

3 THE ONLINE NEWS AUDIENCE

In this chapter, you will learn the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why* and *how* of online news demographics:

- Young people and news junkies are the people *who* are most likely to go to the Web for news.
- National and international news from television sites is *what* the audience is mostly likely to consume online.
- The middle of the day is *when* online news is most popular, and people consume it in small chunks throughout the day.
- More and more news consumers are getting their news from mobile phones, using them to find news *where* they are.
- The reason *why* people turn to online news is to access breaking news updates and to share news with friends.
- Online news users differ significantly from their print and broadcast counterparts in terms of *how* they consume news.

Journalists without an audience are just diarists, solitary scribblers of their own thoughts. But journalists who know and connect with their audience can, quite simply, change the world.

Communicators have been changing the world since before the days of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who argued that the audience was the most important element in human communication. “[O]f the three elements in speech-making—speaker, subject, and person addressed—it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech’s end and object,” he wrote in his treatise “Rhetoric.” You, the journalist, are the speaker. But you can’t tell a story about your subject effectively without understanding your audience. The technology you use may be new, but journalists’ desire to inform and engage their audience is ancient.

As communication technology evolves, so too do audiences. The audiences for whom you write today behave in fundamentally different ways from the audiences of ancient Greece—or even from the audience for whom journalism students were trained to write a decade ago. People who get their news and information from online sources behave

differently than people who read newspapers or watch television. And a person who gets his or her news from multiple media consumes and interacts with each of those media differently. While both a newspaper and a website may offer their readers the same text of an article, it is important to understand that these readers consume the text in different environments, and often for different reasons. Their actions before and after they read the text story will also differ depending on the medium.

An understanding of the changing nature of audience habits is crucial to good journalism. Awareness of your audience isn't something you get just by reading one chapter of a textbook or passing a year-end examination; audience awareness hinges on audience needs. As a journalist you must always place the audience's needs above your own—whether they involve a political agenda, financial considerations or even artistic self-expression. Perhaps more so today than ever, a journalist in a networked world is not just a storyteller on a stage or at a lectern, but a conduit for connecting ideas and people.

Without an audience, all of your hard work reporting a story—and your creativity in presenting it—will be wasted. Study after study has shown that the online news audience has different behaviors and expectations than a print or broadcast news audience.

WHO READS NEWS ONLINE?

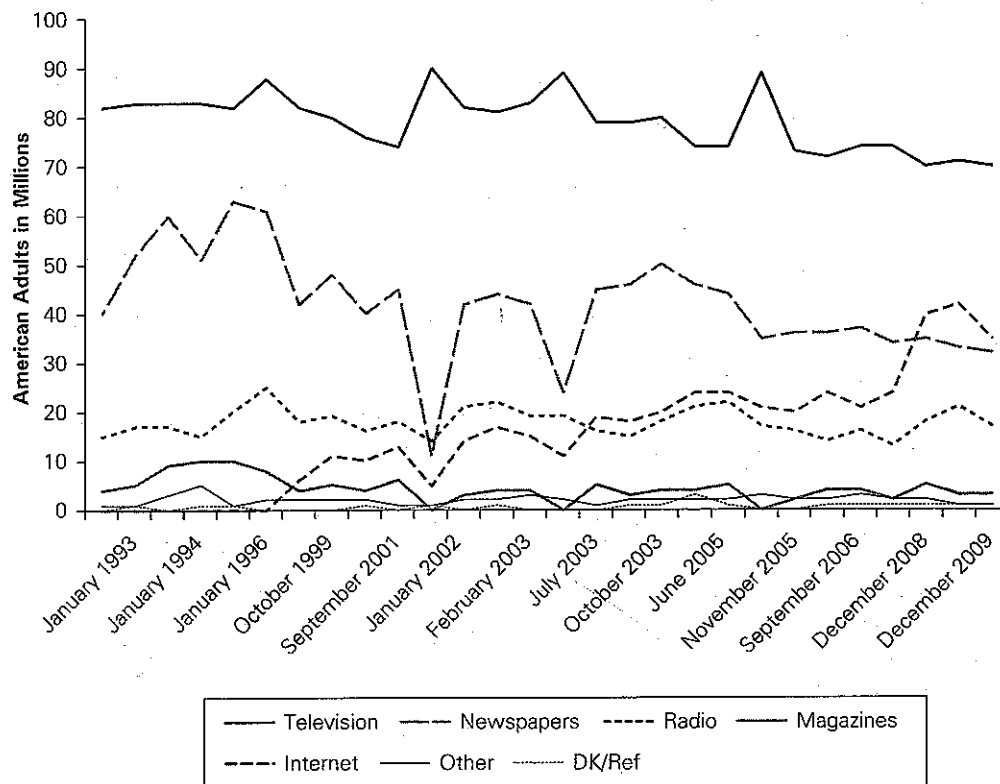
Who reads news online? The short answer to this question, at least in the U.S., is nearly everyone. Somewhere between 75 and 80 percent of American adults use the Internet, and between 70 and 75 percent of these people have used the Internet to get news in some way. In just 10 years, the Internet overtook magazines, then radio and then newspapers as a major source for news, especially among people between the ages of 18 and 30.

