



EU MEDIA RELATIONS

Brussels Journalists Survey & what
the findings reveal for Communicators.



CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Defending Media Freedom | 3 |
| 1. The Brussels Journalists Survey and what it means for Communicators | 4 |
| 2. The Brussels press corps | 5 |
| 3. Challenges facing Brussels journalists | 6 |
| 4. Spokespersons and Public Relations | 11 |
| 5. Journalists' favourite sources of news and information | 17 |
| 6. Media Relations under Juncker's Commission | 23 |
| 7. Press Releases: The good, the bad and the ugly | 27 |
| 8. Journalists working with Online and Social Media | 35 |
| About the Authors and Dober Partners | 42 |

DEFENDING MEDIA FREEDOM

Press and media freedom is under attack. Not only in authoritarian states but also in countries with strong democratic traditions like Germany and the United Kingdom.



**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Media freedom is one of the key values and ideals of democratic societies in the world. It must be defended at all times because it is constantly under pressure.

Therefore, as a small thank you to the journalists who contributed to this research, we have donated €1,000 to Reporters Without Borders – which focuses on internet and new media censorship, as well as providing material, financial and psychological assistance to journalists assigned to dangerous areas. Headquartered in Paris with a Brussels bureau, Reporters Without Borders has consultative status at the United Nations and UNESCO.

The work of Reporters Without Borders has never been so important. Last year started with the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris and ended with Poland’s new nationalist government adopting legislation that would give it comprehensive control over the country’s public broadcasters to “stop” criticism of the government’s actions. As Politico summed up: “2015 was a terrible year for journalists in Europe. Attacks by Islamic militants, unjustified arrests, assaults, harassment, threats and tougher legal restrictions made it harder for editors, reporters and photographers to hold the powerful to account across the region this year, according to media organizations and NGOs.”

It was not all bad news, however, and we applaud the European Commission’s support for the new European Centre for Press and Media Freedom established in Leipzig. We sincerely hope 2016 will be a better year for journalists and dedicate this report to media freedom everywhere.



Mark Dober



Natalia Kurop

1. THE BRUSSELS JOURNALISTS SURVEY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR COMMUNICATORS



If you are a journalist or a communicator based in Brussels this report is for you. It is based on qualitative and quantitative research carried out in late 2015 and 2016 together with desk study, personal experience and reflections.

At the heart of this report are the results of an online survey of 80 Brussels journalists accredited with the European Commission. The answers are reflected in the aggregate data summarized in the charts found in this report, as well as the anonymous quotes. Having completed the survey, we discussed and validated the findings with a number of leading Brussels journalists also quoted directly in this report.

Question Randomisation was employed to minimise question order bias and improve overall data quality. Percentages were rounded up or down to the nearest single percentage. Otherwise rankings are given scores denoted on the individual charts.

We feel that the survey findings give a statistically relevant and accurate reflection of the opinions of the entire Brussels press corps given the sample size and known 'universe' of around 955 accredited journalists. In addition we talked to a number of individual journalists after completing the research to add some personal responses to the survey results.

By making the results public, we hope to promote best practices that can help reduce the flow of irrelevant information that journalists are just going to ignore, and increase the success rate for real news that we believe is really important to communicators. Dober Partners does not make any money from this report but we hope it demonstrates our expertise in European media relations to those seeking our help.

We are grateful to a number of organizations for promoting this study, especially the International Press Association, which represents journalists in their professional dealings with the EU institutions and the Brussels Press Club.

Lastly we would like to thank the many Brussels journalists who took part in this research. We expect many of you will be interested in the findings.

2. THE BRUSSELS PRESS CORPS

The following number of journalists and technical press (i.e. cameramen and photographers) were officially accredited with the European Commission in 2016:

Number of EU journalists

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| Men | 599 |
| Women | 356 |
| Total | 955 |

Number of EU technical press

| | |
|--------------|------------|
| Men | 285 |
| Women | 73 |
| Total | 358 |

Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium, it is also hosts the EU institutions, and is one of the most important international media centres. According to the European Commission there are 1,313 accredited journalists and technical press people reporting from Brussels. In total they represent 487 different print, broadcast and online media organizations from 62 different countries around the world.

They cover European affairs, NATO and events in Belgium, the Netherlands and other European countries. Many more journalists from all over the world visit Brussels for brief periods for EU related events or to report on the activities of the international institutions based here.

Despite what seemed to be a trend described by 'The Economist' in 2010 as 'The incredible shrinking EU press corps', the number of EU-accredited foreign correspondents has grown almost continuously over the last 40 years, from only 259 in 1976 to almost a thousand in 2016.



GARETH HARDING, FREELANCE JOURNALIST AND HEAD OF THE MISSOURI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM'S BRUSSELS PROGRAMME

“There are two myths about the Brussels press corps. The first is it is in decline, whereas numbers have constantly risen. The second is it is the biggest foreign press corps in the world – a position held by London.”

3. CHALLENGES FACING BRUSSELS JOURNALISTS



The biggest challenge for journalism over the last decade has been the impact of the internet on everybody and everything.

For most media the internet has led to a dramatic fall in revenues. Advertising revenue used to account for 80 percent of newspaper income. Unfortunately for newspapers, corporate advertisers are relying more heavily on cheaper and more dynamic online advertising space. Although some online media have gained subscribers and advertising revenue, the primary winner in this race seems to be Google, which provides ample free news to consumers, while it profits from online advertising.

The challenge for publishers is switching from print to online editions generally brings in much lower revenues – so while some print newspapers generate hundreds of millions of euros, the best digital products make only tens of millions. News that The Independent was ceasing print editions in March 2016, leaving only an online edition is indicative of the crisis in print media. Stephen Glover, a co-founder of the Independent, said the paper was selling “So few copies that it doesn’t really make sense to go on printing it every day. I think it will be the first of many papers which stop their print editions and have another existence online.” He said The Financial Times and The Guardian could also stop producing print editions “within the next few years”, and in 10 to 15 years there would not be “very many” printed newspapers.

The first impact of the internet on journalists was changing their deadlines. Instead of filing to meet the old deadlines of 6 o’clock for the following day’s printed press, deadlines are now constant and rolling. Time has become a scarce resource for journalists the majority of whom have less than four hours to research a story before submitting it for publishing.

Although the internet initially seemed like a time-saving machine for research and filing stories, the internet has actually caused most journalists to work longer hours. Alongside filing regular broadcast or print stories, reporters are often pressured to write blogs, film interviews and tweet constantly in the fight for eyeballs. With so much news freely available, exclusives have become more important and Brussels journalists will often focus more on analysis rather than ‘pure’ news.

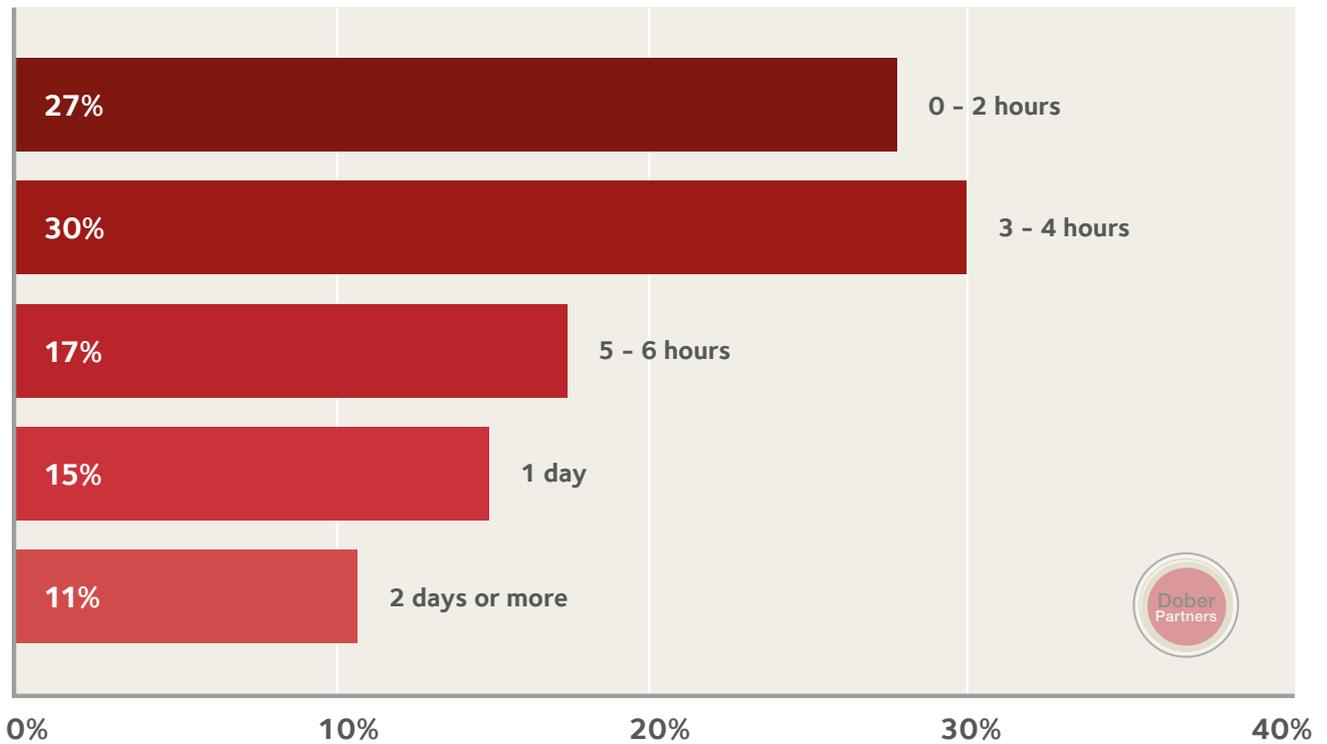
Not surprisingly, with so much ‘internal’ pressure placed on Brussels journalists by their media, time and money are the key challenges facing them today according to our research. However, there are many other ‘external’ institutional challenges pinpointed in our study, ranging from media freedom issues to accessing appropriate EU spokespersons. We list below a selection of quotes from journalists when asked the key challenges facing them.



Time

- **“Time - Everything has to be done so fast, that you never seem to be able to think first.”**
- **“Escape the continuous flow of information and news.”**
- **“Being faster than Twitter.”**
- **“Too many big topics, not enough time.”**
- **“The workload.”**
- **“Covering a plethora of subjects accurately and in an in-depth way.”**
- **“The intense pace of news gathering.”**
- **“To remain calm and professional in an increasingly hectic environment.”**
- **“Trying to reconcile long, sometimes unpredictable hours with a young family.”**
- **“A 24-hour news cycle.”**
- **“Covering so many issues simultaneously it’s hard to cover any of them with the depth they deserve and require.”**
- **“Adapting to “instantaneous information”, such as summit results being communicated first on Twitter rather than in a press room.”**

Survey Question: How much time do you have to research a story typically before submitting it for publishing?



EU Journalist Survey

Money

- **“Adapting to the ‘digital’ age where people want or expect content to be free and also have quality.”**
- **“Finding new, paying clients as many of the magazines and newspapers I used to write for are going bankrupt.”**
- **“Getting decent pay for freelance work.”**
- **“To get paid and waiting a long time before receiving payments.”**
- **“Finding and keeping a job.”**
- **“Lack of money and resources.”**
- **“Keeping doing my job, regardless of the cuts in my office.”**
- **“Ensuring that I have enough work.”**
- **“Job uncertainty.”**
- **“Getting properly paid for my work.”**
- **“Destruction of markets for paid journalism.”**

“

Sooner rather than later all print newspapers will all go.

