, there was agreement that the lack of support and the need for improvement to media and literacy information levels are necessary.

Based on the feedback from interviewees, it was opined that every citizen would benefit from improvement in the area of media and information literacy. It will help with decision-making in daily lives. It is most necessary in communities with high poverty levels and less access to information, users of social media platforms, and children and teens aged 5 to 18.

## Disinformation

In a small group of fourteen respondents ages 17 to 71, only six answered the question about their confidence to spot disinformation. Of these six, only one said they were very confident. Those who responded said they were fairly confident

and those who did not answer said they never thought about it and are uncertain. This dipstick measurement done with a small, controlled group is indicative of the magnitude of the disinformation issue. There was also a general lack of understanding of the difference between misinformation and disinformation.

With a lack of data, the perception is that disinformation is very widespread. A leader of one business service organisation said disinformation is most prevalent among the population who do not rely on traditional news sources. Based on his experience he shared that older people are less inclined to factcheck. This was also mentioned with regard to radio talk shows and the lack of control by show hosts and moderators to dispel disinformation rants from callers.

All respondents pointed to the danger of social media as the main culprit of the disinformation deluge. A head of news and current affairs at a local media outlet stated that disinformation is very prevalent on social media, which has no regulation: "we have several voices on social media who claim to be experts or possess information and are claiming to share it in the public's best interest. Some members of the public don't background check and they accept the information as truth."

From a regulatory perspective, the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) admitted to their inability to regulate social media content since they do not — and cannot — control this space. Under the Cybercrime Act, if a website has registered offices in the country and it can be legally proven that the site is propagated with disinformation, the authorities can order it to be stopped. However, there is no monitoring of the internet in this manner.

"Typically, disinformation in the Caribbean context is tied to politics and political agendas. The pandemic period narrowed the focus considerably to include misleading messages about the disease, treatments, vaccines and official interventions to prevent spread. In a sense, our public life has always been prone to the deliberate propagation of untrue or misleading information in order to promote the interests of individuals or groups. In my view, it is an effective element of propaganda that has been employed to influence people — usually

in a negative sense.” This is a sentiment familiar to many countries globally. Within smaller communities, disinformation via word of mouth and small meetings is also common. It is a manipulation technique. Disinformation around health in the form of “wonder drugs: as a cure for all ailments” was also a concern which has been in existence more so over the last decade.

One interviewee questioned how effective the media was in curbing disinformation and said he believed that the media lacks commitment to fact-checking and fact-finding. This notion was addressed by a media manager who explained the constraints of newsrooms to factcheck every rumour every day. “There are insufficient resources to be a fact-checking machine. We can only address what are the big stories and what impacts the public the most”.

### Trust in news media

Trust in traditional news media remains high in Trinidad and Tobago. Within a group of eleven respondents, eight trusted either television, newspaper, or radio. Surprisingly, three respondents said their family members were the most trusted sources of information. This leaves the door open to misinformation and disinformation with an emotional connection.

When asked what influences trust in news media, one interviewee explained that “its perception of independence and inclination to be fair and balanced in presenting news and information.” This was echoed by a business leader who said that in his circles there is less trust in state media as it represents the government’s position and is a “propaganda machine.” He opined that as a plural society, some media houses are biased and need to present more balanced perspectives on the issues of the day because “when they are too biased, as with talk shows, it undermines their independence and erodes the public’s trust in them. Balanced and fair reporting is what brings trust. Some media houses do not make this a priority.”

Further, some media houses focus on “audiences and accompanying financial support through sponsorships and advertising. There is a lack of dominance of editorial content.” The concept of media capture is relevant and adds to the

dwindling of trust among some news outlets. Yet there are media houses which do place emphasis on fact-finding and ensuring they maintain the trust of their audiences via strong editorial policy and newsroom practices, inclusive of guidelines for reporting on social media platforms. There is overall consensus that there is a free and independent media in the country but there is a choice of political allegiance.

The sentiment that there is a lack of investigative reporting and meaningful news content was expressed as a perception that the media does not do their job effectively. Following a discussion with a few media practitioners, they explained the constraints within newsrooms of staff, time, investment, and legislative mechanisms. While there may be a willingness, the potential cannot be realised due to circumstantial challenges, especially among smaller news entities.

Recent in-country developments such as the pandemic reinforced trust in news media and more so in traditional news media. Television and radio were particularly more active as their audiences were more engaged with them, which showed the role of traditional media in a crisis. While social media was also very active, it was a source of misinformation and disinformation. With an explosion of information, it prompted some individuals to factcheck themselves. The speed of distribution and extent of reach created the negative impact, especially where resources are limited and culminated into the infodemic.

One interviewee expressed the opinion of others saying that “in other instances such as elections and sectional conflict, there are episodic spikes and troughs in media trust.” He disagreed that news is routinely mistrusted and said, “but it can be, if it collides too heavily with lived reality or powerful disinformation campaigns.”