A Growing Audience, Second Only to TV

In 2009, more than 170 million American adults said they used the Internet, and about 120 million said they at least occasionally used the Internet to gather news. But for most Americans, the Internet is just one of several places to turn for news. Despite the rapid growth of the Internet, television clearly remains most Americans' preferred source for national, international and local news and information. The two media may be on a collision course, however, as the popularity of television declines and its audience fragments while the popularity of the Internet continues to increase. For about 18 percent of American adults, the Internet is their number one source for news.

One of the most consistent and thorough sources of free public data about the online news audience is the Pew Research Center. Several times every year, the center surveys thousands of Americans about their news habits and attitudes. In December 2009, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press asked American adults to name the two media from which they got most of their national and international news. Seventy percent said television was one of the two most important media, 35 percent said the Internet and

Figure 3.1 American Media Use Over Time



How do you get most of your news about national and international issues?

NOTE: Figures add to more than 100 percent because of multiple responses.

SOURCE: Pew Research Center for People and the Press. December 2009 Political Survey, <http://people-press.org/reports/questionnaires/573.pdf>.

32 percent said newspapers. It was the second consecutive year that the Internet was named more often than newspapers as a top source of news. Since 1999, when Pew first began including the Internet as a source of news, the percentage of television news viewers has dropped from 82 percent and newspaper readers from 42 percent. In 1999, only 6 percent cited the Internet as an important source for national and international news.

For local news, however, the Internet plays less of a role. In a July 2009 Pew survey, the Internet trailed all other media as a source for local news and information. Only 17 percent of respondents said that they get most of their local news from the Web, compared to 64 percent who cited television, 41 percent who named newspapers and 18 percent who preferred radio.

The period between the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections saw rapid growth of the Internet as a source for political news. By the end of the 2008 campaign, more American adults said the Internet was one of the two media from which they got most of their election news. A third of the people in a Pew poll said the Internet was one of their most important sources, while 29 percent named newspapers. Meanwhile, television was the top source, cited by 72 percent of respondents.

Big news events have tended to push more and more people to the Web for breaking news as well as in-depth reporting and a broader variety of sources. On Election Day in 1996, news websites saw traffic spike as Americans turned to the Internet for quick access to results and analysis. Much of that audience has remained, and in fact the Internet audience grows each time a new story breaks—for example, the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal in 1998–99 and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. This trend continues. During the outbreak of H1N1, or “swine flu,” in May 2009, 25 percent of American adults cited the Internet as the most useful source of news about the illness; this compared to 45 percent who found television the most useful source of news and 9 percent who cited newspapers.

Despite the rapid growth of the Internet, it would be tough to make the argument that the advent of online news has made most Americans more aware of current events. If the Internet is having any effect on the overall news diet of Americans, it may be that it is merely slowing the decades-long decline in the amount of time the average person spends with the news. Between 1994 and 2004, surveys done by the Pew Research Center showed steady erosion in the amount of time that people were spending on news consumption. But in 2004, when Pew first started asking about online news consumption, there was a sudden jump in the average time spent on news—a jump that hadn’t been seen before and hasn’t been seen since. Time spent with traditional news media, however, continues to be replaced by time spent getting news online. In 2004, Americans spent 92 percent of their news consumption time with offline media. In 2008, that percentage had dropped to 86 percent.

A Young and Elite Audience

To the disappointment of many people who saw the rise of the Internet as a sign of a renewed interest in the news, more and more Americans are simply ignoring news from any source. Nearly 20 percent of Americans didn’t see or hear any news yesterday, a five-point jump from 1998. Among adults younger than 24—the most frequent and engaged online news audience—more than one-third got no news yesterday, a nine-point jump in 10 years.

In an April 1997 article written for *Wired* magazine, author Jon Katz led off with idealistic optimism: “On the Net last year, I saw the rebirth of love for liberty in media. I saw a culture crowded with intelligent, educated, politically passionate people who—in jarring contrast to the offline world—line up to express their civic opinions, participate in debates, even fight for their political beliefs.” Katz and others hoped that by making online publications cheap to start up and nearly free to distribute, the Internet would see a flourishing of new voices—voices that had been ignored by traditional mainstream reporters and editors.

VIDEO

FINDING AND TRACKING DOWN THE ONLINE NEWS AUDIENCE

By [Name] and [Name]

As the industry continues to grapple with the challenges of the digital age, finding and tracking down the online news audience has become a critical task for news organizations. This article explores the various methods and challenges involved in reaching and understanding this audience.