No one can say in what order it will happen....Trace the downward curves of print sales over the past couple of decades and then extend those lines into the future: you will find they all hit zero at some point in the next 25 years or so – and of course they will have to cease publication long before that zero moment comes. It is possible that some titles might continue to appear in print as retro niche products, rather like vinyl LPs, but for serious purposes the paid-for newspaper is going the way of the dodo.”

**Brian Cathcart Professor of Journalism
quoted in The Guardian February 2016.**

”

Institutional Challenges

- **“Availability of Commissioners and other important players for on-camera interviews.”**
- **“Reporting on economic issues and Greece.”**
- **“The coverage of the migration crisis.”**
- **“The strict information control by powerful institutions like NATO and the European Union. At those moments when there is a real need for asking questions, access is restricted.”**
- **“Access to sources.”**
- **“Breaking the European Commission’s wall around real news.”**
- **“Lack of transparency from policymakers and corporations.”**
- **“Simplifying complex European policy matters for the audience to understand.”**
- **“Propaganda.”**
- **“Turkish government’s crackdown on free media and in particular my newspaper.”**
- **“Making my deep disappointment of the course the European Union has taken not too deeply felt in my articles.”**
- **“Trying to navigate the enormous amount of information being poured out of the institutions daily. And trying to find out what is really relevant!”**

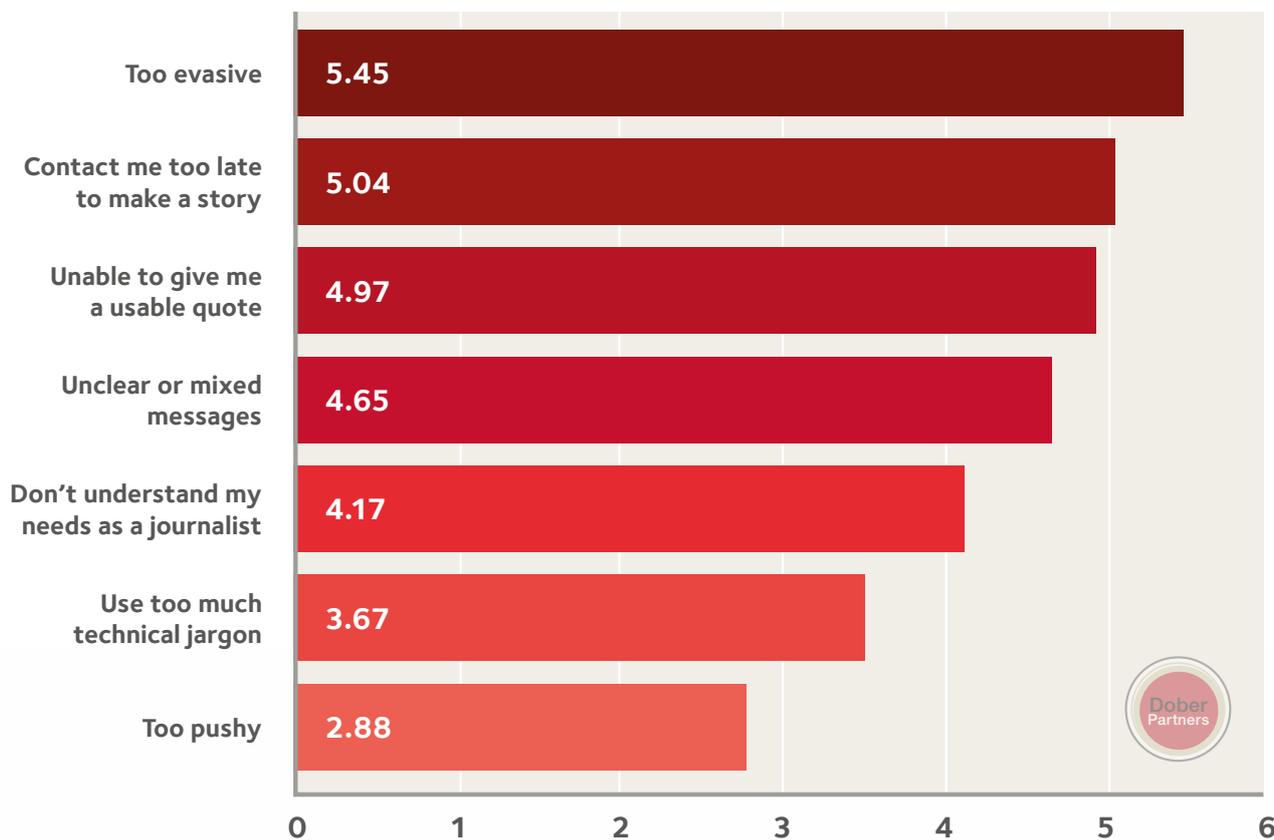
4. SPOKESPERSONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Most Brussels journalists are professionals, and have degrees in journalism or related fields but they are not necessarily content experts on every subject they cover.

They rely on experts and spokespersons for facts and commentary. The reporter's main objectives in an interview are to gain an understanding of an issue or story, collect facts and quotes from reputable sources and balance opposing views.

Spokespeople being too evasive is the number one pet hate of journalists according to our research. You will gain no points with journalists if you speak evasively, like some politicians.

Survey Question: What are your top complaints about the spokespersons you interact with? Ranking from 1 to 7 with highest scores meaning the biggest complaints.



EU Journalist Survey





Brussels journalists work in a very competitive environment. Tight space, time constraints, and decisions made by editors and producers ultimately determine what stays or gets cut from a story.

Contrary to common perceptions, most interviews are not “investigative” in nature. Reporters are trained to gather news quickly and accurately by conducting interviews with expert sources. Hence, if spokespersons avoid answering direct questions, give unclear or mixed messages or don’t give any usable quotes they are wasting a journalist’s valuable time. Many Brussels stories are about technical EU regulation, and spokespersons tend to use too much Brussels or industry jargon – which loses the journalist’s and ultimately the potential reader’s attention. Hence, there is a general feeling among journalists that spokespersons just don’t understand their needs.



Timing is everything in good media relations. For instance you don’t want to brief a journalist too early or too late. Yet our survey shows how often communicators approach journalists when it is too late and the story has already broken or passed. Although some journalists believe spokespersons can be too pushy, it is the least of their gripes – which means that there is room to be more proactive in reaching out to the media.

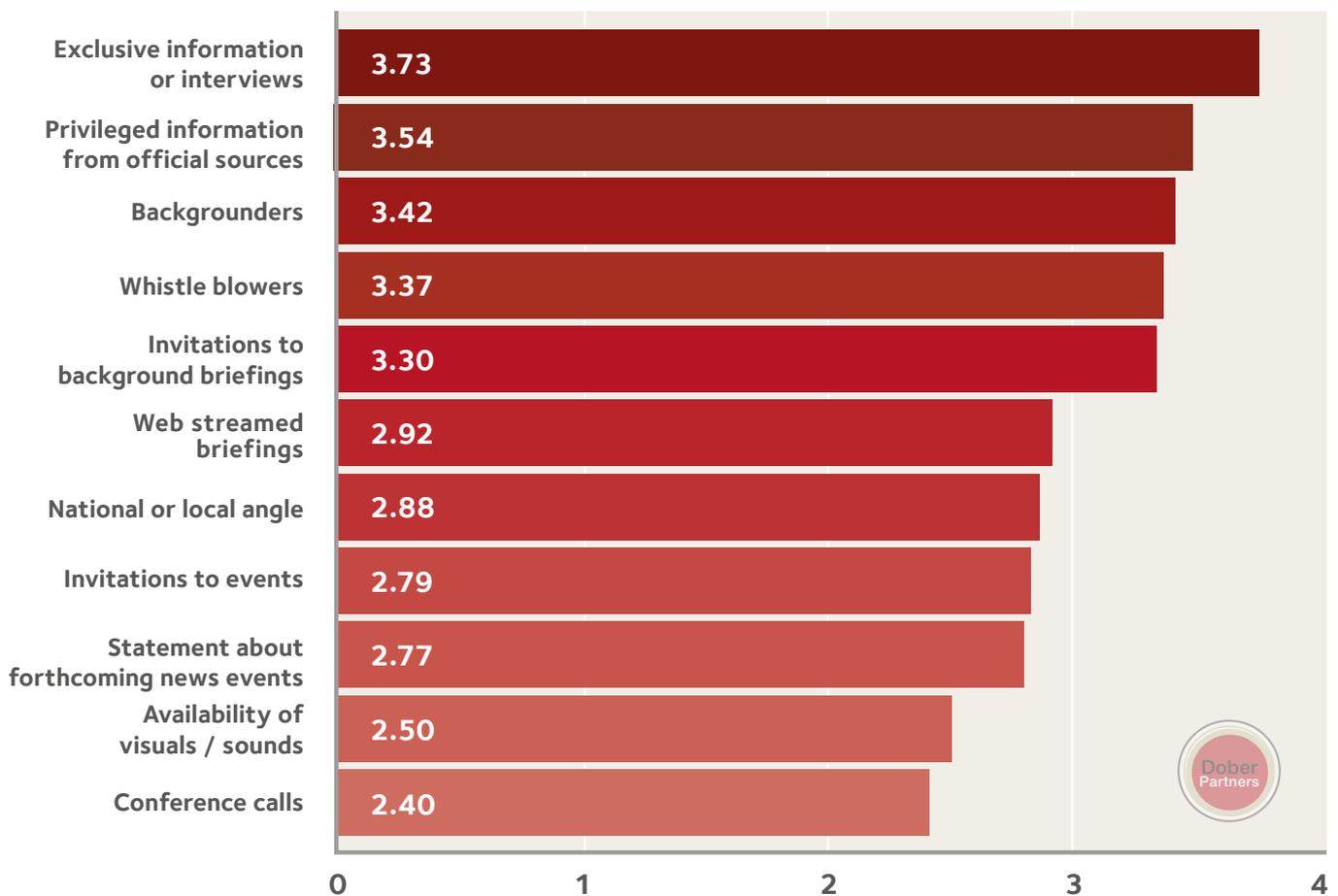
It is noteworthy that many journalists say their audiences are interested in the EU but not well informed about it, and that journalists’ bosses are hardly any better informed than their readers, viewers and listeners. This speaks to the need to make the journalist’s job of selling a story to his or her editors as easy as possible.

One Brussels-based correspondent for a major news agency, responded to a colleague’s pitch with the e-mailed question, “What impact will this have on my editor’s mother?” The remark demonstrates the need to keep pitches very short and simple and remember that the journalist’s audiences are not just EU officials but real people, most of whom live outside of Brussels. This underlines the need to keep things very simple and seek to make the journalist’s work as easy as possible by anticipating questions and providing enough background information to allow journalists under tight deadlines to hear your side of the story quickly and clearly.

Lisbeth Kirk, Founder, EU Observer told us: “The really good stories are not being sent to us by the EU institutions or PR firms. They come from journalists chasing leads and asking questions. Personal networks are the most important sources but if I attend an event I very often find news or a new angle to investigate.”

It is important for communicators to understand what types and formats of information are most useful for journalists. According to our research and experience the more exclusive and personal the briefing, the more it will be valued by the journalist. Hence, exclusives and interviews are typically highly valued, while conference calls or even press conferences where the same story is shared with competing journalists are much less compelling.