Overall, the founding principles of editorial independence and commitment to be authoritative voices at times of crisis is key to ensuring that trust in news media is strong.

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## Recommendations

**1**

### Disinformation

- Conduct an information ecosystem assessment to understand the most prevalent distribution channels of disinformation; the key disinformation themes; and identify the main sources of disinformation. By having a better understanding of the environment, the most effective strategies to combat disinformation can be developed.
- Increase awareness among the adult population via a strategic campaign with private sector and civil society organisations. The campaign must focus on how to spot false information and how to factcheck, as well as discouraging individuals from forwarding messages (especially on WhatsApp) without verifying the information first. Major stakeholders such as the Trinidad & Tobago Publishers & Broadcasters Association (TTPBA) and the Media Association of Trinidad & Tobago (MATT) should be anchors for such an initiative.

**2**

### Media and information literacy

- Include media and information literacy in the school system from primary school to secondary level by developing specific strategies for the age groups. An example is to reintroduce 'Critical Thinking' as a subject area in a manner which will allow for case studies and examples to develop fact-checking skills. This initiative must also be communicated to parents and have the full support of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

**3**

### Trust in news media

- Develop the capacity of newsroom personnel, on-air hosts of radio and television, and heads of news to employ fact-checking tools and be more effective in communicating to the public.
- Develop the skills of journalists to report more effectively online via the media entities' social media platforms.
- Establish an online fact-checking hub which can service the country, for example, Snopes.

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# Surveying the need for a Caribbean public interest media initiative

By Denis Chabrol

## Introduction

This survey was conducted under the aegis of the [Association of Caribbean Media Workers](#) (ACM), with support from the [Public Media Alliance](#) (PMA), to determine the need for a Caribbean public interest media initiative.

This survey forms part of a wider project, “Developing a Situation Report & Action Plan on Media and Information Literacy and Disinformation in the Caribbean”, being implemented by the PMA and its regional partners, the ACM and the [Media Institute of the Caribbean](#) (MIC). The project is supported by UNESCO’s Cluster Office for the Caribbean and UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC).

This survey was conducted during the third quarter of 2022, at a time when the Caribbean lacks a solid, well-resourced mechanism to gather and disseminate journalism content about the Caribbean for the Caribbean. The Caribbean has a long history of regional media services<sup>1</sup>. But there have since been the closures of several Pan-Caribbean media houses between 1991 and 2015, whose survival had depended on external financing either as grants and/or revenue streams.

For instance, Radio Antilles closed its operations in 1991 when German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle scaled back its funding to the regional station<sup>2</sup>, which was followed by the eventual decline in other external revenue from relays of Voice of America, British Broadcasting Corporation, and Radio Canada International to the Caribbean through Radio Antilles. To put the

funding stream into perspective, Deutsche Welle had subsidised Radio Antilles’s operations to the amount of more than US\$555,000 per quarter.

Further, the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), founded in 1976, scaled back its operations and eventually officially closed its commercial operations in 2001 after the United Kingdom-headquartered Reuters News Agency ceased paying CANA to redistribute its wire (text) service to Caribbean subscribers. Its financial issues were compounded by a failure of some of its members to pay up regularly for its services. Ultimately, the agency closed, leaving major bills unpaid and over 50 staff members sent home without redundancy payments or salaries<sup>3</sup>.

“CANA was the main supplier of regional news from the Caribbean, information, and analysis to virtually all major newspapers, radio, and TV systems in the English Caribbean. The suspension of its service continues to be keenly felt throughout the region and beyond. Its subscriber base includes Reuters News Agency, the BBC, the German News Agency (DPA) and a variety of companies, international organisations and diplomatic offices that keep abreast of developments in the Caribbean.” (ibid)

Meanwhile, due to an apparent reduction in the Caribbean’s geo-political importance to major Western nations following the end of the Cold War, the Voice of America ceased the production and broadcast of its nightly Caribbean report in the late 1990s, followed by the closure of the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Caribbean Service in 2011<sup>4</sup>.

The Caribbean has a vibrant and diverse media landscape, with rapidly developing digital services. However, mis- and disinformation have increased across the region, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and crises, posing a threat to the regional media environment, and the life and wellbeing of its citizens. Trust in verified independent news and citizen engagement is important now more than ever but the potential for collaboration in the Caribbean media landscape remains relatively untapped. One solution is to create a strong Caribbean-wide network of affordable and accessible sources of verified news – a regional public interest media initiative.

### Survey background

This survey was conducted on the hypothesis that, despite the advances in modern Information Communications Technology (ICT), the region’s population seemed less educated and informed about issues and events in each other’s territories. A possible reason for this situation may be the diversity of the Caribbean, both in its geography and the multiple languages its residents speak<sup>5</sup>. The spirit of transboundary integration across common challenges, experiences, and solutions among the scattered, mainly Caribbean, island nations and territories appears to have diminished.