One of the primary challenges is the sheer volume and fragmentation of the online news audience. With the rise of social media and niche news websites, traditional methods of audience measurement are becoming less effective.

Industry experts suggest that a combination of data-driven insights and targeted outreach strategies is necessary to effectively reach the online news audience. This includes leveraging analytics to understand user behavior and preferences.

Another key challenge is the issue of ad fraud and bot traffic, which can significantly distort audience metrics. News organizations must implement robust verification processes to ensure the accuracy of their data.

Despite these challenges, there are several strategies that can help news organizations better understand and reach their online audience. These include investing in advanced analytics tools and fostering direct relationships with readers through newsletters and social media.

Ultimately, the success of any news organization in the digital era will depend on its ability to adapt to the changing landscape and effectively engage with its audience. By embracing data and innovation, news organizations can continue to provide relevant and compelling content to their readers.

For more information on the latest trends in the news industry, visit our website at [URL].

Stay tuned for our next article on the future of journalism in the digital age.

Thank you for reading this article. We hope it provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of the online news audience.

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Best regards,
[Name]

[Organization]

On Newsstands Now
Issue 5.04 | Apr 1997

Birth of a Digital Nation

By Jon Katz

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For some, this past election year was about the slow death of the current political system. For Jon Katz, on the other hand, it marked the rise of postpolitics and the birth of the Digital Nation.

First stirrings

On the Net last year, I saw the rebirth of love for liberty in media. I saw a culture crowded with intelligent, educated, politically passionate people who - in jarring contrast to the offline world - line up to express their civic opinions, participate in debates, even fight for their political beliefs.

I watched people learn new ways to communicate politically. I watched information travel great distances, then return home bearing imprints of engaged and committed people from all over the world. I saw positions soften and change when people were suddenly able to talk directly to one another, rather than through journalists, politicians, or ideological mercenaries.

I saw the primordial stirrings of a new kind of nation - the Digital Nation - and the formation of a new postpolitical philosophy. This nascent ideology, fuzzy and difficult to define, suggests a blend of some of the best values rescued from the tired old dogmas - the humanism of liberalism, the economic opportunity of conservatism, plus a strong sense of personal responsibility and a passion for freedom.

I came across questions, some tenuously posed: Are we living in the middle of a great revolution, or are we just members of another arrogant elite talking to ourselves? Are we a powerful new kind of community or just a mass of people hooked up to machines? Do we share goals and ideals, or are we just another hot market ready for exploitation by America's ravenous corporations?

Wired magazine's archived article from Jon Katz.

for most other media, the Internet news audience skews white, male, affluent and educated. The gap is especially large in terms of age, education and income.

Adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age—the so-called Millenneals—are an overrepresented age group among the online news audience. While they account for 22 percent of the total U.S. adult population, the Millennial age cohort makes up nearly 30 percent of the online news audience. This age group may be less likely than previous generations to be avid news consumers, but that portion of the cohort that *is* reading news is doing so in ways that differ sharply from those of older cohorts. The unique methods by which Millenneals acquire and share information about their world are worth watching; if decades of research hold true, the media patterns established at this age will remain throughout life.

Among Millenneals, the Internet has left newspapers and radio in the dust and is quickly catching up to television. Television remains the top source of news for 65 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds, but the Internet is a close second at 59 percent. Millenneals are also

In some cases, Katz's optimism has been rewarded. New voices have emerged. Fringe social and political groups were among some of the first to use the online media to communicate with each other, find allies and tell the stories that were not being told in popular newspapers and television. In 1998, former professional wrestler Jesse "The Body" Ventura tapped into this anti-establishment energy online and used it to propel himself to the Minnesota governor's mansion.

But from the outset, the pioneers on the Internet have also been mostly educated, affluent, white city-dwellers. The people who could afford the expensive early versions of home computers and Internet access were the first to go online. Later, the same demographic was the first to buy smart phones and iPods and to set up high-speed Internet connections at home. This gap between the online haves and have-nots has been dubbed the "digital divide." In all news media except television, there is a divide between historically privileged groups and historically disenfranchised groups. Like the news audience

the group most likely to watch news video online, visit news blogs, maintain a profile on a social networking site and receive news by e-mail. Yet they are the least likely to use RSS feeds and to access news on a custom Web page.

Millennials don't just consume online media, though. They are more likely to create it too. They're 50 percent more likely than Gen Xers—those ages 30 to 45—to create social network profiles or use Twitter. Twenty-nine percent of Millennials check their online social networks several times a day. They are also more than three times as likely as older cohorts to have posted video of themselves online.

But Millennials don't just differ from older generations in their digital media consumption and creation. They also differ in the times and manner they get news. It is the only age group that prefers getting news after dinner to getting news any other time of day. It is also the only group that is less likely to use a news site's homepage to find a story than to follow a link directly to the story from some other site. And it is the group most likely to just stumble across news while doing something else online.

