



ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT

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MAJOR ENP/CORAL PROJECT SURVEY FINDS MOST COMMENTERS WANT JOURNALISTS AND EXPERTS TO RESPOND IN THE COMMENTS

One of the largest-ever surveys of online news commenters, conducted by the Engaging News Project and The Coral Project, finds that more than 70 percent of commenters want journalists to clarify factual questions in the comment section, and more than 60 percent of commenters want experts to respond to comments.

We partnered with 20 U.S.-based news organizations to conduct a survey of their site visitors, and received more than 12,000 responses. Participating organizations ranged widely in location and medium, with print, television, radio and online-only all represented.

The survey also found that perceptions of the civility of comment sections vary widely by site, with some indication that those commenting on smaller sites see the comment section as more civil than those commenting on larger sites.

For most sites, the most common reason that people comment is to express an emotion or opinion, followed by “to correct inaccuracies or misinformation” and “to take part in the debate.” We also found that 38% of commenters didn’t know that they could report offensive comments even though all of the partner sites’ comment sections included a comment-reporting option.

“We conducted this survey so that newsrooms can have more insight into what a wide range of commenters really think about comment sections and to help us better understand how the space works,” said Dr. Talia Stroud, director of the Engaging News Project.

Other findings from the survey include:

- Fewer than half of respondents on any news site feel connected to other commenters.
- 42% of respondents per site on average would like it if journalists highlighted quality comments in comment sections.
- Most people across all sites find the space easy to navigate, with majorities saying that it is easy to locate the comments, to post comments, to follow a thread, and to like/dislike comments. However, just under half per site, on average, believe that it is easy to sort the comments.

“Comments are all-too-often under resourced and ignored in newsrooms,” said Andrew Losowsky, project lead for The Coral Project. “This survey demonstrates a huge opportunity for conversations that bring journalists and their audiences closer together.”

“Commenters spoke clearly in this survey: they want news organizations to bring reported facts and expert opinions into public discourse, and to listen to their thoughts about the issues of the day,” said Greg Barber, The Coral Project’s lead for strategy and partnerships and director of digital news projects at The Washington Post.

Participating organizations in the survey: Alaska Dispatch News, AL.com, The Arizona Republic, The Atlantic, Civil Beat, The Dallas Morning News, Deseret News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, KXAN, PBS NewsHour, Philly.com, The Seattle Times, Southern California Public Radio/KPCC, The State Journal-Register, The Texas Tribune, TribLIVE, Twincities.com / St. Paul Pioneer Press, Voice of San Diego, The Washington Post, and Willamette Week.

The Engaging News Project provides research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at engagingnewsproject.org

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