Survey Question: How useful are each of the following? *Answers are averaged from response options which were: 4 = Very Useful, 3 = Somewhat Useful, 2 = Not Very Useful and 1 = Useless.*



EU Journalist Survey

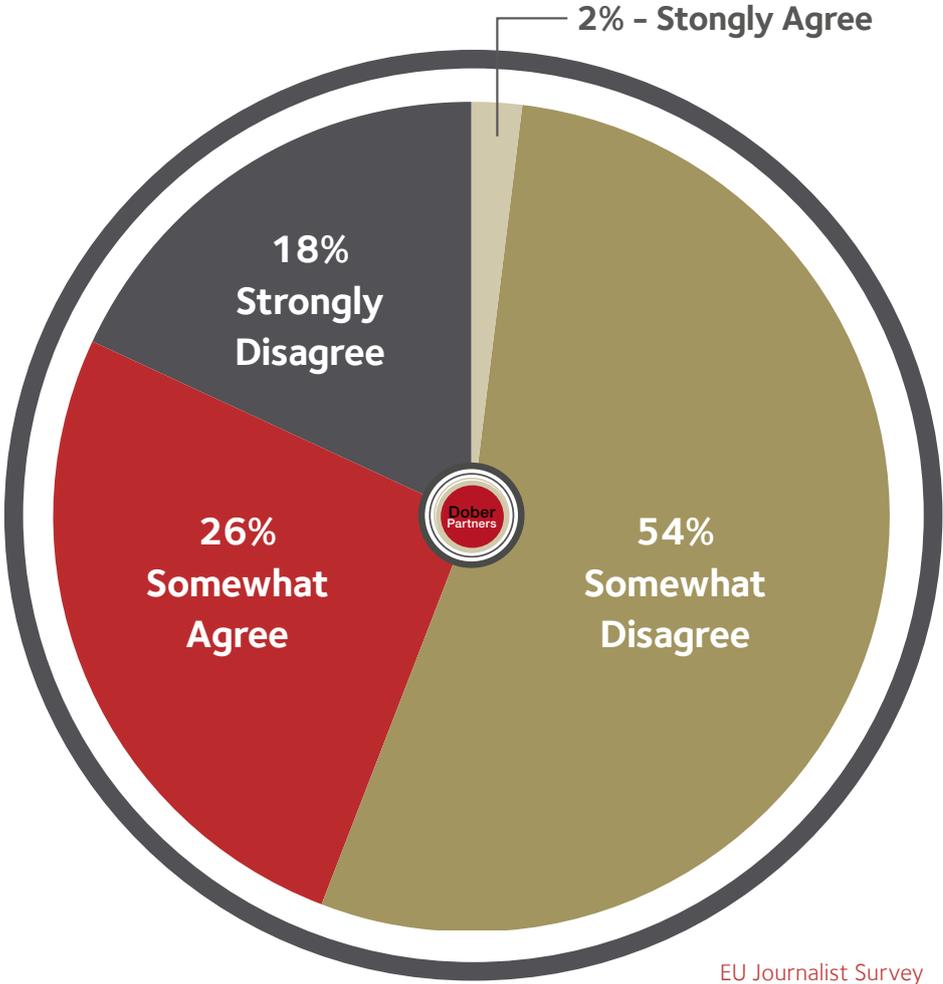
Public Relations

If communicators understand journalists' needs, they are more likely to give them the right information, at the right time and get the coverage they want. In this context, relationships matter, if for no other reason than that they help PR people to better understand journalists' individual needs.

It is critical for PR people to understand what makes journalists tick before pitching meetings and stories they might find irrelevant. However, Brussels journalists told us that less than one third of PR people understand their needs. As Daniela Vincenti, Editor-in-chief at EurActiv.com told us: "PR people often have no clue who writes what. They don't do their own research on the different media they are targeting and which journalists cover what subjects. So my advice would be: before calling journalists, do your homework."

This was a point reiterated by Duncan Lumsden, Managing Editor at MLex market intelligence who told us: "My number one complaint about PR people is poorly-targeted communication. Handing some intern a directory of journalists and telling him or her to call everyone to come to a briefing by the Croatian Worm-Breeding Association is a sure way to rub journalists up the wrong way. Except, of course, those working for Worm-Breeding Monthly. Don't contact a journalist unless you're pretty sure that what you're hawking is going to be of interest to them. To do that you need to appreciate how journalists and news media work – and not just generally. Bloomberg works differently to El Pais. Too few PR folks know and understand this."

Survey Question: "Most PR people understand my needs?"



A reporter’s job is to produce stories - usually at high speed and frequency.

They are not on the lookout for someone to give them a beautiful, branded piece of content; they’re looking for something that’s interesting, timely, and relevant to their readers. Reporters look at PR as a necessary evil, as they are gatekeepers to information.

Journalists generally don’t like PR people who ask to receive their questions prior to an interview, or worse, are offered written responses rather than granting them an interview. When journalists ask to speak to a spokesperson,

they want to speak to them directly and not have a PR-wordsmithed text full of jargon in a reply e-mail. They also do not appreciate an overly media-trained executive who speaks and acts like a robot talking in corporate speak. As Julie Majerczak, Brussels correspondent of Le Parisien told us: “The three worst things PR people do is talk too much meaningless waffle, not get back to you when they say they will and fail to understand the pressures journalists are under – especially in terms of time.”

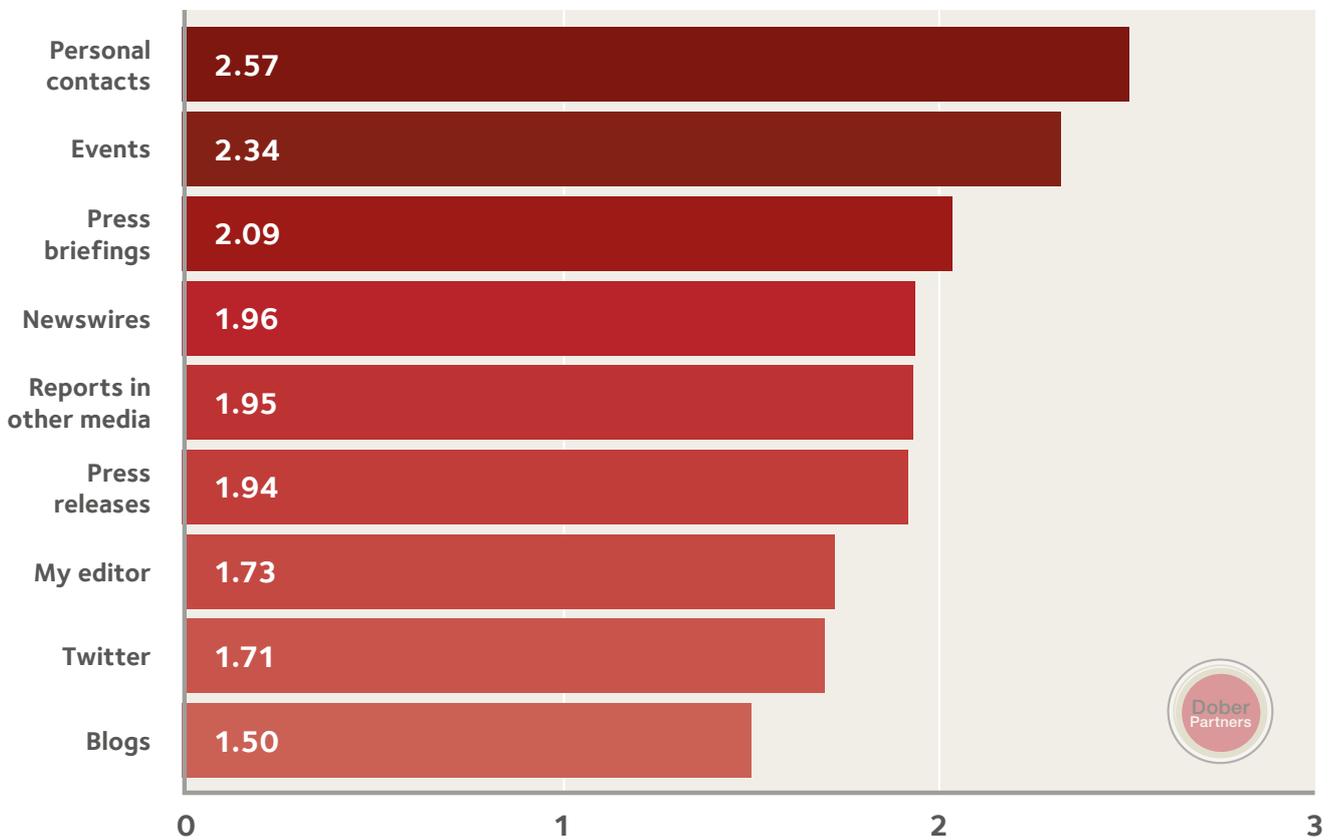
What is the worst PR or media story pitch you have heard in the last year?

Brussels journalists told us many PR blunders and horror stories over the years - some of them quite unprintable! Here is a selection of verbatims from our 2016 research:

- **“Too many to detail. But someone wanted us to cover a pro-Tibet rally. And we are China’s official news agency.”**
- **“Nuclear industry arguing at the same time that they need Contract for Difference (subsidies) and arguing that subsidies to renewables should cease.”**
- **“The relocation of 30 refugees from Italy to Luxembourg - while thousands are waiting.”**
- **“Whether I was interested in receiving press releases from the European margarine association. Honestly, none of my readers would care.”**
- **“German rumours about Grexit being no problem for the Eurozone.”**
- **“Story on wall-cladding.”**
- **“Difficult to single one out. Usually they have to do with niche topics that have very little news value.”**
- **“Come see our anti-TTIP action.”**
- **“I was just wondering if you are currently working on any treatment/spa features that we could currently assist you with?”**
- **“Something to do with British royals with no applicable EU or tech angle whatsoever. I am an EU tech journalist.”**
- **“Anything from the UN.”**
- **“Junker’s statement on Enlargement.”**
- **“Athens sources: We have a deal.”**
- **“Often industry PR people present company trumpet-blowing as wider news.”**

5. JOURNALISTS' FAVOURITE SOURCES OF NEWS AND INFORMATION

Survey Question: What are your top three most important sources for story ideas?