One way in which Millennials mirror previous generations is in the racial, educational and income divides between those who use the Internet to get news and those who do not. The gap between the percentage of college graduates who use the Internet to get news and the percentage of those with no more than a high school diploma who do so is widening rapidly. No other demographic characteristic saw the development of a wider gap between 2006 and 2008. In just two years, the percentage of college graduates who went online for news daily jumped from 32 percent to 44 percent—the fastest rate of growth among any demographic group. Meanwhile, the percentage of people with only a high school degree who accessed news online daily inched forward only 1 percentage point, to 11 percent. While there are also gaps between white and black online audiences, and between men and women, these gaps have remained flat since 2006.

It is important for journalists to remember that even the most compelling online news won't reach those people who don't get their news from the Web. Nor are these people contributing comments and sharing photos with the online community. Different patterns in media consumption can lead to differences of perception that are based solely on the chance circumstances of birth. As long as there is a digital divide, journalists will need to realize that engaging the audience is going to mean finding ways of connecting people across media platforms.

WHAT NEWS DO PEOPLE GET ONLINE?

While the Internet has meant more people are getting their local news from a new medium, most are getting it from the same news organizations that were popular before the establishment of the Internet. Blogs and social media are contributing new stories to the mix, but for the most part social media is functioning as a new distribution tool for legacy media stories.

Much From the Same Old Sources

Among the 199 most popular news sites in the U.S., two-thirds are sites for news organizations that were in business before the Internet existed. And two-thirds of the traffic to the top 199 sites goes to legacy news sites, or sites that are run by companies that produced news before the arrival of the Internet.

While Yahoo News is the most popular online source of news in America, most of its content comes from traditional news sources, especially the Associated Press. The websites of two national cable TV channels, MSNBC and CNN, vie most months for the second largest online news audience. Among the online news audience, 56 percent, or 66 million people, say they get their news from news aggregators such as Yahoo or Google News, and 46 percent say they get their news from a site connected with a television station.

The New York Times has the most popular newspaper website in the U.S., which makes it the fifth or sixth most popular news site overall most months. Even so, the number

of people who visit The New York Times' site every month is less than half the number who visit Yahoo News. USA Today and The Washington Post are neck and neck for the second spot among U.S. newspaper sites; according to Web analytics company Nielsen, they each have less than half the audience of The New York Times' site.

There are plenty of indications that the people who read newspaper websites are not augmenting readership of

the print product. In 2008, only 5 percent of all Americans said they read a newspaper both in print and online. Nine percent of Americans read newspaper stories only online, and 25 percent said they read newspaper stories only in print. People who grew up with traditional media seem to prefer it in its native form.

While blogs and social networks such as Facebook are growing in popularity as news sources, most of these platforms rely heavily on traditional journalism, especially newspapers. According to a 2009 analysis of outgoing links from social media sites done by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), about 80 percent of the links go to traditional

The screenshot shows the Yahoo News homepage with the following content:

- Search Bar:** "Q Search" with a "NEWS" button.
- Navigation:** HOME, BUSINESS, WORLD, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, TECH, POLITICS, SCIENCE, HEALTH, OPINION, MOST POPULAR.
- Sub-navigation:** Video, Photos, The Upshot, The Starting Point, Local, Odd News, Comics, Weather, Travel, Newsletters, Varsity, Who Know?
- Search:** "Q Search All News" with a "GO" button.
- Trending Now:** unemployment benefits, 401k rules, juggle bush, bank of america.
- Main Story:**
 - Historic financial overhaul signed to law by Obama** (AP - 42 mins ago)
 - WASHINGTON — Flipping over a new milestone in his presidency, a triumphant Barack Obama on Wednesday signed into law the most sweeping overhaul of lending and high-finance rules since the Great Depression, adding safeguards for millions of consumers and aiming to contain Wall Street excesses that could set off a new recession.
 - Full Story »
 - Video: Obama signs sweeping financial overhaul into law AP
 - Related: A place-by-place guide to financial overhaul law AP
- Other Stories:**
 - Fired Ag worker mulls job offer after WH apology** (AP - 21 mins ago)
 - Video: Shilday Shored Defends Har
 - Comcast AIG Jaws
 - Speech: Shilday Shored
 - Related: USDA to reconsider Shored resignation The Upshot
 - Large China oil spill threatens sea life, water** (AP - 1 hr 15 mins ago)
 - Related: China oil spill grows, official warns of 'severe threat'
 - Related: China uses oil-sealing tactics to clean up spill AP
- Most Popular:**
 - Workplace Bullying: New York Bill Targets Abusive Bosses
 - Fired Ag worker mulls job offer after WH apology
 - Hispanic financial overhaul signed to law by Obama
 - Judge in Conn.: Cheering isn't a colloquial sport
 - Scientists find most massive star ever discovered
 - More Most Popular »
- DC I-DAY** (with "GET MONTHLY DEALS" badge)

The first story on this screenshot of the Yahoo News homepage features both an AP wire story and photo.

media sites. The list of destinations to which bloggers send their readers is dominated by just three news sources: The New York Times, CNN and the BBC. Interestingly, the pattern at Twitter looks a bit different. Newspapers account for less than 3 percent of links from Twitter posts. All legacy media accounted for just less than a third of outbound Twitter links, according to the same PEJ study.