This contrasts with the pre-digital era when information consumers had been much more engaged and conversant about domestic and regional issues. The hypothesis thus assumes that there is a dire need for a trusted Caribbean public interest initiative. It further assumes that a regional public interest media entity could serve a wide Caribbean audience beyond the 15-nation, largely English-speaking CARICOM<sup>6</sup>, and its associate nations of Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

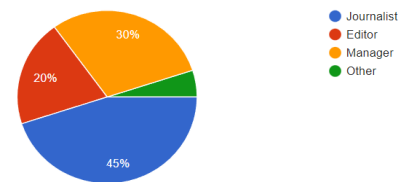
The survey was created with and distributed via Google Forms to a select group of experienced Caribbean media professionals. The survey consisted of three sections: questions about the respondent; questions about the landscape; and questions on the formulation of a regional system.

This research was constrained by the fact that the questionnaire was not administered individually or face-to-face, allowing persons to either opt out or not see it because it might have gone to their spam mail. For instance, more than 50 people contacted by email did not respond to the survey. Nonetheless, the received responses provided insight from a satisfactory cross-section of media workers, who represented different industries, years of experience, and target audiences.

Twenty responses were received from 18 Caribbean countries, with 45% percent identifying as journalists, 30% as managers, and 20% as editors. The participants represented radio (60%), online (55%), print (50%), television (40%), and academic and public relations (1% each). The respondents delivered content to different target audiences: national (80%), regional (75%), community or local (50%), and international (40%).

Which category of media worker are you?

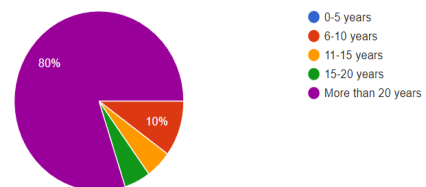
20 responses



Eighty percent of respondents indicated working in the media environment for more than 20 years, followed by 10% with 6 to 10 years of experience. There were no respondents with under six years of experience.

How long have you worked in the media environment?

20 responses



It must be noted that, while the respondents could be considered experts or media veterans, the insights should be considered a dipstick survey and it therefore cannot be said that they speak for the majority of Caribbean media professionals. Nonetheless, their insights serve as a solid foundation for further analysis of this subject and provide direction and guidance for future research.



## The need for a regional system

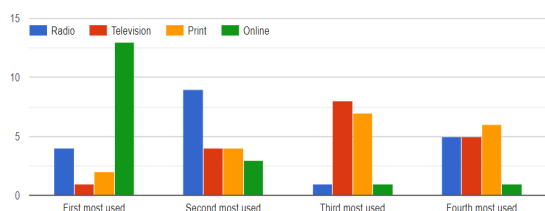
In the context of this research, the public interest media initiative refers to a network of trusted, affordable, and accessible Caribbean media outlets who produce fact-based news for audiences across the region. The initiative depends largely on collaboration and is committed to public service media values such as transparency, diversity, and accountability. While the final configuration of a new public interest media initiative would need to be developed, this research explores the feasibility of creating a network of regional media companies committed to the aforementioned values.

How necessary is a regional public interest media system for the Caribbean? Very much necessary, says most of the media workers surveyed. When the question was posed to them to rate the necessity on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being "very necessary"), no respondent indicated a rating below a 6: 47.4% of respondents rated 10, while 15.8%, 26.3%, 5.3%, and 5.3% indicated ratings of 9, 8, 7, and 6, respectively.

The respondents noted that regional residents are often not up to date with news and developments from other nations within the Caribbean. When asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 how well-informed they believed Caribbean residents are about what is going on in other territories (with 10 being "very-well informed"), 70% of respondents indicated a rating of 5 or below, with most respondents (35%) indicating a rating of 5.

Meanwhile, in terms of the most used information channel for credible news about other Caribbean territories, media workers indicated that residents preferred online sources, followed by radio and television, and then print as the least used information source.

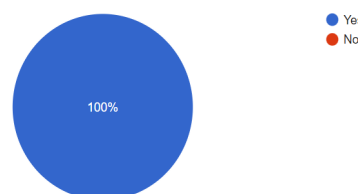
Using the grid below, please indicate the channels of information residents in your country receive credible news about other Caribbean territories, from most used to least used.



According to all 20 respondents, an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility can help combat misinformation and disinformation. Several respondents recounted the days of established and credible outlets such as Radio Antilles, CANA Radio, and the BBC Caribbean Service. One respondent – a journalist with more than 20 years of experience – said that these were "major sources which provided us with our most reliable and credible news and current affairs about the Caribbean and its people. There has been a huge void since they all became defunct. The Caribbean continues to lose the gains made when we had these media institutions."