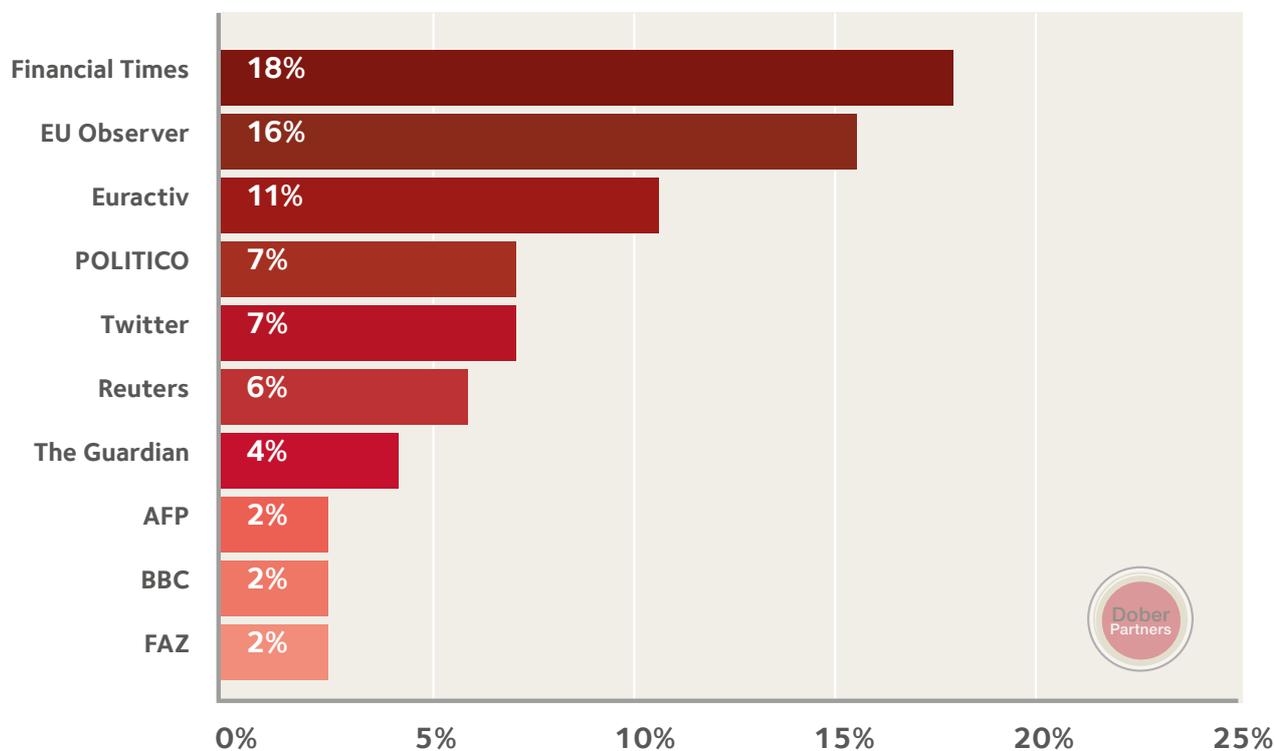
EU Journalist Survey



RYAN HEATH, SENIOR EU CORRESPONDENT,
WRITER OF THE MORNING PLAYBOOK
COLUMN AT POLITICO

“Playbook is necessarily diverse in sources because it is so long and broad. What shocked me as a former Commission spokesperson is how little I use the official, and expensive, Commission channels as a source. The spokespersons service maybe ramming home more key messages on TV news, I don’t know, but I am not alone in thinking there is too much spin and too much dismissal of smaller stories and journalists not perceived as favorites these days. I much prefer to have sensible conversations with people across town, either on or off record, than go each day to the Commission midday briefing for example.”

Survey Question: Which are the most important media sources about the EU for you?



Other useful publications referenced include:

Wall Street Journal, Der Spiegel On-line, DPA, Europe by Satellite, El País, Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Reddit/Europe, EU Reporter, Euronews, Le Monde.

EU Journalist Survey

Influential media with Brussels journalists

English is the common language of the Brussels press corps and so not surprisingly the most read insider publications tend to be in English according to our research.

While most people with a message or a story aim for coverage in the FT, it is clear that EUObserver, Euractiv, POLITICO Europe and Reuters offer significant opportunities for “ripple effects” with wider media audiences.

The Financial Times has long been the most influential newspaper in Brussels among the media and the EU and described as “The journal of record” by senior Commission sources. It is still the favourite newspaper for leaks and breaking EU stories.

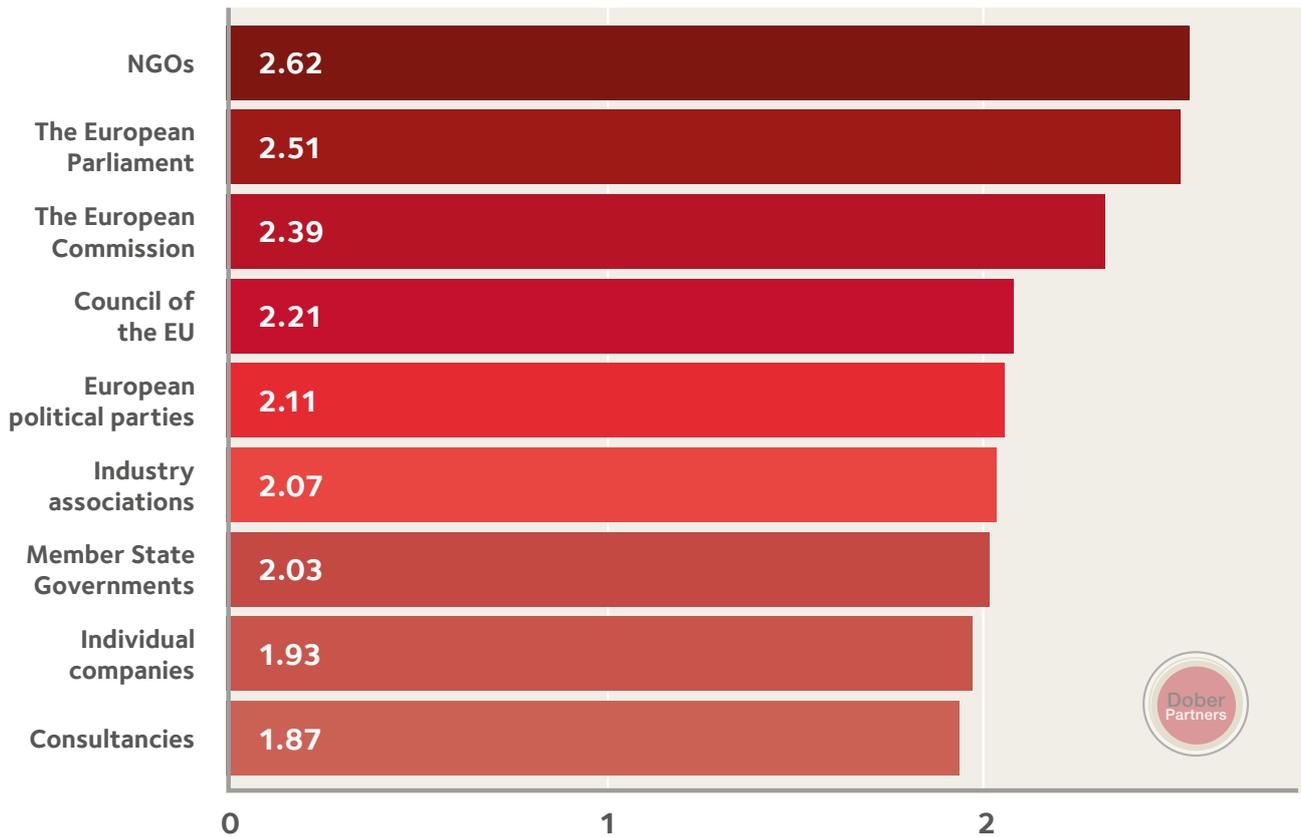
Aimed at “the thought-leader class of Europe” POLITICO Europe- with a bureau of over 40 journalists focused on EU scoops and analysis - is now the main challenger to The Financial Times in the Brussels bubble. With the largest distribution of any Brussels-based English-language publication, POLITICO distributes over 28,000 copies of its weekly print edition and Ryan Heath’s morning email news

update Playbook is read by over 50,000 people every day. As much of POLITICO’s juiciest content is behind a paywall, beyond the reach of most budget-stretched journalists, free and open online media EU Observer, Euractiv and Twitter are generally more popular with journalists.

With a Brussels team of six journalists, EU Observer offers high quality online journalism. With 260,000 unique users per month EU Observer often breaks stories with cross-border and investigative reporting. What makes EurActiv.com different is its depth of free information in 12 languages which reaches over 667,000 readers.

Survey Question: How do you rate the quality of the information you get from...

Answers are averaged according to a weighting where 4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = OK and 1 = Bad.



EU Journalist Survey



Journalists love NGOs the most and business the least.

When we shared the results with one journalist she was not surprised – in her words: “NGOs are seen to defend the general interest; companies their own. They also use communication tools better, are very competent and know their stuff. They don’t beat around the bush, like many companies. Instead when you call an NGO you get a clear message. Trade associations are split between their members and they only have a lowest-common-denominator position and often they don’t even want to reply.”

Our research shows that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) give Brussels journalists the best information. When NGOs collaborate with journalists to create a big story,

companies and consultancies are often left scrambling in PR terms. We recently undertook a separate survey which showed that European business leaders believe NGO activists are the biggest threat to their reputation among all stakeholders, ahead of the media. As another journalist told us: “NGOs tend to have an intrinsically catchier message. They’re more likely to be seen to be fighting a ‘good’ fight and not to be out for commercial interest. They’re also able to couch their message in catchier language. Companies have a harder sell in this regard. They’re less able to stick their necks out and adopt a position and rhetoric that lends itself to getting quoted in the press.”



LISBETH KIRK, FOUNDER, EU OBSERVER

“The European Commission has less information to give than in the past because the institution is less important than it was and proposes fewer laws. Information from the Council of the EU has improved. Information from the European Parliament is often dominated by the political parties, which vary in the quality of the information they send out.”

Just by sheer weight of numbers, budget and spokespersons one might expect the European Commission to be the main EU institution favoured by journalists in Brussels.

However according to our research the European Parliament beats the Commission in terms of giving quality information to Brussels journalists. The Parliament’s Press Service comprises a team of press officers whose job it is to assist journalists and provide them with information. Each press officer specialises in a particular area, official language or member state, to ensure comprehensive coverage of all of parliament’s activities and to provide information to journalists from all Member States. As most journalists have a national focus this gives the parliament a media edge over the often pan-EU perspective of the Commission. Strasbourg is also a political and media circus.

The European Commission allocates over €78 million to communications. Beyond sheer financial and man power, an audio-visual service and the Europe by Satellite (EbS) live broadcasting channel, the ace up the Commission's sleeve is the daily midday briefing for members of the Brussels media corps held in the press room of the Berlaymont building.

For about half an hour the chief spokesperson and other Commission spokespeople provide short introductions to the latest proposals and then answer questions. Perhaps unfairly for the EU's two legislative bodies – the Parliament and Council of the EU – this gives the Commission a first-mover advantage when it comes to the media.

Media contact with the Council of the EU occurs mainly when ministerial meetings are held. Background briefings and documents are provided before these meetings, flash press releases and Council conclusions are issued during

them, and they are followed by a press conference. In recent years, however, journalists' attention has shifted to the European Council, which groups together the leaders of the EU's 28 states. These summits of EU leaders used to be quarterly but in recent years have been almost monthly with the financial and refugee crises. They can attract up to 2,000 journalists – double the number of reporters permanently based in Brussels. Despite attracting large numbers of journalists, however, national governments don't do a great job at getting quality information to journalists, according to our research. Perhaps this can be explained by the Council taking the lead on media outreach, and the often competing wishes of Member States to blame Brussels for unpopular measures at home while quietly supporting them in working groups.

According to the Federation of European and International Associations (FAIB) established in Belgium there are currently 2,265 associations based in and around Brussels. They employ 13,400 people, many of them involved in one way or another with communications. Associations have generally improved their media relations capability, but the problem of finding consensus on public positions means they are quoted less than might be expected. Unfortunately, associations are often not the best sources for quotes and stories as they take too long to agree a press statement, and by the time they have the story has often moved on. European associations seem to struggle even with the traditional press release: other research we have conducted found that most associations issue press releases between once a month and once a year, and one in six associations almost never issue them.

Individual companies do not fare well in the ranking, which is probably explained by the lack of corporate communicators actually based in Brussels. They tend to be in Corporate HQs back home while their public affairs representatives in Brussels are often not empowered to speak to the media on the record.

Bottom of the pile are consultancies. At Dober Partners we pride ourselves on providing timely, quality information to journalists, and know many colleagues in other agencies feel the same – so we hope for a higher ranking for consultancies next time we conduct this survey!



PETER SPIEGEL, THE FINANCIAL TIMES.

“The most frustrating thing is the institutions don’t know how to communicate what they decide. After an agreement in the European Council, you get 28 different versions of the same event. Explaining what the deal was is seen as an afterthought

6. MEDIA RELATIONS UNDER JUNCKER'S COMMISSION



Many of President Juncker's reforms, such as focussing on jobs and growth, can be seen in a positive light. However, Brussels journalists told us when it comes to media relations, the Commission has performed worse since Juncker took office in November 2014.