Looking at the way that traditional national news outlets dominate the list of the top news sites in the U.S., it is not surprising that the type of news that most people seek online is national and international news. Weather, sports scores, financial news, entertainment news and health information round out the remaining top categories of online news.

Local news still seems to reach Americans mostly from local television, though journalists should keep a close eye on the local news consumption patterns of young people. Young people today say that they are interested in local news much less than other topics, but according to a survey of college undergrads done by Kevin Kiley at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Millennials may be using Facebook as one of their primary sources of news about local events.

Some Different Stories, in a Different Way

Overall, social media is growing as a source for news distribution—though not necessarily news creation. On one hand, about 42 million Americans say they get news from their friends on social networks. This is just 3 million fewer than say they get news from newspapers. On the other, bloggers not associated with a mainstream media outlet are a source of news for only 13 million Americans, and fewer than 8 million Americans say they get news from a friend on Twitter, according to a December 2009 telephone poll done by the Pew Research Center.

People use Facebook and other social sites primarily as a social filtering device rather than as a way of staying connected to specific journalists or news outlets. On both Facebook and Twitter, people are much more likely to say that they get news on these platforms from a friend than from a journalist or news organization.

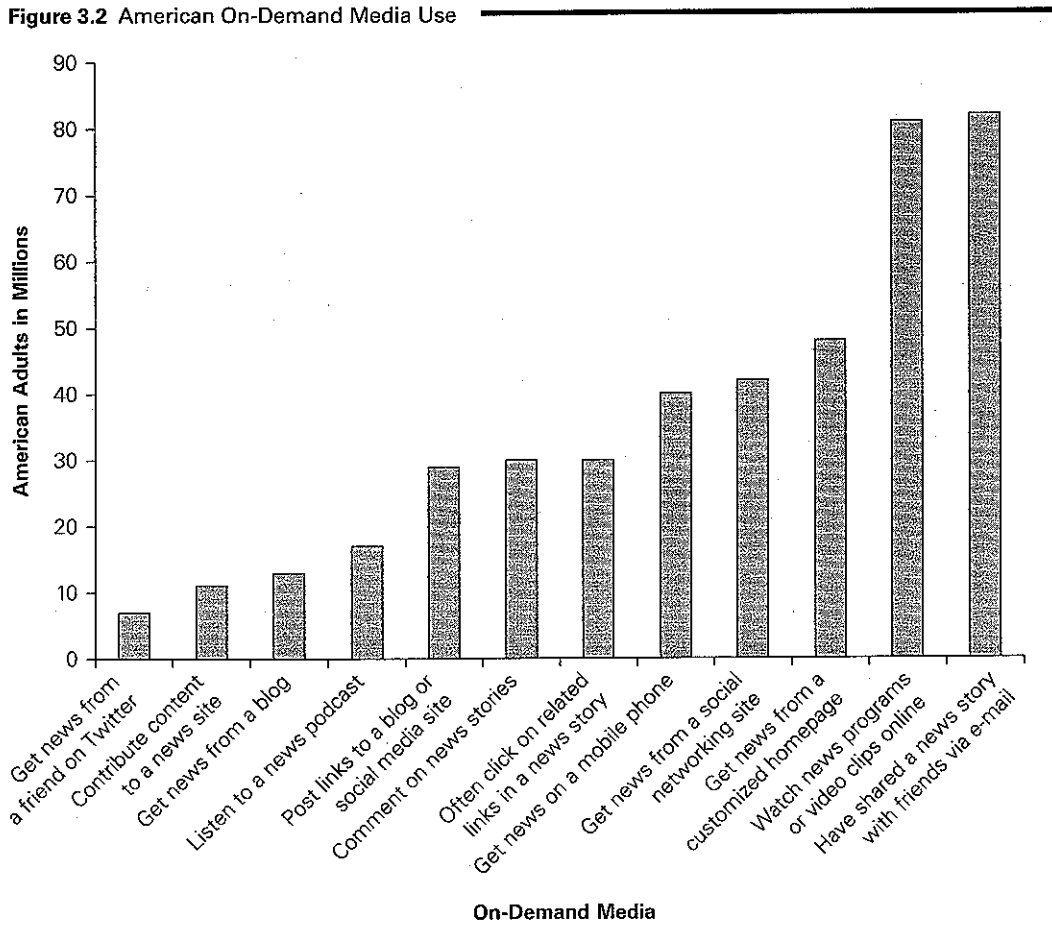
Perhaps the biggest role for social media sites is as a distribution tool because of the way they link back to original source sites. Journalists need to be aware of which stories are being discussed on social media—and which are not. The Project for Excellence in Journalism's 2009 study of the topics covered on blog and mainstream news sites found that blogs and the mainstream media both had the same most-popular story in only 13 of 47 weeks.