Will an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility help combat misinformation and disinformation?

20 responses



Other comments included concerns that social media has been a source of false information where journalists are "forced to constantly combat misinformation", along with calls for "an adequate promotion of news literacy" and for all parties to operate under "the same editorial code of conduct in the strictest way possible." Another respondent with 6-10 years of experience in the media environment opined that, considering common challenges faced in the Caribbean, "getting a better understanding of how the countries are interconnected would allow people to more easily recognise when a news item may not be completely factual."

Further, nearly all respondents (95%) believed that an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility would help the Caribbean respond to disasters citing, among other reasons, that "It will be a trusted source of information"; "it can bring timely and relevant news/information to members of the public"; "once reliable information is disseminated in a timely and consistent manner, the public will be educated and there would be more buy in"; and "the media has a huge power to influence national and global public opinion, giving visibility to disaster-

related issues.”

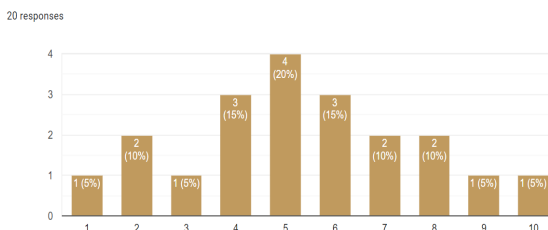
One Dominican respondent cited the example of Radio Antilles’ role when Dominica was devastated by Hurricane David and the major eruption of Soufriere Hills volcano in St. Vincent in 1979, adding that “Radio Antilles sent a five-member team to an island which had little to no communication to the outside world.” Another veteran journalist with more than 20 years of experience recalled the example of ABS TV/ Radio which was the de facto sub-regional entity during the passage of hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. “Our coverage was regionally acclaimed, showing there is a great demand for this type of service,” the respondent said.

Meanwhile, nearly every respondent said they were aware of existing or previous regional news services that produced original content. The current Caribbean Media Corporation (formerly CANA, the Caribbean News Agency) was the most cited. One respondent with 6-10 years of experience in the media, commented, “I know some regional outlets sometimes have people on the ground reporting on major events in individual countries, but I am unaware of a continued effort to bring original content from member countries.” Another veteran journalist with 20+ years of experience said that “consideration must also be given to local media that offer both local and regional content online.”

With radio remaining “the most technologically accessible medium of mass communication”<sup>7</sup> for the Caribbean, the absence of a regional radio news service has impacted the availability of credible news and current affairs content, most respondents said. One respondent noted that “Since the demise of [previous regional services], there have not been any major sources for credible news and current affairs. With islands so widely dispersed, information is key to Caribbean integration and development.” Opposing comments cite residents as being informed through numerous sources, with television filling the void but being unable to provide a credible response.

Despite the reported necessity of a regional news system, there are challenges to such a system being developed. The level of existing collaboration between regional media organisations, for instance, seems to be a potential hindrance.

Based on your knowledge and experience, how would you rate collaboration between regional media organisations? (1 = no collaboration at all, 10 = high level of collaboration)



Many respondents also cited the high costs related to broadcast technologies and running a news organisation. “It can be quite costly depending on whether we want to set up a terrestrial radio station for example. Even if it were to be internet based, significant costs would have to be expended, though less. In any event, the workers must be well paid and adequate resources provided,” said a veteran media manager.

Meanwhile, when asked about their concerns about a regional system, respondents’ answers included political interference; a lack of credibility; funding; sustainability; governance structure; and independence. Some notable responses were:

1. Who is involved - board, managers etc.
2. Sustainable investment - contract of commitment etc.
3. Consistency of journalist / reporters, this may require permanently hired staff, possibly one in each radio station or the station is well compensated for providing the content.” – **Media manager with 20+ years of experience**

“Collaboration and consistency. Plus, we are already stretched for resources and only have a small pool of journalists trying to produce news locally.” – **Editor with 6-10 years of experience**

“My answer above is deliberately tentative and would depend to a large extent on the sustainability of the funding model, its editorial independence, the depth and breadth of its editorial team, the reach of its broadcast and the commitment by its creators to consistent excellence in providing world-class content.” – **Media manager with 20+ years of experience**

“That this is not controlled by the larger islands of the Caribbean but that every

island is represented; and that no particular government or sponsor be allowed to compromise its credibility.” – **Media manager with 20+ years of experience**

## Recommendations

Despite its limitations, this survey has demonstrated the immense potential of a Caribbean public interest media initiative. But the survey, along with the storied history of previous initiatives, has also highlighted noteworthy challenges that must be overcome. Nonetheless, the benefits of a regional system – particularly its potential to fight disinformation, foster greater relationships between Caribbean citizens, and build resilience to threats such as climate change – remain significant and indicate there is a need for such an initiative.