One of the reasons is the changes that Juncker introduced to the previous Commission spokesperson system. As part of his revamped media strategy for the new Commission, Juncker appointed former Greek MEP Margaritis Schinas as his main spokesperson. He also emphasised the need for European Commissioners to be "communicators" - to go out and explain policies to the public, media, and national parliaments. Overall this meant a cut in the spokespersons' service, which had over 100 staff previously.

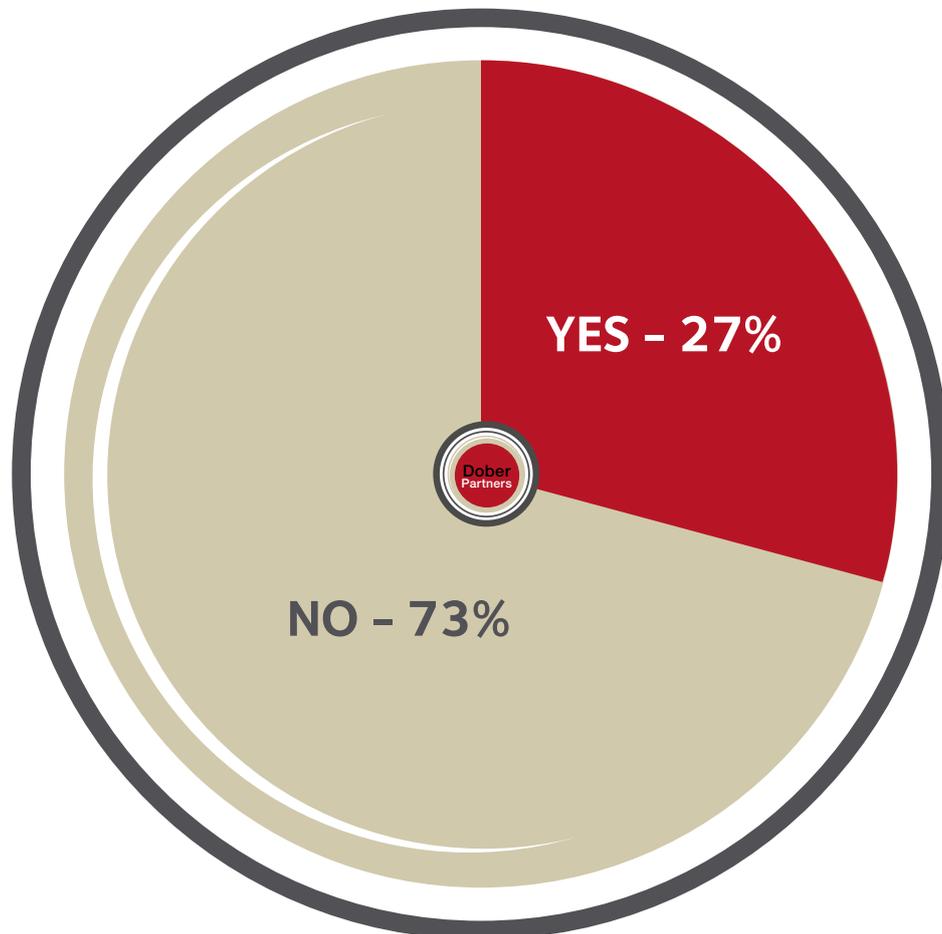
The new service has meant there are fewer spokespeople who can go on the record. Previously, each Commissioner had one main spokesperson and several press officers. But in the new system with seven super-Commissioners overseeing broader policy areas, not all Commissioners have spokespeople who can go on the record. The remaining Commissioners have only press officers who can give information to media, but cannot be quoted.

A January 2015 Euractiv article entitled "The Juncker Commission pledged to be more media-friendly" lays out the good intentions of the media team: "All spokespersons will be present at the midday briefing, ready to answer all questions, Schinas said. He dismissed rumours that the

spokespersons would take questions only if they are notified in advance in writing. "We will strive to have more and more Commissioners coming in person to this press room and I'm confident that on Wednesday [where the College meets] I will have either President Juncker or First Vice President Timmermans", Schinas said. He later added that the members of the Commission would meet the press not only to deliver the good news on achievements, but also when problems arose.

Unfortunately one year on from this announcement, Brussels journalists gave us a clear thumbs down to the changes. As one seasoned Brussels journalist told us: "The Juncker Commission's handling of the media is much worse compared to the previous Commission. They say it is more political. I doubt this has trickled down to the spokespeople. In reality, Dark Vader - [Juncker's Chief-of-Staff] Martin Selmayr - controls everything. It's true that Commissioners come more often to the pressroom and that's welcome. But the spokespeople are overworked, not able to say anything and try to block rather than facilitate access to the Commissioners. They are really vicious playing one media against the other."

Survey Question: Has the quality of information provided to the media improved under the Juncker Commission?



EU Journalist Survey

Brussels journalists who like Juncker's new media service

- **"More prioritisation and a bit less jargon"**
- **"More comprehensive and detailed"**
- **"Less emails, but better quality, more readable."**
- **"I cover energy. They are more responsive and more transparent, although you must really know well your subject to ask precise questions, otherwise they do not answer. Spokespersons not useful but press officers are excellent. They get quickly in touch with the right expert within the Commission and answer as soon as possible."**
- **"It is better structured and more political, which is good. They don't drown you in technicalities and info about useless initiatives."**



JULIE MAJERCZAK, BRUSSELS
CORRESPONDENT, LE PARISIEN

“The Juncker Commission informs less – which you think is good because you imagine they are prioritizing. But at the same time we have no idea of their agenda – when a report will come out or an announcement will be made. That makes it hard to plan and anticipate news.”



DUNCAN LUMSDEN, MANAGING EDITOR AT
MLEX MARKET INTELLIGENCE

“The Juncker Commission’s media outreach is more professional, in the service of the Commission itself. That’s not necessarily better for the journalists, however. It’s a slicker more centralised and politicised spokesperson’s service, more likely to stonewall and less likely to cater for the specialised interests of specialised journalists. But in delivering and controlling the Commission’s message, chapeau.”

Brussels journalists who think Juncker's Commission is less media friendly

- **"The new set-up of spokespeople is disembodied from any real and regular contact with the cabinet, which means that they are essentially useless. The communications advisor in the cabinet varies in quality from good to completely press-avoidant."**
- **"The Commission's press service is less available and less open; they do not consider themselves anymore as an authority which needs to provide the public with information but as a political body. They claim more transparency, but in fact it is less transparent than ever. Even technical background info is not provided properly and deadlines are not met."**
- **"There is no monthly or weekly agenda, and off the record briefings are too often not understandable."**
- **"Even more PR."**
- **"It is now more difficult to get hold of spokespersons."**
- **"My interview requests on several occasions were processed very slowly or not at all. I feel that the new (hierarchical) structure of the press service doesn't answer the needs of the journalists. It is also very difficult to get an interview with the Commissioners themselves."**
- **"They try to control the press much more than in the past."**
- **"The communications team are much less forthcoming with any details. They often only give us documents to a technical briefing at the actual briefing so we've had no time to read them and have a more in depth discussion."**
- **"The overhaul of the spokespersons service has led to a lack of in depth knowledge on technical subjects. Those who know something are not allowed to speak. And those allowed to speak know next to nothing."**
- **"The Commission now seem less open. The spokespeople are harder to get hold of, they don't reply in time and in general they talk less openly than the previous Commission."**
- **"Confusion about which press officer to address. No fast reply, which is really important for my press agency."**
- **"Introverted and journalist unfriendly."**
- **"The quality of information under the Juncker Commission has actually deteriorated. It seems that the Commission is holding a tight grip around the information they want to push out and do not invest much into giving information journalists are interested in."**
- **"Not for a specialised media - as the spokesperson/press service has been shrunk down in size too far."**
- **"Too much spin."**

News

7. PRESS RELEASES: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

The death of the press release is a favourite topic for media and communications professionals.

A good press release, however, can provide the spark for a news story, highlight something that a journalist might have missed, present new facts and figures, distill something complex into understandable quotes and include links to third parties and research. Hence, the press release is still relevant but it jostles for attention in a world suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder and multiple news sources. As Julie Majerczak, Brussels correspondent of Le Parisien told us: "Press releases are still useful. We need figures and details and it's important to know others' views. It's then up to us as journalists to decide whether all that makes sense, is newsworthy or correct – but we need those messages."

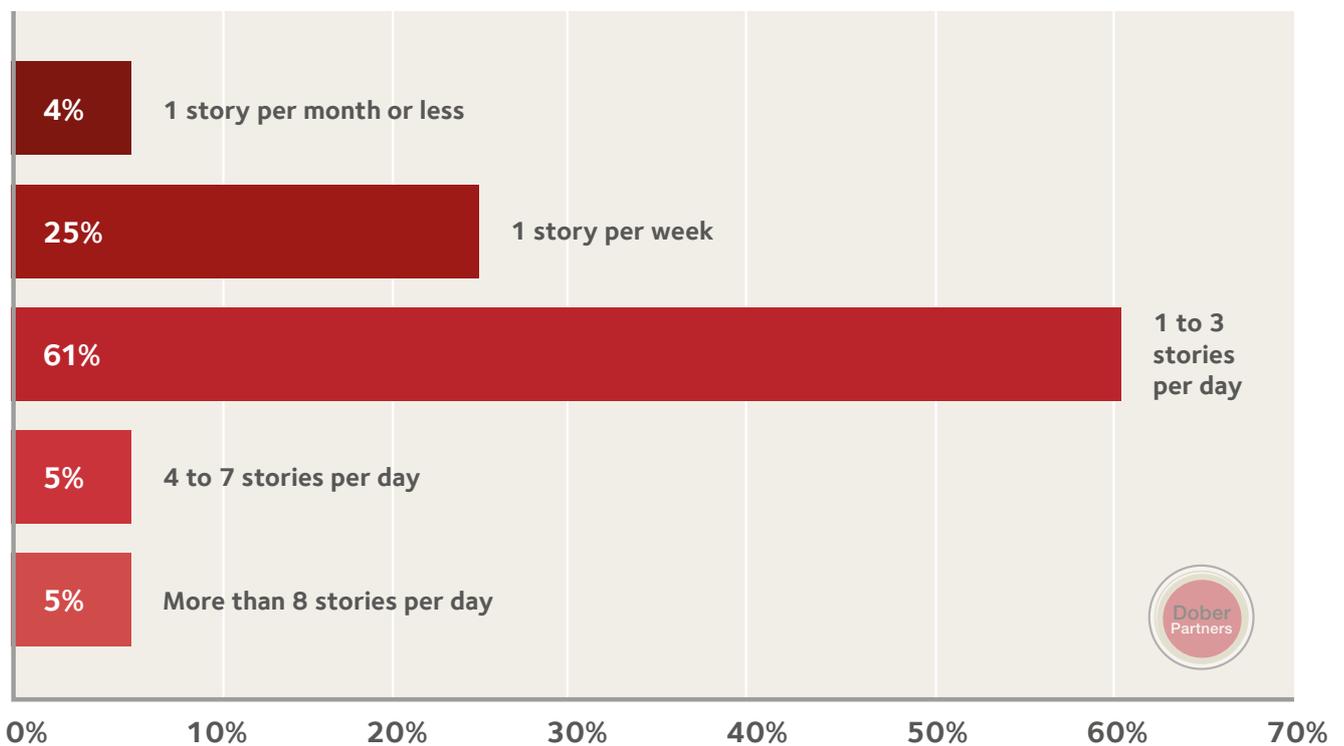
Journalists have always lived with time pressure. But, in recent years the pace of news distribution has picked up massively due to social media which distribute news, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In this new reality journalists face added pressures to process all these sources and press releases – and generate several stories of their own on the same day.

