

# Unpacking perceptions of news media and journalism among U.S. teens (2025):

## Executive Summary

This follow-up survey, which recontacted more than 750 respondents from the News Literacy Project's 2024 [News Literacy in America Report](#), sought to better understand the nature of teen distrust in news media, including how they conceptualize the practice of journalism.

This report and its recommendations aim to inform educators, parents/guardians, policymakers and media professionals on ways they can foster healthy skepticism and avoid exacerbating harmful news media cynicism among teens. Equipped with a healthy skepticism, young people can more effectively hold the press (and other institutions) accountable, participate in civic life and protect themselves from misinformation, conspiracy theories and low-quality information sources. These key findings provide an overview of the report's main data points and offer valuable insights into how teenagers believe newsrooms operate and their attitudes toward news media. The full report will be available on our website on Nov. 6th at [newslit.org](#).



Conducted online between April 28 and May 12, 2025, the nationally representative, probability-based survey of teens ages 13–18 carries a margin of error of  $\pm 5.3$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level (with larger margins for subgroups).



For more information, visit [newslit.org](#)  
or contact us at [info@newslit.org](mailto:info@newslit.org).

## 1. The majority of teens view news media negatively.

[illegible]

## 2. More teens believe journalists are skilled at lying and deceiving than informing the public.

When asked to think of one thing they think journalists are doing well, roughly 1 in 3 teens (37%) offer negative feedback, saying things such as lying and deceiving (81 responses) or that journalists don't do anything well (66 responses). Among teens who had positive feedback for what journalists are doing well, informing the public (52 responses) and uncovering the truth (46 responses) are most frequently mentioned.

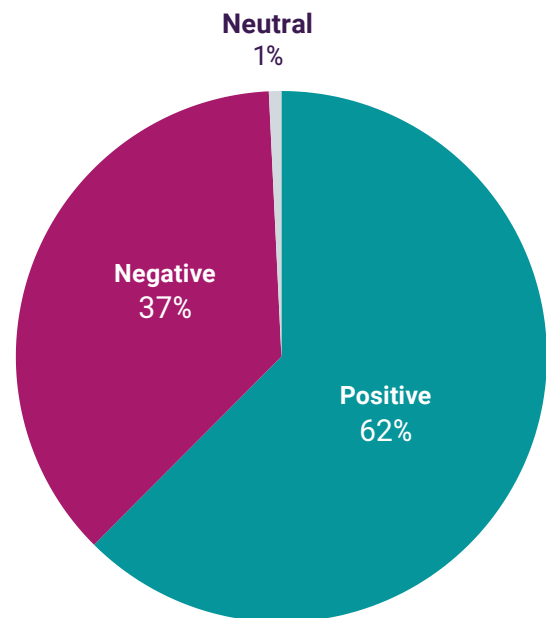
## 3. Young people's top advice to journalists: Get the facts right and minimize bias.

When asked to think of one thing they think journalists could improve on, teens most frequently mention being honest and getting the facts right (283 responses) and minimizing bias and improving balance (138 responses).

**More than a third of teens offer negative feedback when asked what journalists are **doing well****

Note: Results based on 634 responses with enough detail to categorize.

Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from April 28 - May 12, 2025, with 756 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.



## 4. More teens believe professional journalists regularly engage in unethical behaviors than they believe journalists regularly engage in standards-based practices.

Roughly half of teens or more believe that journalists always, almost always or often engage in the following unethical behaviors: “give advertisers special treatment” (49%), “make up details, such as quotes” (50%), “pay or do favors for sources” (51%) or “take photos and videos out of context” (60%). In contrast, only about a third or a quarter believe that journalists frequently engage in the following standards-based practices: “correct errors when they happen” (23%), “gather information from multiple sources” (29%), “confirm facts before reporting them” (30%) or “cover stories to help protect the public’s interests” (31%).

### Perceptions of frequency of journalist actions, by type of action

% of teens who say that professional journalists and news organizations always, almost always or often...

■ Always or almost always ■ Often

#### STANDARDS-BASED PRACTICE

Correct errors when they happen **NET**

6% 17% **23%**

Gather information from multiple sources

8% 22% **29%**

Confirm facts before reporting them

6% 24% **30%**

Cover stories that help protect the public’s interests

6% 24% **31%**

#### UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Give advertisers special treatment **NET**

15% 34% **49%**

Make up details, such as quotes

18% 32% **50%**

Pay or do favors for sources

12% 39% **51%**

Take photos and videos out of context

20% 40% **60%**

Note: Items may not sum exactly to the NET values due to rounding.

Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from April 28 - May 12, 2025, with 756 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.

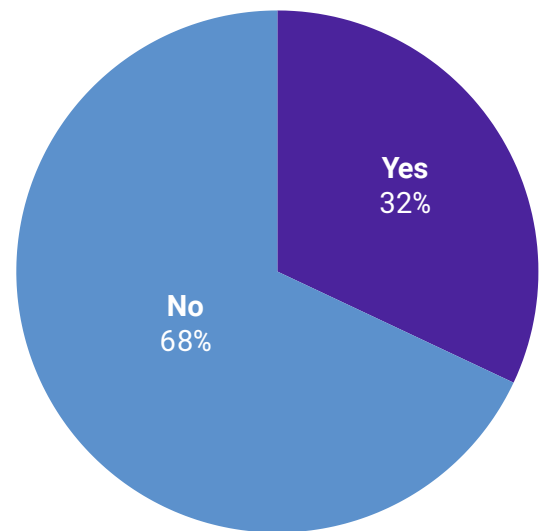
## 5. Most teens can't think of any representations of journalism on screen but if they do, chances are it's from *Spider-Man*.

When asked if any movies or TV shows come to mind when they think of journalism, only about one-third of teens (32%) say “yes.” With 15 mentions, the most popular cultural touchstone for journalism among teens is the *Spider-Man* franchise.

### For most teens, thinking about journalism doesn't bring to mind any TV shows or movies

% of teens who say that any movies or TV shows come to mind when they think of journalism

Source: SSRS survey for the News Literacy Project conducted online from April 28 - May 12, 2025, with 756 teenagers ages 13-18 nationwide.



# Recommendations

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**This report provides a revealing look into how teenagers believe newsrooms operate and their attitudes toward news media.** The results of this survey highlight several important opportunities for news literacy education and dialogue — opportunities that can help close the gap between perception and reality, sharpen students’ ability to recognize credible information and empower teen voices as critical respondents to

coverage that falls short of journalism standards and ethics. Below are **our recommendations** for ways that educators, parents/guardians, policymakers and media professionals can help foster healthy skepticism and avoid exacerbating harmful cynicism among teens.

- 1** Encourage young people to distinguish between standards-based journalism and other types of information.
- 2** Teach students verification skills and how standards-based newsrooms operate.
- 3** Foster accurate perceptions of journalism by helping teens question unrealistic portrayals or sweeping statements about “the media” and by acknowledging examples of high-quality journalism.



» The full report will be available at [newslit.org/news-and-research/teens-and-news-media/](https://newslit.org/news-and-research/teens-and-news-media/) on Nov. 6.