Based upon the findings of the survey, the researcher offers the following recommendations that would lend to the feasibility of the development of a regional public interest media system:

### 1 Build upon existing human resources

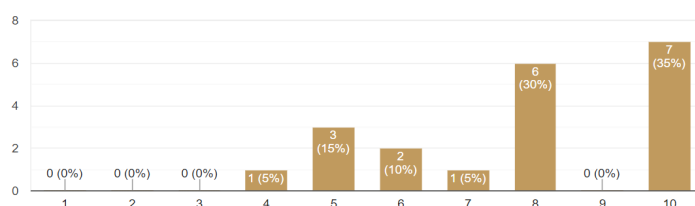
According to most respondents, Caribbean newsrooms are well-equipped to effectively and efficiently produce world-class news and current affairs content. Respondents were asked to rate how well-equipped they believed the Caribbean’s human resource capacity was to effectively and efficiently produce world-class news and current affairs content and nearly every respondent (95%) indicated a rating of 5 and above, with 25% of respondents believing that the region’s human resources were “completely equipped” (a rating of 10). Only one respondent rated below 5, instead rating a 3 in response to the question. It is therefore imperative that a new regional system should build upon and invest in existing human resources, particularly through training and career development opportunities.

### 2 Strong buy-in from regional news managers should be a priority

According to the surveyed media workers, existing levels of cross-border collaboration leave much to be desired, with previous regional efforts having reportedly failed due to a lack of collaboration. When asked to rate collaboration between regional media organisations, the respondents were across the board, with most responses falling in the middle (ratings of 4 to 6). The lack of a unanimous response hints to disjointed collaborative efforts regionally. But there is hope – when asked if they would join a Caribbean news initiative if it were created, most respondents (35%) said they completely would.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being “disagree entirely”, 10 being “agree entirely”), how much do you agree with the following statement: “If created, I would join a Caribbean news initiative”?

20 responses



**3**

### **Any regional service must ensure that a viable and sustainable financial structure is in place**

Previous initiatives also reportedly failed due to financial struggles, such as dealing with high telecommunications costs, and a new regional system must ensure previous mistakes are not repeated in this regard. Most of the surveyed media workers (76.5%) explicitly cite finances or funding when asked their opinions about why previous regional services have collapsed or have not been sustainable. Addressing potential financial issues ahead of time was identified by several respondents as an important way to ensure the sustainability of a new regional service but overall, the responses were diverse. Their opinions on ensuring sustainability included winning the involvement and support of governments, regional and international non-profit organisations, private sector, and big corporations; making the regional system CARICOM-led; tapping into advertising/sponsorships; seeking endowments; creating a regional trust fund; resuscitating media associations; and bettering salaries and working conditions for staff retention. One respondent cited “the rebirth of a cooperative/trust model of news service with access to external funding from development/philanthropic sources” as a useful means of ensuring regional news service sustainability. Further, the respondents generally found today’s technologies for the acquisition of and dissemination of news and current affairs content to the Caribbean to be cost-effective. However, some comments indicate that cost-effectiveness depends on where terrestrial radio is set up, the appropriate audience platform, and the need to shop around. A new regional system must therefore also tap into cost-effective technology, while considering how these costs may vary across the territories.

**4**

### **To adhere to public service values, a new initiative must be supported by strong governance and regulatory structures that safeguard editorial independence**

When asked “What should be done to guarantee the editorial independence of a credible regional news service?” 80% of respondents indicated an editorial board as important. A reliance on journalists was also highly cited (55% of responses), along with strong policies (50%), a board of directors (25%), and a charter (25%). One respondent indicated that a cooperative ownership has been effectively used in the past with the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), “whose independence and credibility has never been seriously questioned or doubted.” Regardless of the established structure of a new regional system, it must demonstrate strong governance and adherence to editorial independence.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wood, R.E., 1977. International Broadcasting in and to the Caribbean. *Caribbean Studies*, 17 (3/4), pp. 153–169. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25612817>

<sup>2</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1997. Montserrat: Information on a radio station called Radio Antilles, on its present-day operations, and if no longer in operation, on the circumstances of its closure, on its ownership, management, and corporate affiliations, 1970 to present. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ac562f.html> [Accessed 5 October 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Dunn, H.S., 2004. The Politics of the Media in the English-Speaking Caribbean. In Thomas, P.N. and Zaharom, N., eds. *Who Owns the Media: Global Trends and Local Resistances*. London: Zed Books, pp. 69–96

<sup>4</sup> Voice of America, 2011. BBC to Shut Down 5 Language Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/bbc-to-shut-down-5-language-services-114608894/170455.html> [Accessed 5 October 2022]

<sup>5</sup> Guyana Chronicle, 2021. Caribbean Languages. [Online]. Available at: <https://guyanachronicle.com/2021/08/22/caribbean-languages/> [Accessed on 5 October 2022]

<sup>6</sup> CARICOM, n.d. Member States and Associates. [Online]. Available at: <https://caricom.org/member-states-and-associate-members/> [Accessed 5 October 2022]

<sup>7</sup> Caribbean Broadcasting Union, 2022. CBU Members Joining the Global Celebration of Radio and Trust. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.caribroadcastunion.org/2022/02/10/cbu-world-radio-day-2022/> [Accessed on 5 October 2022]

# Appendix

## Overview

This research report was informed by an online survey of media workers and other stakeholders based in 8 Caribbean countries: The Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago, and a feasibility survey conducted by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers.