According to those surveyed, 60% of Brussels' journalists now produce between one and three stories a day. This is a huge leap from 2008 when our previous media survey revealed that less than a quarter of journalists produced a similar number of stories per day. This shows the increasing time pressure Brussels' journalists experience today compared with eight years ago.

Think the press release is dead? Think again.



Survey Question: How many stories are you expected to produce?



EU Journalist Survey

One reason for this shift is that the disruptive digital environment has not only increased the pressure to deliver breaking news faster, but the need to closely monitor crisis situations and produce ‘fast following’ stories.



DANIELA VINCENTI, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
AT EURACTIV.COM.

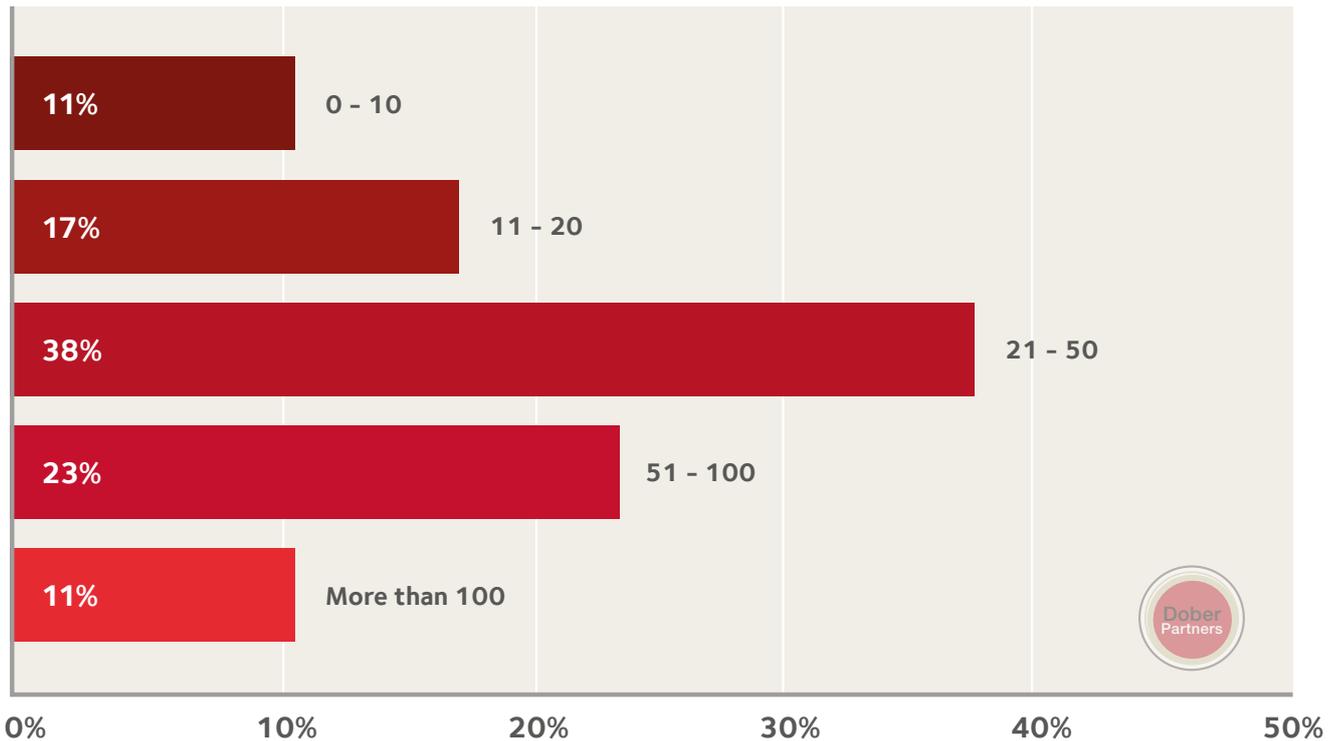
“Press releases are good when they are quick reactions. We can’t call every stakeholder for a reaction. So it’s great to get press releases linked to stories we’re writing that day. They are useless two days later. Also, if you want to grab our attention it is vital to get the headline and subject line right. Journalists skim for keywords and if they are not well thought through we will delete, delete, delete.”

Today’s news outlets jostle for relevance amongst readers who show little loyalty, moving hungrily between news sources in search of the most up-to-the-second news and information. Brussels’ media has responded by transitioning to digital platforms and increasing the number of digital news feeds. And there has been a newsletter renaissance, which has resulted in news being delivered direct to your inbox. One of the most recent and successful of these newsletters is Playbook, the Ryan Heath-authored, daily from Politico. This presents a mix of ‘Brussels insider’ gossip, breaking news and an aggregated, round-up of the best stories published online overnight.

It is fair to say that in 2016 ‘digital’ disruption has become the norm. Journalists are adjusting and are better anticipating what news stories will position their outlet as the best media and front-runner for audiences. But, shrinking media revenues have put the squeeze on the media’s resources and budgets, which has also added to the load, meaning that journalists are now expected to cover a wider range of issues.

In the midst of all these challenges, journalists receive a daily avalanche of press releases. 37% of journalists receive between 21 and 50 press releases daily – and a whopping 28% of them receive between 51 and 100 press releases a day.

Survey Question: How many press releases do you receive on average per day?

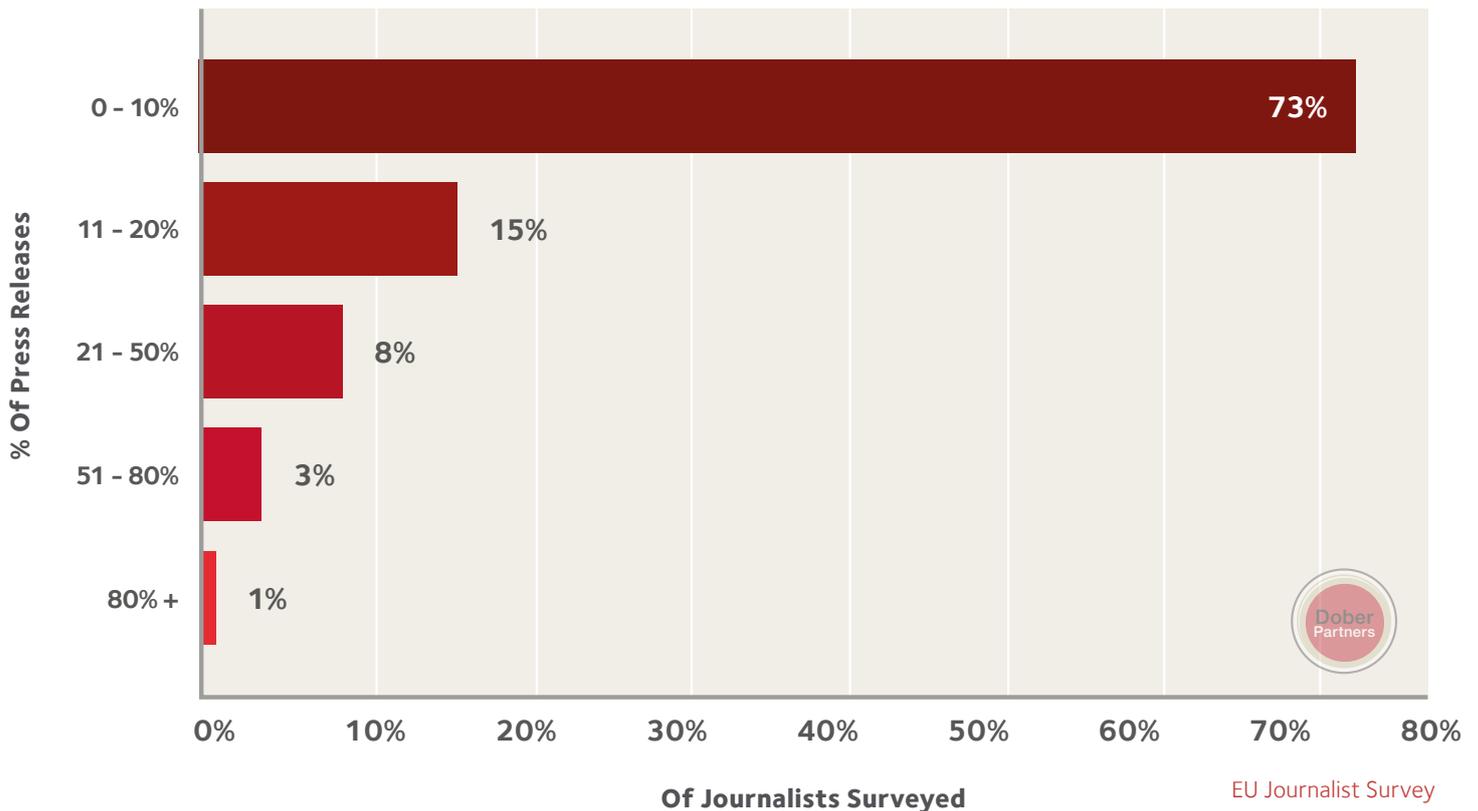


EU Journalist Survey

A journalist’s mountain of mail takes time to process and it comes on top of having to track what’s being pumped out on social media, as well as traditional news channels.

Our research shows that although journalists receive a huge numbers of press releases every day, less than 10% of them translate into actual stories, meetings or quotes.

Survey Question: Of the press releases you receive, how many lead to meetings, coverage, quotation?



So it seems the vast majority press releases are not even read by most journalists who typically have less than 4 hours to research a story before publishing. So although the press release still has its place, especially for ‘big news’, there are other more effective ways to get your story published.

One of the challenges with press releases is that they are impersonal mass communications, while journalists at the end of the day are individuals who sometimes look for tailored, opinionated or exclusive news. Hence, the goal of the communicator is to establish a one-on-one rapport with a journalist to become a trusted news source. Never forget, however, that a journalist’s first loyalty is to the story and will use opposing arguments and sources if necessary.

Indeed according to our research two thirds of journalists believe that personal contacts are the most valuable

source of news stories. Events and press briefings are also opportunities for one-on-one communication and hence highly valued by journalists. Other media including newswires are also critical sources, especially those with strong brands and credibility such as Reuters. Hence, you will see many articles that start with a phrase like ‘Today it was reported in The Financial Times that’ Press releases are only the sixth most important news source for journalist.

Communicators have historically relied on press releases to communicate with the media, but they are not making the cut because they are either not newsworthy and/or journalists simply don't have the time to process all the information they receive in a day.

One senior editor for a leading media outlet made his view clear: "I hate press releases. I get too many of them. They come in on a busy day when Twitter is dominating the news feed. Give me two lines and/or three bullet points; this is almost an art form. A lengthy press release is a waste of your time and ours."

So, while the digital revolution heralded the arrival of fantastic new tools for communicators, at the same time it has been eroding the value of trusted old tools like press releases. Unlike journalists though, Brussels' communicators have been reluctant, unwilling or unable to adapt to these changing times and continue to bombard journalists with lengthy, jargon-filled press releases that clog up the collective inbox of the EU press corps.