On-demand delivery offers the online audience much more control over which stories it sees via social media as well as news aggregators such as Google News. Because they are reading headlines on social networking sites, many people may be getting as much news as they want without ever actually visiting a news site. According to a 2009 study done by the research firm Outsell, 44 percent of people who read headlines on Google News never click through to the site where the story originated.

On the upside, the use of search and social filtering means that for many people their news diet is becoming more balanced—68 percent of the online news audience regularly

relies on more than one source for news every day, and 11 percent regularly uses at least six sites every day. Much of this diversity is coming from increasing use of partisan news sources such as political blogs. On both the right and left, political bloggers and news aggregation sites enjoy loyal audiences that visit more often and stay longer than do the audiences of most mainstream news sites. And nearly a third of Americans say that they prefer to get news from a source that shares their point of view. These audiences aren't necessarily small, either. Conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart, for example, has more monthly visitors to his website than do major metro newspaper sites such as the Philadelphia Inquirer, Miami Herald and Houston Chronicle.

Figure 3.2 American On-Demand Media Use



SOURCE: Data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau, December 2009, National Estimate of Postcensal Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population; and Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, Online News Survey, December 28, 2009–January 19, 2010, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx>.

WHEN DO PEOPLE READ NEWS ONLINE?

If you've ever asked your grandparents about how they got their news, you might have heard a story that was common when they were young adults. Every morning the newspaper boy—and it was almost always a boy—would ride his bike by the house a little before dawn and toss the morning paper on the doorstep or driveway. With a cup of coffee in hand, your grandfather or grandmother went out and retrieved the paper and brought it back to the breakfast table, where it was divided up among the family. Every morning, the family had an appointment with the newspaper, and it was the same paper delivered at about the same time to nearly every house in the city.

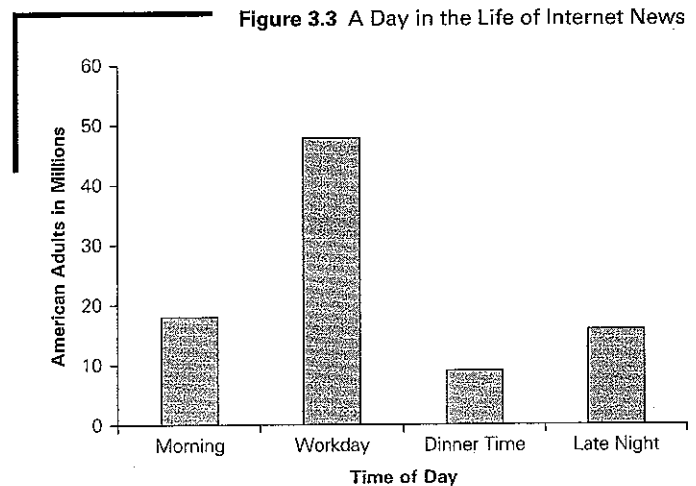
Your parents might tell a similar story of an appointment they had with the nightly network news. Every evening at about dinner time, a man—and it was always a man—would appear on whichever of the three national broadcast television networks your parents preferred and spend 30 or maybe 60 minutes telling them about what he and his editors and producers thought was the most important news of the day, or at least the most important news for which they had video.

Fast forward to your generation. If either your parents or grandparents asked you the same question, after thinking about it for just a few minutes you'd tell them that the days of appointment news consumption are over. You and your friends get news when you want it, where you want it and how you want it. You choose the stories you find interesting, and your friends may recommend some of the stories you see. A number of these stories may in fact have been written by journalists whose primary audience is the residents of a city on the other side of the country. Today's audience—the online news audience—doesn't eat three square meals at about the same time as everyone else every day. It snacks throughout the day, a nibble at a time.

During the Workday

One of the reasons that the Web has grown as an online news source is that it is often the only medium that reaches office workers during the day. Sixty-four percent of Americans say they check news during work hours. The middle of the day is second only to the morning as the time when Americans are most likely to be looking at news.

Of the people who check news during the day, a third say that they use the Internet to do it. Although television is the most



SOURCE: Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey, April 30-June 1, 2008, <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/444.pdf>.

popular source of news during the workday, providing 44 percent of the daytime news audience with its information, for Americans under 50 the Internet is by far the most popular daytime source of news. Ten years ago, only 5 percent of the daytime news audience used the Internet.

Among people who prefer to get their news online, 82 percent check news during the day. Only 61 percent of people who prefer to get their news from a traditional source check news (from any source) during the day. Ninety-two percent of the heaviest users of online news sites—a group Pew has dubbed the “Net Newsters”—access the Internet to get news during the day. Only 4 percent of people who get their news from traditional media outlets check for news on the Internet during the day.