The appendix herein contains the blank versions of both surveys. Survey results and insights – along with any additional surveys conducted by individual researchers – can be found throughout the country reports and the “Surveying the need for a Caribbean public interest media initiative” report.

The **online survey of media workers and other stakeholders** accepted responses from 14 July 2022 to 23 August 2022 and was produced using the platform, Survey Monkey. The survey was hosted by the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC) and shared via MIC and the researchers. The survey was not shared with the general public.

There were 30 questions in total, and a total of 105 online responses were received. Responses were collated by MIC and each researcher analysed their respective countries. While the online survey received a response from each country, there was an uneven number of respondents from each: 23 from The Bahamas; 19 from Barbados; 1 from Grenada; 14 from Guyana; 16 from Jamaica; 15 from St. Vincent & the Grenadines; 3 from Suriname; and 14 from Trinidad & Tobago. As a result, some countries were better represented than others. This shortcoming is taken into consideration and highlights the need for more data as well as further insights from media stakeholders in the target countries.

Meanwhile, the **public interest media initiative feasibility survey** accepted responses from 5 July 2022 to 12 August 2022 via Google Forms. There were 31 questions in total. The survey was hosted by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) and shared via ACM researcher, Mr. Denis Chabrol, and PMA Advocacy Coordinator, Ms. Desilon Daniels. The survey collected data using expert sampling, with Mr. Chabrol identifying more than 50 media workers with whom to share the survey. Ultimately, twenty responses were received from 18 Caribbean countries.

It must be noted that while the respondents could be considered experts or media veterans, the sample size cannot be said to be representative of the majority of Caribbean media professionals. Nonetheless, their insights serve as a solid foundation for further analysis of the feasibility of a public interest media initiative and provide direction and guidance for future research.

Further, it must be emphasised that this research is not wholly representative of the Caribbean media landscape, especially given the small scale of responses. However, it provides a snapshot of the current situation facing the media in the region in the areas of disinformation, trust in media, and media and information literacy.



# Surveying the need for a Caribbean trusted news network initiative

This survey is being conducted by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, with support from the Public Media Alliance (PMA), to determine the feasibility of Caribbean public interest media initiative.

This survey forms part of a wider project "Developing a Situation Report & Action Plan on Media and Information Literacy and Disinformation in the Caribbean", being implemented by the PMA and its regional partners, the Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) and the Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC). The project is supported by the UNESCO Kingston office and UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC).

The survey is split into three sections: questions about you; questions about the landscape; and questions on the formulation of a regional system.

This form will close on Friday August 12, 2022 at midnight EDT. For questions or comments, please email [\[redacted\]](#) or [\[redacted\]](#).

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\* Required

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

1. Which category of media worker are you? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Journalist

Editor

Manager

Other

2. How long have you worked in the media environment?

*\* Mark only one oval.*

- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 15-20 years
- More than 20 years

3. Please indicate your country of residence and/or work. *\**

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Please indicate your industry (select all that apply) *\**

*Check all that apply.*

- Online
- Print
- Academia
- Radio
- Television
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What has been your target audience? Select all that apply.

*\* Check all that apply.*

- Community or local
- National
- Regional
- International

6. How would you rate your knowledge of old broadcast technologies (for example, reel tapes, and cassettes)? (1 = no knowledge at all, 10 = completely knowledgeable) \*

Mark only one oval.

—

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____

7. How would you rate your knowledge of digital and internet-based technologies? (1 = no knowledge at all, 10 = completely knowledgeable) \*

Mark only one oval.

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LANDSCAPE**

8. How well-informed do you believe Caribbean residents are about what is going on in other territories? (1 = not informed at all, 10 = very well-informed) \*

Mark only one oval.

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____

9. Using the grid below, please indicate the channels of information residents in your country receive credible news about other Caribbean territories, from most used to least used.

*Check all that apply.*

	Radio	Television	Print	Online
<b>First most used</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Second most used</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Third most used</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Fourth most used</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Using the grid below, please indicate on a scale of 1-10 each medium's prospect of disseminating regional news and current affairs content to the Caribbean in a cost-effective manner? (1 = no prospect, 10 = best prospect)

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Radio</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Television</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Print</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Online</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Will an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility help combat misinformation and disinformation?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

12. Please provide a reason for your answer above. ("Will an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility help combat misinformation and disinformation?")

