

## **The Impact of Misinformation on Social Trust**

In recent years, misinformation has continued to spread throughout Taiwanese society, exerting a profound impact on the daily lives of citizens and the functioning of social institutions. As many as 95.05% of respondents reported having received misinformation, while only 4.95% stated they had never encountered it—clearly indicating that misinformation has become a serious issue in Taiwan’s society.

This survey was conducted by the Web Survey NTU (臺灣大學動態民意網路調查平台會員庫 in Chinese) of National Taiwan University, with an in-depth exploration of the potential impacts of misinformation on Taiwanese society. The survey focuses on five aspects: (1) the awareness of misinformation, (2) the ability to identify misinformation, (3) the awareness of fact-checking, (4) the awareness of accountability for misinformation, and (5) the possible effects of emerging artificial intelligence. An experimental design was also included to analyze the effectiveness of fact-checking efforts.

The survey was based on the membership database of the Web Survey NTU and conducted through an online questionnaire. The target population comprised individuals aged 20 and above, registered in Taiwan (including offshore counties such as Penghu). The survey was conducted from October 25 to October 30, 2024, for a total of six days, resulting in 2,422 completed questionnaires. The sampling method involved randomly selecting eligible members from the online platform’s database, with considerations for gender, region, age, and other socio-economic background factors. Invitations were sent to these individuals via text message to their mobile phone numbers. Three rounds of sampling were conducted, for a total of 14,040 sample invites. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is  $\pm 2.00$  percentage points. The final results were weighted by region, gender, and age according to the latest demographic data from the Ministry of The Interior to align with the population structure.

1. Increased frequency of exposure to misinformation, and it’s showing up in multi-channel than ever before.

- 95% of the public reported having received misinformation, marking an increase of nearly 13 percentage points compared to 2023.

- Misinformation appears more frequently in daily life, and its sources—media, online platforms, mobile phones, and neighborhood communities—have all shown increased frequencies compared to 2023.
2. Ongoing erosion of trust
    - Misinformation undermines public trust in politicians, political systems, social institutions, and the media.
    - Distrust toward politicians has risen most notably, climbing from 61% to 68%.
  3. Polarization of media trust
    - The widespread presence of misinformation has caused a split in how the public perceives media professionals.
    - 70.54% of respondents reported “decreased trust” in media professionals, but 11.40% indicated “increased trust.” This reflects the dual role of media in the misinformation debate: some media outlets are viewed as sources of misinformation, while others that actively combat misinformation have gained credibility.
  4. Significant outcomes in promoting fact-checking
    - Growing Awareness and Usage
    - People are getting more familiar with fact-checking tools. In fact, 74% now know about civil rumor-busting or fact-checking organizations—up significantly from 2023.
    - More People Putting Fact-Checking into Practice
    - The percentage of respondents who have never used a fact-checking service dropped from 52% last year to 33% this year. This shows that government and civil organizations’ efforts to promote these services are steadily paying off.
  5. Public Becoming More Alert
    - People with higher education are encountering fake news more often, possibly because they have more diverse information sources or are more sensitive to spotting misinformation.

- Moreover, compared to before, a higher number of respondents now believe they themselves can be influenced by fake news. This shows that misinformation appears frequently in everyday life and that the public's self-awareness about being misled has grown stronger.
6. Dispersed sense of responsibility
- The public still has a strong sense that misinformation governance is necessary, but the proportion of those who believe a specific person or entity has “very high responsibility” has declined compared to 2023.
  - This indicates that expectations for governance are gradually becoming more diversified. People increasingly believe that multiple parties must work together to resolve misinformation. Additionally, fatigue over misinformation and distractions from other issues may weaken the public's focus on combating misinformation.
7. Support for restrictive measures against misinformation
- Over 90% of respondents support using education and legal measures to prevent misinformation.
  - A higher proportion of respondents want the government, online platforms, and technology companies to adopt restrictive measures, indicating a growing public demand for legislative regulations.
8. AI usage and the ability to identify misinformation
- Artificial intelligence has yet to become mainstream, with half of the respondents having little to no experience using AI. Moreover, 22% of younger respondents and many older respondents have nearly no AI usage experience.
  - Groups that frequently use AI are more likely to encounter misinformation, yet they also feel more confident in detecting it. Some even believe AI-generated messages are more objective and accurate.
9. Impact on specific groups and misinformation

- Different demographic groups exhibit distinctly different social media usage habits. Older adults and individuals with lower education levels tend to prefer Facebook and YouTube.
- If the government aims to help these groups reduce their exposure to, or sharing of, misinformation, it may need to strengthen regulation and education efforts on specific social media platforms.

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