Throughout the Day

In 2008, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center, 51 percent of American adults said they check in on the news from time to time during the day, rather than get the news at regular times. This marked the first time that a majority of Americans considered themselves “news grazers.” For news grazers, the Internet is a popular source of news—9 percent of them say they turn to the Internet for news at least three days a week, compared to the 39 percent of people who get their news by appointment. The appointment news audience is more likely to rely on television, newspapers and radio for its news than the Internet. Net Newsters are the people most likely to be grazers. Seventy-eight percent of Net Newsters say they check news from time to time, compared to 41 percent of people who are traditional news consumers.

While online news consumers dip their toes into the stream of information more often than people who rely on traditional sources, online users spend less of their time engaging with the news than do people who get their news from traditional media. Online users average just 35 minutes a day looking at news from all websites. This is less than the 39 minutes the average newspaper reader spends with his or her newsprint, and far less than the 54 minutes spent on television news by the average television news viewer. Not everyone uses the same sources of news in the same proportion, but an average American adult spends 66 minutes consuming news from all sources each day.

The online news audience—always “on” and always “snacking”—relies on short bursts of information and interactivity. Journalists have taken note. The challenge today is figuring out how to produce in-depth investigative and explanatory news in a way that suits audience behavior.



Tool: Google Analytics

For a large number of Web publishers, the online news audience remains a mystery. Getting detailed information about the traffic to your site can require purchasing analytics server

software, such as **Omniure's SiteCatalyst**, while getting information about traffic to other sites in a way that allows for easy comparison requires the purchase of reports and data from analytics companies. Thankfully for small publishers, Google offers a free tool called **Analytics**. By placing a small piece of code within the HTML of your Web pages, you can use **Google Analytics** to track the visits, unique visitors and page views to your site.

Q Online Module 3

Screencast on applying Google Analytics to your blog or website

Q Online Module 3

Tutorials on using Google Analytics

HOW DO PEOPLE READ NEWS ONLINE?

If we know anything about the 121 million people who regularly go online for news, it is that they are fickle. They flit from site to site, spending an average of only three minutes on each one. Many people who visit online news sites don't even know or care which site they are on. They simply get news when they want it, where they want it and how they want it; choose the stories they find interesting—or those their friends have found interesting and recommended; and not infrequently access stories written by journalists whose primary audience is the residents of a city on the other side of the country.

Searching and Scanning

It would be tough to overstate the role of search engines on online news consumption. Searches empower people to find news on exactly the topic they want at exactly the time they want. Search engines such as Google drive massive amounts of traffic to news websites, and the search function within a website is one of the most common ways for people to navigate a site. Seventy-one percent of Americans who use the Internet to get news say they use search engines to find news at least once every few weeks. A third say they use a search engine to find news at least three times a week. In fact, search engines may be one reason why the news consumer is so fickle: oftentimes users don't even know the names of the sources they're hooking up with. Forty-eight percent of online news users say their searches for news take them to websites with which they are not familiar.

The prominence of search engines as a starting point for online news consumption means that journalists have to consider not just how humans will read their stories, but how computers will read them as well. As you will learn in Chapter 5, on writing for searchers and scanners, the manner in which content is placed on a Web page and the words in a headline can affect whether or not searchers find your news stories.

Search engines are one of the primary reasons that so many people begin their visit to a news site directly on a specific article rather than first going to a site's homepage. Only 41 percent of the online news audience reads news by going directly to the homepages of

news organizations. Half of the people who visit online news sites typically start on an article page. A 2007 report in Advertising Age magazine noted that 57 percent of all visits to websites began at a page other than the site's homepage. The editor of one of the largest online newspaper sites in the U.S. told the Project for Excellence in Journalism that only a third of the traffic to his site came through the homepage.

Even though the homepage is, for most websites, the single most-visited page on the site—and the page on which most people begin their visit—its influence pales in comparison to the power of a broadcast's lead story or the stories on the front page of a newspaper. Change in audience behavior is forcing today's journalists to think differently about the traditional elements of news judgment and editorial control.

On the Go

The online news audience isn't just sitting in one place moving from site to site. A growing number of Americans are getting news while *they* are moving from site to site. Internationally, mobile phones have long been an important tool for accessing the Internet or sending short text messages. In the United States, mobile Internet use has trailed tethered desktop use, but recent years have seen a dramatic increase as more and more Americans are using Web-enabled "**smart**" phones such as the iPhone, Blackberry or Droid. Overall, 15 percent of Americans say they have a smart phone, and more than a third of those say that they look at news on these devices.