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13. Will an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility help the Caribbean to respond to disasters?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

14. Please provide a reason for your answer to the previous question. ("Will an effectively-run regional news and current affairs facility help the Caribbean to respond to disasters?")

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15. How well equipped do you think the Caribbean's human resource capacity is to effectively and efficiently produce world-class news and current affairs content? (1 = not equipped at all, 10 = completely equipped)

*Mark only one oval.*

1

2

3

4

5

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7

8

9

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16. Based on your knowledge and experience, how would you rate collaboration between regional media organisations? (1 = no collaboration at all, 10 = high level of collaboration)

*Mark only one oval.*

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>

17. How much do you agree with the following statement: "Audience engagement should be strictly measured by web metrics such as social media data"? (1 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)

*Mark only one oval.*

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>

18. How much do you agree with the following statement: "Web-based metrics provide a true reflection of real audience engagement"? (1 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)

*Mark only one oval.*

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>



## FORMULATING A REGIONAL SYSTEM

19. How necessary is a regional public media system for the Caribbean?  
(1 = completely unnecessary, 10 = completely necessary)

Mark only one oval.

1	<input type="radio"/>	2	<input type="radio"/>	3	<input type="radio"/>	4	<input type="radio"/>	5	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____
6	<input type="radio"/>	7	<input type="radio"/>	8	<input type="radio"/>	9	<input type="radio"/>	10	<input type="radio"/>
	_____		_____		_____		_____		_____

20. Are you aware of any existing or previous regional news services that produces original content? If so, please identify the services below.

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21. Has the absence of a regional radio news service impacted the availability of credible news and current affairs content in the Caribbean? Please explain your answer. \*

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22. Why you think regional news services have collapsed or have not been sustainable? Please explain your answer.

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23. What should be done to ensure the sustainability of a regional news service? \*

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24. What financial model would you most recommend to ensure a regional news service is credible and sustainable? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Government funding
- CARICOM funding
- Advertising/Sponsorship
- Grant Seed Funding
- Proceeds from the Investment of Seed Funding
- Subscription/Paywall
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

25. What should be done to guarantee the editorial independence of a credible regional news service? Select all that apply. \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Reliance on journalists
- Board of Directors
- Editorial Board
- Charter
- Policies
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

26. How cost-effective are the technologies for the acquisition of and dissemination of news and current affairs content to the Caribbean?
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

27. Do you think that radio stations across the Caribbean will broadcast well-produced regional radio news packages free of cost? Give reasons for your answer. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

28. Do you think that radio stations across the Caribbean will pay for well-produced regional radio news packages?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

29. Do you think that radio stations across the Caribbean will broadcast well-produced regional radio news packages inclusive of advertisements as well as obtain local advertisements for themselves?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

30. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "disagree entirely", 10 being "agree entirely"), how much do you agree with the following statement: "If created, I would join a Caribbean news initiative"?

\*

*Mark only one oval.*

1

2

3

4

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31. As a media professional, what would be your concerns about such an initiative?

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# International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) Caribbean Survey

## QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

1. Please indicate your age.
2. Please indicate your gender.
3. What is your country of residence?
4. Please indicate your occupation and industry.

## NEWS TRUST

**5. Please rank your sources of information, from most trusted to least trusted.**

	Family, friends	Social media commentators	Online news media	Radio news media	Print news media	Television news media
1 <sup>st</sup> – most trusted						
2 <sup>nd</sup>						
3 <sup>rd</sup>						
4 <sup>th</sup>						
5 <sup>th</sup>						
6 <sup>th</sup> – least trusted						

**6. How would you define a trusted news organisation?**

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**7. How much do you agree with the following statement: “I trust the news media in my country”? (0 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**8. How much do you agree with the following statement: “I often question the accuracy of news items in my country”? (0 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**9. Has your trust in established news media shifted over the past five years? If so, please explain how (for example, has it risen, declined, or stayed relatively the same)?**

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## DISINFORMATION

**10. How would you define disinformation? Select all statements with which you agree.**

- I consider disinformation and misinformation to be the same
- "Fake news" is another term I use to refer to disinformation
- I believe disinformation is deliberately produced to mislead or deceive
- I think disinformation and propaganda are the same
- I consider disinformation to be worse than misinformation
- I think dis- and misinformation are new phenomena
- I consider all false information to be disinformation

**11. Who should be responsible for tackling mis- and disinformation? Please check all that apply.**

- Governments
- Library services
- Established media houses
- Social media commentators
- Citizens
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**12. How much do you agree with the following statement: "Mis- and disinformation has worsened over the past three years"? (0 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**13. Please provide an explanation to your previous response.**

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**14. How much do you agree with the following statement: "I feel well-equipped to spot mis- and disinformation"? (0 = completely disagree, 10 = completely agree)**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**15. Please provide an explanation to your previous response.**