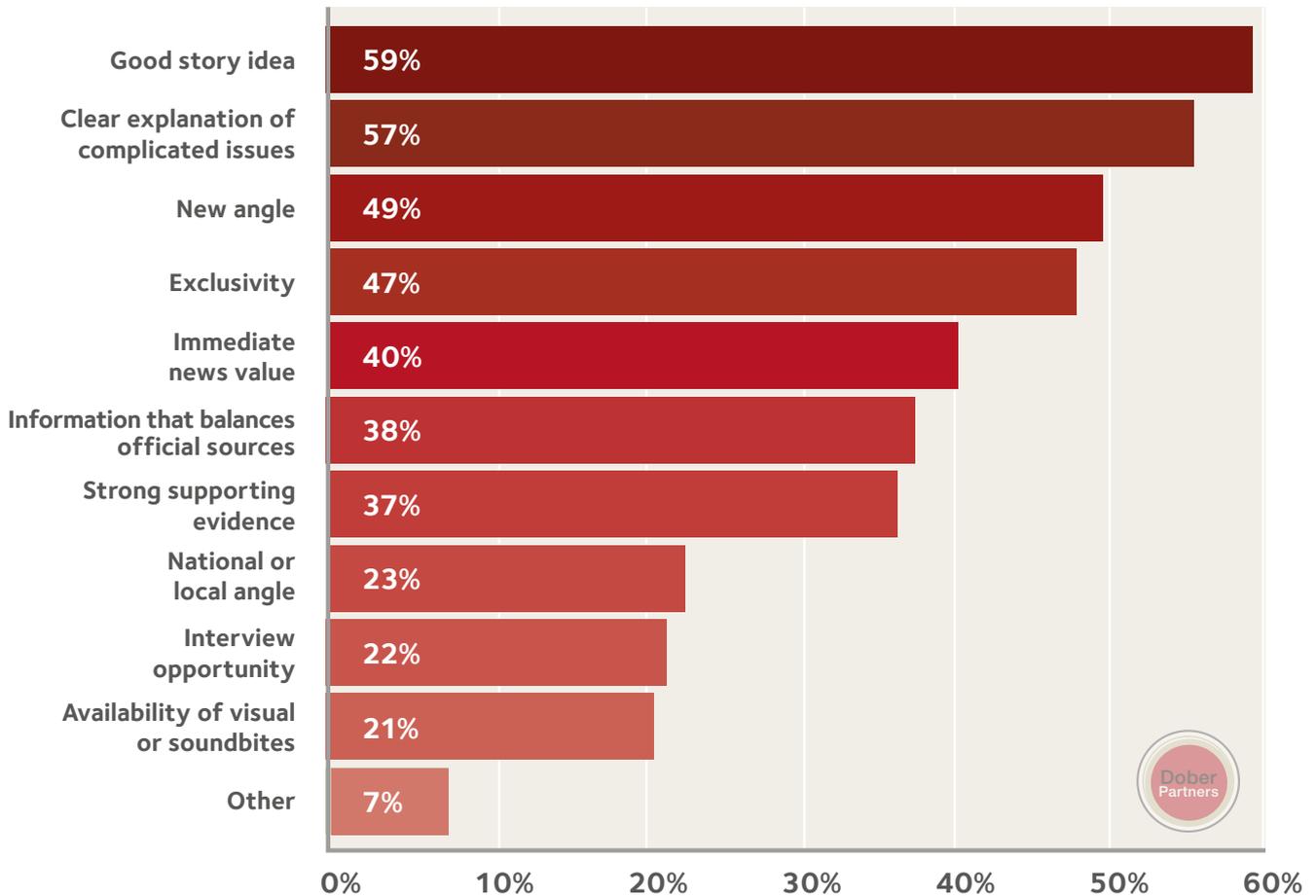
According to Nate Lanxon, Senior Editor at Bloomberg Media "There is also much more 'chopping up' of stories and almost serializing them, as the implementation of more advanced monitoring technologies by the media showed, on average, a 50% drop off in readers after the fifth paragraph of any one given story."

News outlets have started to chase news flashes, which they offer as 'click bait' on Twitter to win readers attention and link to punchy stories online.

In the light of this and a world where newsletters and direct newsfeeds filter out 'less interesting' and newsworthy stories, it is easy for a good story to end up buried at the bottom of a long email rather than on the front page.

Survey Question: What are the most important elements in a good story pitch?

Multiple elements possible hence % greater than 100.



EU Journalist Survey

How can communicators in Brussels make their press releases stand out in the crowd?

Journalists suggest that communicators learn to think more like them. “The most interesting headline will win the attention of editors and journalists. Tell your story in a short and focused way. The worst press releases are those press releases produced by committee,” said one journalist.

Research shows that many journalists only read the first 11 characters of a press release’s headline before deciding to discard or read further. Communicators only have a matter of seconds to grab the journalist’s attention in full. Creating a standout, short and tight headline is the first step to getting noticed. Imagine the headline as a short alluring tweet.

Communicators sometimes forget that data and sources are needed to support their messages. As one journalist told us: “A story was recently offered to me, based on here–

say without any evidence to support it, concerning lack of government spending. It seemed to be a baseless accusation, so I declined rather than be seen as a mouthpiece,”

Brussels journalists have admitted that this new, even faster paced news environment has led to more mistakes coming out of the newsroom. Evidence and fact checking remain important for both communicators and journalists. A press release by the European Commission was recently proven to be riddled with factual errors, which leads to the inevitable question, whose responsibility it is to fact check, the originator of the press release, or the journalist who quoted it as a reliable source?

Top Press Release Tips for Communicators

1. Think like a journalist. Is your press release newsworthy? If not, don't send it to the press.
2. Give your press release a punchy headline.
3. Keep your release short and to the point.
4. Writing press releases by committee doesn't work. They end up being, long, complicated and boring.
5. Think in soundbites. Can your press release be shortened to 40 characters or less? This is the new press release art form.
6. Get your facts and sources right - and make your quotes quotable.
7. Use social media to communicate your press release to your target audience.

8. JOURNALISTS WORKING WITH ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA



Social media has changed the face of journalism. Twitter, YouTube and Facebook have shifted the way news is sourced, produced and received.

As Lisbeth Kirk, Founder, EU Observer told us: "Social media has changed things for the better. It's obviously making things a lot faster and no news service can compete with that. But journalists still have a vital role to play verifying and checking things." But, social media also has a considerably negative side, namely that news stories are reduced – and the power of the front-page of the print media has steadily eroded as audiences migrate and spend significantly more time on social media.

According to a report on "Journalism in the age of Social Media" by the Reuters Institute the internet has: "forced traditional news organisations to take note of the shift of news breaking". Social media has also created an

unprecedented level of transparency in the public domain. It has empowered 'ordinary' people by enabling them to produce and distribute raw news and events live and direct. User generated content has legitimacy because it can be instantaneously beamed around the world to people's mobile devices anywhere, anytime.

However, this new reality is also fraught with risks. Uncurated content is unverified and has the power to reek political, economic and social havoc – as witnessed by the Arab Spring, which has had far wider reaching consequences than could ever have been anticipated with the first anti-government tweets.

Proponents say social media makes news more accessible and gives a voice to those who were once voiceless and overlooked through ‘citizen journalism’. The detractors say that social media shouldn’t be used in reporting because social media can’t be trusted. They point out that some reporters overlook or under-check their sources and wrongfully report on an issue.

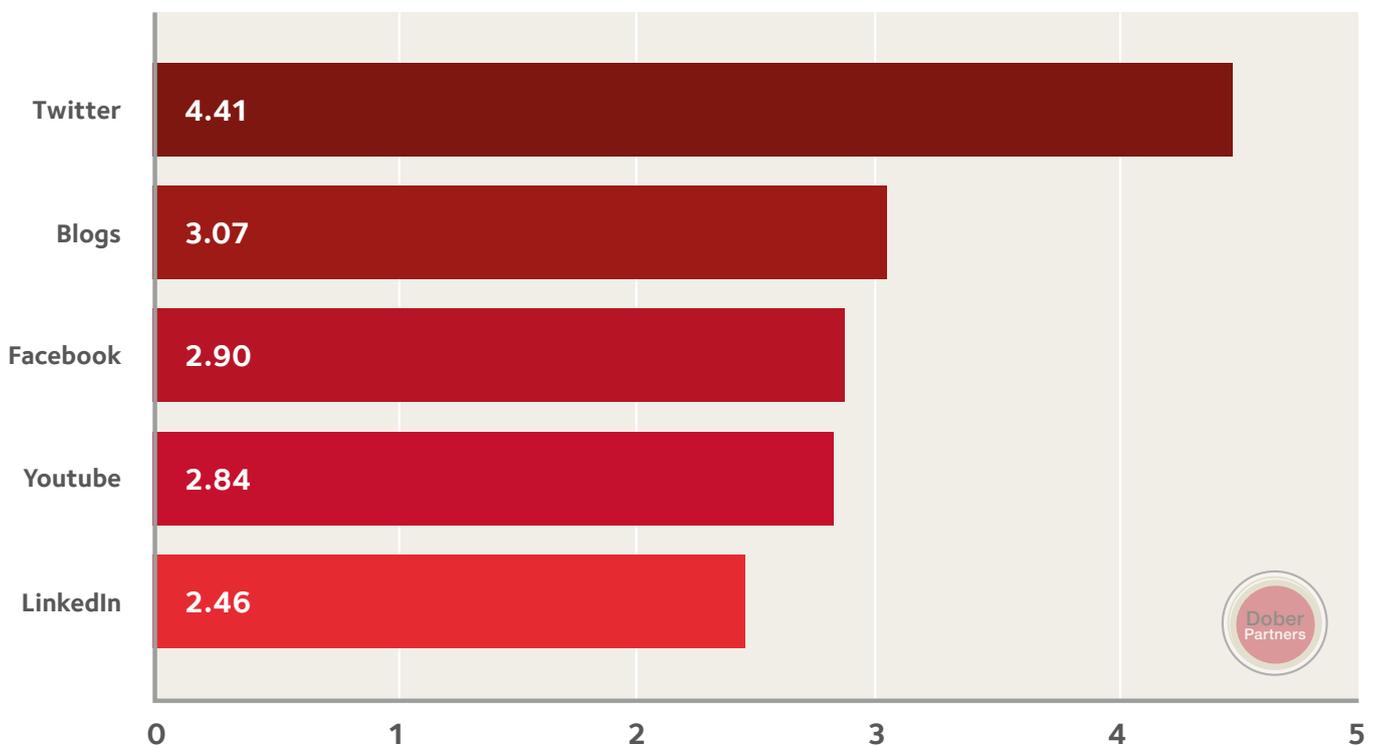
In the fast paced world of social media where time is of the essence, it is fair to say social media does provoke a more pressured style of writing. “Everything has to be done so fast,” says one journalist surveyed, adding: “You never seem to be able to think first”. Journalists are feeling pressure from their editors to publish as quickly as possible and there is an increasing expectation to, “publish first and correct later”.

On the flipside, a three-year global study of how journalists use social media published by Cision in 2015, shows that overall journalists appreciate social media. More than half of journalists say they would be unable to do their job without it. Meanwhile, fifty-seven percent of journalists agree that social media has improved their productivity.

Despite the fact that the use of online social networks has increased exponentially in recent years – almost half of Europeans now use them at least once a week – a recent Eurobarometer report called ‘Media Use in the European Union’ showed that in the case of the Internet and online social networks it is also more likely that Europeans do not trust them. This shows that while social media has a role in the distribution and sharing of information, there is still a strong tendency for audiences to believe what they see on television, read in newspapers and hear on the radio.

Which are the most important digital media for your work?

Ranking of 5 digital media with highest scores denoting highest importance.



EU Journalist Survey



Twitter Top

The most popular journalists in the world live and breathe social media and must be on Twitter to stay relevant, research stories and share breaking news. These journalists let their audience know real-time answers to real-world questions, while speaking in a relevant and honest voice through social media.



CHRIS MORRIS, BBC EUROPE
CORRESPONDENT.

“Twitter has been fantastic for the finance crisis...Ironically the more difficult the subject, the more useful Twitter was.”