Of the 170 million American adults who use the Internet, 70 percent of them access it through some sort of wireless device—either a mobile phone or **WiFi**. Among mobile phone Web users, more people choose to pull information from the Web via searching or browsing than to have e-mail or text messaging alerts sent to their phones. Weather, sports, financial news and traffic information are some of the most popular news topics that people want to see on their phones. Many industry analysts see mobile technologies as a growth opportunity for journalists. New devices such as Apple's iPad offer companies new platforms. For example, ESPN and The New York Times were the first to provide special applications that take advantage of the features of the iPad.

Technological change brings with it challenges for journalists. For example, with each new screen dimension comes the need for a fresh design with fresh features that fit consumer habits. Most major news organizations have built stripped-down versions of their online sites so that mobile phones with slow Internet connections can more quickly download the content. For online news producers, this means fewer pictures, shorter headlines to fit a smaller screen and less Web page width in which to create links to related content.

Good mobile news operations, however, don't just retool their existing site to fit a new screen. Content for mobile devices can take advantage of geographically targeted information. The New York Times, the Financial Times and several Canadian papers have teamed up with a company called Foursquare to create content based on a user's location. According

to media consultant The Kelsey Group, about a third of all Web searches conducted by mobile phone are initiated to access information on something that is situated nearby.

Podcasts are another form of mobile media that is formatted to fit the audience. Podcasts are digital audio news shows that can be downloaded and played on a mobile music device such as an iPod. Because so many of the 16 million Americans who listen to news podcasts do so during their commute, most podcasts are edited to run between 5 and 20 minutes in length—about the same amount of time it takes many people to get to work.

A Social Experience

We've already discussed the way in which the online news audience snacks on information throughout the day, so you probably won't be surprised to learn that according to a survey done in 2006 by the Pew Research Center, the most popular reason that people say they go online for news is because of its convenience and to get breaking news updates. These reasons remain the most prominent motivations for the audience's shift to online news. But the rise in social networking has become increasingly important, as its interactivity features facilitate the exchange of online news. In fact, when Pew asked in 2009 what were the most important factors in deciding where to get news online, the audience cited links to related material, aggregating news from around the Internet and the ability to easily share stories with others as their top three factors.

The importance of sharing news, though, predates the rise of Facebook and Twitter. E-mail was the first way that people shared links to online news stories, and it remains the most popular. About 104 million Americans say they have received a news story in the e-mail from a friend. And about 81 million say they've sent news to a friend via e-mail. This compares to about 30 million adults who have posted a story to a blog or social network, and only 6 million who have posted a link to a story on Twitter.

It appears that people are much more interested in reacting to or sharing news content that has been developed by someone else than in creating news content of their own. Despite having the ability, the vast majority of Americans do not make their own news content. According to several surveys done by the Pew Research Center, less than 10 percent of American adults who go online for news have ever posted photos, video or information about their communities to a news site.

Even before the Internet, talking with friends about the news is one of the most common reasons that people say they follow the news, according to survey research. Reporters have always pitched their most interesting stories as "water cooler stories"—reports that people would read and then discuss around the water cooler while on break at work.

In the field of mass communication research, the uses and gratifications theory says that people consume news and information for one of four basic reasons: (1) to be aware of dangers and opportunities in the world, (2) for entertainment, (3) to feel connected to other people, and (4) to reinforce personal feelings or opinions. Similarly, political economist Anthony Downs as far back as 1957 noted that there were four reasons people seek

the news: (1) to help them make smarter consumer decisions, (2) to improve their workplace productivity, (3) to entertain themselves, and (4) to make voting decisions.

These findings create a challenge for online news producers. On the one hand, favoring timeliness above other news values and creating content that can be consumed in short bursts will match audience behavior. On the other hand, producers face the challenge of figuring out how to deliver in-depth investigative and explanatory journalism to a restless news audience. When people can easily ignore information that doesn't entertain or inform them, it is important for journalists to create news that people want to talk about.

Interactivity is one of the pillars of online news that make it fundamentally different from news in other media. A site's visitors can become its best advocates by sharing with their friends the information they find there. The audience isn't just the audience anymore. If you, the journalist, give them news that is engaging and relevant, they will share it with their friends. Your work has the opportunity not only to connect your sources with your readers, but also your readers with each other. That's how journalism builds community.

ONLINE LEARNING MODULE 3

ACTIVATE THIS MODULE: journalism.cqpress.com

The online news audience looks and behaves differently from the audience for traditional news sources in print or broadcast. Your ability to identify the characteristics of the online news audience is the first step toward building stronger stories that fit that audience's specific needs.

On my blog, I write about and link to the most recent material on the ever-changing trends of the online news audience. This blog is a resource for you regarding all the latest research on this topic.

When you buy or activate this chapter's online learning module, you will have access to:

- A digital version of this chapter's text.
- Interactive flashcards for the terms used in this chapter.
- A printable one-page guide to the who, what, when, where and why of the online news audience.
- A quiz to test your mastery of the material in this chapter.
- A video screencast that shows you how to use Google Analytics.