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**16. Reflect on those instances where you've seen blatant "fake news", or you've questioned the facts of something you've seen or heard. Where have you most likely experienced these instances? Please select no more than three.**

- Word of mouth conversations with family, friends, or acquaintances
- In a private chat on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Signal, etc.)
- In a group on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Signal, etc.)
- From private citizens on my social media feed(s)
- Reading or listening to a news report
- Billboards or signage

## **MEDIA LITERACY**

**17. How much do you agree with the following statement: "I feel empowered/sufficiently informed by the information and media I consume to tackle everyday problems and democratic issues"? (0 = not empowered at all, 10 = completely empowered)**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**18. When you see or read things online, how confident are you in recognising what is advertising and what is not?**

- Very confident
- Fairly confident
- Neither confident nor not confident
- Not very confident
- Not at all confident

**19. A news story or article appears in your news feed, a link to an article is shared with you, or you've come across a trending article on social media. How do you usually identify whether what you're reading, seeing, or hearing is accurate and reliable? Please select all that apply.**

- I would believe it if it was a news outlet I had heard of
- I assume the information must be true because it is published
- I would believe if it was by a news outlet I thought was trustworthy
- I would check how professional the article looks (for example, I check for spelling mistakes, the quality of images and videos)
- I don't question the validity of what I'm reading because all things on the internet are accurate
- I consider the article's content and assess how likely it is to be true
- I check to see if the same information in the article appears anywhere else
- I consider whether the person who shared it was someone I trusted
- I look at the article's comments or what people have said about the news outlet

- I check whether the article was written by someone who witnessed the events themselves
- I wouldn't tend to check the information in the article to see if it was true
- I ask a trusted person whether they think the news is real or fake
- I question everything all the time because I am sceptical about everything on the internet

**20. How do you think search engine websites such as Google are mainly funded?  
Please select one option**

- A TV licence fee
- By the Government
- Sales of programmes and services to other channels or countries
- Advertising on the website
- Advertisers who pay to prioritise their entry on the list/ to be first on the list
- Advertisers pay when users click through from sponsored links to their website
- Don't know
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**21. "Internet users must be protected from seeing inappropriate or offensive content." Please select one option**

- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

**22. "I think people should have the right to hide their identity online in order to express their views anonymously." Please select one option**

- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

**23. "When I visit websites or apps, I usually accept the terms & conditions without reading them".**

- Strongly disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Slightly agree
- Strongly agree

**24. Thinking generally, when you find information online (such as on search engines like Google), do you ever question whether the information you find is truthful?**

- Yes
- No

**25. And do you believe that all the information you hear, see and find online is truthful? Please select one option**

- All is truthful
- Most is truthful
- Some is truthful
- Don't know

**26. How do you determine whether a news site is trustworthy? Please select all that apply.**

- I check different websites to see if the same information appears on them all
- I check that the website address looks genuine
- I ask people I trust whether they use the site
- I check the credibility of the identified author(s) or owner(s)
- I check whether the site is regularly updated
- I check whether the site looks professional
- I use a search engine to determine how reputable the source is
- I check the site's metadata or source codes
- I don't make any checks

**27. When you use a search engine to find information, you enter a query in the search box and the search engine will then show links to websites in the results pages. Which one of these is closest to your opinion about the level of accuracy or bias of the information detailed in the websites that appear in the results pages?**

- I think that if they have been listed by the search engine, these websites will have accurate and unbiased information
- I think that some of the websites will be accurate or unbiased and some won't be
- I don't really think about whether they have accurate or unbiased information, I just use the sites I like the look of
- I consider results that are placed higher to be more accurate and unbiased

**28. There are many ways that companies can collect information about people based on what they do online. Which, if any of the following ways are you aware of? Please select all that apply**

- Using 'cookies'\* to collect information about the websites people visit or what products and services interest them
- Collecting information from social media accounts – i.e. about users' interests, "likes", location, preferences and so on
- Asking customers to 'register' with a website or app and to opt in/ opt out of receiving further information from them or their partners

- Using apps on smartphones to collect data on users' locations or what products and services interest them
- Not aware of any of these
- Not aware that companies collect information about what people do online
- Don't know

**29. Do you know what clickbait is?**

- Yes
- No

**30. An example of clickbait: "You won't believe what President Biden said to a group of journalists! Read more." This is a sensationalised headline that aims to grab your curiosity and emotions and encourages you to click a link. How does a clickbait headline influence your trust in a news article?**

- It increases my trust in the article
- It decreases my trust in the article
- It neither increases nor decreases my trust in the article
- I do not click on clickbait headlines because I do not trust them

**Find out more about the Public Media Alliance, Association of Caribbean Media Workers, Media Institute of the Caribbean and UNESCO IPDC:**

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