But keeping up with social media is a massive hurdle. “Being faster than Twitter” is highlighted by some Brussels’ journalists as one of the biggest challenges they face in their jobs. Long before stories hit the news-desk they have most likely been trending on social media. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism confirms that most scoops, breaking news, tips and leads these days come from the web or what’s “trending” in social networks like Twitter, Facebook, or its popularity rating on Digg or volume patterns in search engines like Google.

In early 2016 the leading Brussels journalists on Twitter were:

1. Jean Quatremer of France’s Libération newspaper with 85,963 followers
2. Ryan Heath of POLITICO Europe with 26,906 followers.
3. Bruno Waterfield of the Times with 22,604 followers
4. Ian Traynor of the Guardian with 18,306 followers.

This leaves journalists with a simple challenge – how to sniff out a new angle? Most journalists have learnt to use social media as a platform to develop more analytical and in-depth stories. They use it as a news source and then cross reference it and compare it with different press releases or government officials and get it touch with personal contacts who provide corroborated information for audiences who want news verified by trusted sources.

According to our research Twitter far outstrips other social media in importance for Brussels’ journalists. More than half of those surveyed say that Twitter is not only used to source stories, but it is also a great platform to keep tabs on what their peers (the competition) are publishing.

There is an important shift from the days when a reporter was given a lead by a trusted source that transformed into a scoop. Today scoops often come out on Twitter first. Twitter has been breaking news before the mainstream media since it first sputtered into life.



JEAN QUATREMER, BLOGGER AND JOURNALIST.

“I have two publics. For Libération, it’s French. For the blog, it’s Europe.”

Blogs in Brussels

The state of EU blogging (in one tweet)

MAY 5, 2015 / KOSMOPOLIT / 0 COMMENTS

Unfortunately I did not make it to this year's [republica in Berlin](#). So, here is my take on the 'state of EU blogging 2015' - well, it is quite telling that 140 characters are enough to summarise it:



The rise of the EU bloggers in the early years threatened to challenge traditional media by giving a voice to anyone with an opinion who was willing to put it online. However, just over a decade later, despite the relatively large numbers of organisational blogs in Brussels, there remains only a handful of established independent bloggers in Brussels.

Jon Worth's Euroblog stands side-by-side with Nosemonkey's EUtopia and the Brussels Journal, kosmoplito.org as front-runners in the EU blogging domain. These bloggers are known to have strong opinions and are not afraid to share them or promote them widely. An example of this is Jon Worth's recent blog analysing Politico's performance, which resulted in a trail of accusations and counter accusations on Twitter about what constitutes credibility and quality journalism.

The FT's Brussels Blog and the Wall Street Journal's Real Time Brussels are regularly updated with well-written pieces and act as important platforms for EU journalists to share their views on topics of interest with limited editorial input. Meanwhile, the impact of Liberation journalist Jean Quatremer, author of the popular Coulisses de Bruxelles blog, gives readers unexpectedly interesting insights and remains one of the most popular French language blogs focussed on the EU.

Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and the rest

With almost 1.6 billion users globally and the most popular social network worldwide, nearly all Brussels journalists have Facebook accounts. Although not the best medium for policy issues and debates, Facebook does often report rumours and trending issues before crossing over to the mainstream media – which are increasingly using Facebook as a medium to distribute news. For instance, Europe’s biggest selling newspaper, German tabloid Bild, announced in 2016 that it is experimenting with delivering news to its readers via Facebook Messenger.

YouTube is the second largest search engine, and the third most visited site on the Web. The fundamental innovation encapsulated by YouTube’s motto—“broadcast yourself”—has permanently changed the landscape of journalism. Any individual with a smartphone and internet connection now possesses a tool once reserved by television networks. Around 40% of all videos used by news organisations depict raw footage shot by non-journalists. Video content is more engaging than a page of text and often more informative. Hence journalists use YouTube to sometimes understand complex issues or pick up trending issues from channels like EU Tube, the European Commission’s YouTube Channel.

LinkedIn has a number of surprising uses for journalists. The professional networking site has made inroads into newsrooms as a place for research, sourcing and listening, allowing journalists to follow issues and pull stories out of conversations. Journalists are also using LinkedIn to stay on top of issues and organisations, and running searches of employees there to see those with LinkedIn profiles. The advanced search function on LinkedIn allows journalists to find and connect with people for stories. For instance, we were recently contacted by a journalist via LinkedIn who was writing an undercover investigative story. As it is often hard to find people’s personal emails online, journalists use LinkedIn to avoid corporate addresses. Other social media are far behind Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The New York Times even likened Google+ to a “ghost town”. However, new social media and apps are launching all the time. For example, Snapchat now has news apps and many journalists use Instagram as both a source of news and platform for their photos.



JON WORTH, EU BLOGGER.

“How are you supposed to know whether to trust a blog? It’s a complicated issue. I’m not a journalist – I’m not paid to write my blog, and I’m not trained as a journalist either. Yet conversely I don’t have a news editor nagging me to write stories on topics I’m clueless about. I view EU politics through my own ideological prism, and that’s what you’ll get on my blog.”

The Brussels bubble does have a growing number of online video channels specialised in EU affairs. Notably ViEUws, the online and independent EU policy broadcaster coming up for its sixth year in operation, has been successful in establishing a niche news portal for those interested in EU Affairs. It's impact however seems to be limited to Brussels. Euractiv continues to have a strong foothold amongst those interested in EU Affairs, generating sponsored video content alongside its news sections.

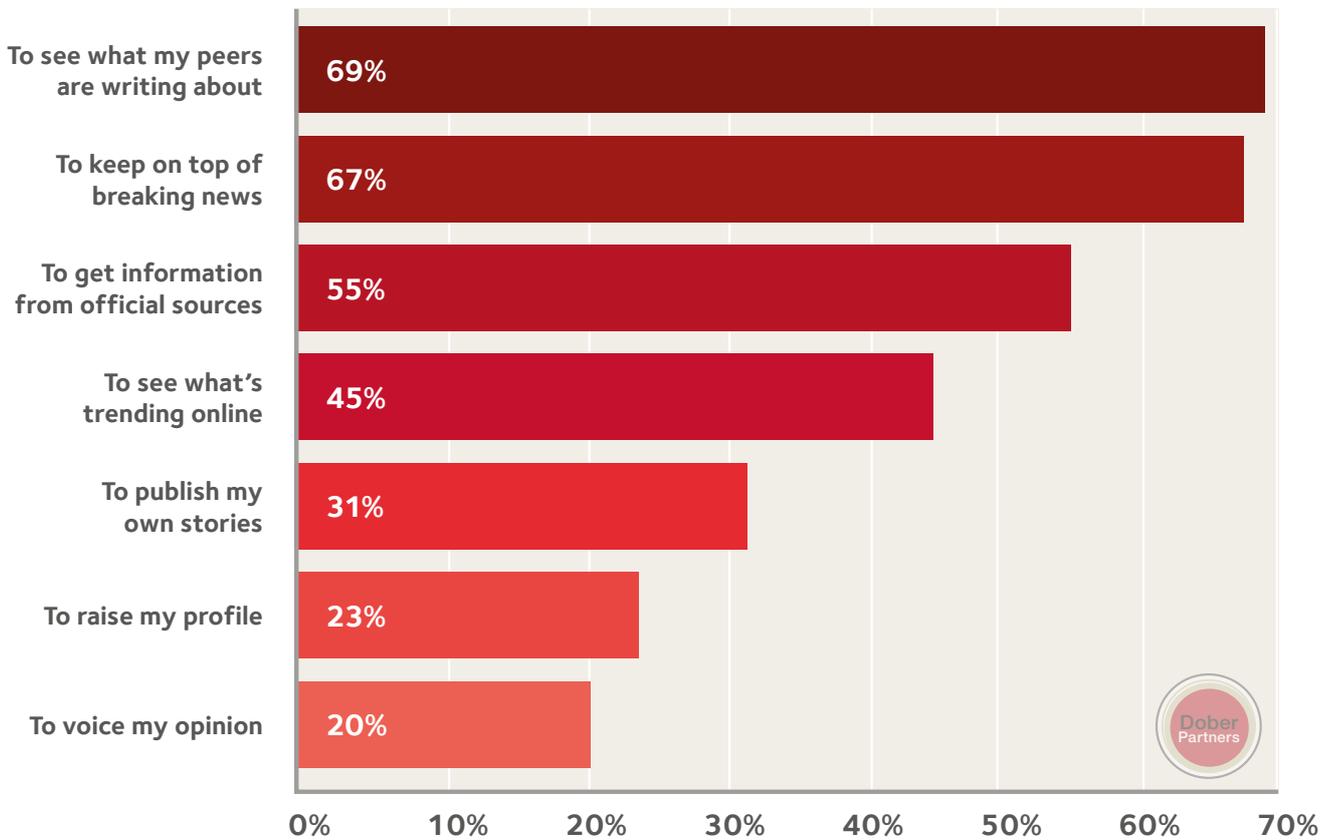
"One thing we've learnt about social media is that pictures travel further than anything else. Text is important to people

in a story but if you can attach a picture it's much more shareable," says the British Broadcasting Academy on Social News Strategy.

It's hard to imagine that YouTube just celebrated a decade in existence. From humble beginnings, it has morphed in recent years into a platform for everything from the Arab Spring to community journalism and pretty much everything in between but it has not yet overtaken the popularity of television for news.

Survey Question: How do Brussels journalists use social media?

Multiple uses possible hence % greater than 100.



EU Journalist Survey



DAVE KEATING, BRUSSELS FREELANCE
REPORTER

“The Brussels Twittersphere has come a long way over the past five years. Now it’s a real community of journalists, bloggers and stakeholders with their own lingo and esoteric references. The group is most on display during the European Council summits, using the hashtag #EUOCO. Twitter presents an opportunity for Brussels-based journalists to get a sense of what is grabbing people’s attention around town, and also to be alerted to developments in people’s home countries. For a breaking news event, Twitter can be indispensable for getting the latest updates, as we saw during the terrorist attacks of March 2016.”



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MARK DOBER

Mark launched Dober Partners after 20 years of experience in the communications and public affairs industry.

He has been twice voted 'European Consultant of the Year' by a jury for 'Public Affairs News' and also by members of 'The European Public Affairs Directory'. He was APCO Worldwide's first employee in Europe and set up APCO's Brussels office in 1995, acting as Managing Director in various roles until 2010. Prior to APCO, Mark joined the London office of Hill & Knowlton and left its Brussels office as Associate Director. He also served briefly with the Brigade of Gurkhas in the British Army. Mark has taught semesters for Masters in Strategic Communications at Brussels IHECS University and has a Masters in Political Science from the PUC University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Mark is also a Shareholder and Senior Director in the Brussels office of Executive Search firm Ellwood Atfield, which specialises in Communications and Public Affairs recruitment.



NATALIA KUROP

Natalia is an independent consultant with Dober Partners and also serves as Director of Communications for the European Technology and Travel Services Association (ETTSA). Natalia was previously Senior Adviser to the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Europe) and Director of Communications at DIGITAL EUROPE, the leading European digital technology industry association. Natalia started her career as a broadcast journalist with the BBC and has produced numerous radio documentaries and TV programmes. Natalia is a Board Member of the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD). She is also a Senior Adviser to the Brussels office of Executive Search firm Ellwood Atfield.

ABOUT DOBER PARTNERS

Dober Partners brings together independent consultants bound by a common interest in doing good work. We are Brussels specialists in media relations, communications and public affairs. Dober Partners helps clients analyse the issues that matter and devise strategies that shift opinion. See www.doberpartners.com for more information or contact info@doberpartners.com

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EU MEDIA RELATIONS

Brussels Journalists Survey & what
the findings reveal for Communicators.

