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# **Understanding the participatory news consumer**

**How internet and cell phone users have turned  
news into a social experience**

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## **Part 1: Summary of Findings**

In the digital era, news has become omnipresent. Americans access it in multiple formats on multiple platforms on myriad devices. The days of loyalty to a particular news organization on a particular piece of technology in a particular form are gone. The overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including national TV, local TV, the internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers. Some 46% of Americans say they get news from four to six media platforms on a typical day. Just 7% get their news from a single media platform on a typical day.

The internet is at the center of the story of how people's relationship to news is changing. Six in ten Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online *and* offline sources on a typical day, and the internet is now the third most popular news platform, behind local television news and national television news.

The process Americans use to get news is based on foraging and opportunism. They seem to access news when the spirit moves them or they have a chance to check up on headlines. At the same time, gathering the news is not entirely an open-ended exploration for consumers, even online where there are limitless possibilities for exploring news. While online, most people say they use between two and five online news sources and 65% say they do not have a single favorite website for news. Some 21% say they routinely rely on just one site for their news and information.

In this new multi-platform media environment, people's relationship to news is becoming portable, personalized, and participatory. These new metrics stand out:

- ***Portable:*** 33% of cell phone owners now access news on their cell phones.
- ***Personalized:*** 28% of internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them.
- ***Participatory:*** 37% of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter.

To a great extent, people's experience of news, especially on the internet, is becoming a shared social experience as people swap links in emails, post news stories on their social networking site feeds, highlight news stories in their Tweets, and haggle over the meaning of events in discussion threads. For instance, more than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails.

The rise of the internet as a news platform has been an integral part of these changes. This report discusses two significant technological trends that have influenced news consumption behavior: First, the advent of social media like social networking sites and blogs has helped the news become a social experience in fresh ways for consumers. People use their social networks *and* social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. Second, the ascent of mobile connectivity via smart phones has turned

news gathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers.

These are some of the key findings to come out of a new survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the Project for Excellence in Journalism aimed at understanding the new news landscape. Below are some of the other key findings:

**The internet has surpassed newspapers and radio in popularity as a news platform on a typical day and now ranks just behind TV.**

More than half of American adults (56%) say they follow the news “all or most of the time,” and another quarter (25%) follow the news at least “some of the time.” Asked specifically about their news habits on “a typical day,” the results are striking: 99% of American adults say that on a typical day, they get news from at least one of these media platforms: a local or national print newspaper, a local or national television news broadcast, radio, or the internet.<sup>1</sup>

Only local and national TV news, the latter if you combine cable and network, are more popular platforms than the internet for news. And most Americans use a combination of both online and offline sources. On a typical day:

- 78% of Americans say they get news from a local TV station
- 73% say they get news from a national network such as CBS or cable TV station such as CNN or FoxNews
- 61% say they get some kind of news online
- 54% say they listen to a radio news program at home or in the car
- 50% say they read news in a local newspaper
- 17% say they read news in a national newspaper such as the *New York Times* or *USA Today*.

Americans today routinely get their news from multiple sources and a mix of platforms. Nine in ten American adults (92%) get news from multiple platforms on a typical day, with half of those using four to six platforms daily. Fully 59% get news from a

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<sup>1</sup> Note that our question framing in the current survey is somewhat different from surveys that ask about consumers’ news consumption behavior “yesterday” or about the specific frequency of their news consumption. Instead, in the current survey, respondents were asked in one question whether, on a typical day, they get news from each of the following: local television news; national television news; local print newspapers; national print newspapers; or radio. Later in the survey, those who were identified as being at least occasional online news consumers were asked if, on a typical day, they get news from any one of 14 different online sources, ranging from the website of a national newspaper or television news organization to Facebook or Twitter posts of journalists, news organizations, or other people they follow. When answers to the two questions are combined, 99% of American adults say that on a typical day, they use at least one of the 5 traditional news sources or 14 online news sources asked about. This number may be higher than other estimates of daily news consumption because 1) respondents are asked about a “typical day” rather than “yesterday,” and 2) they are asked about a number of “non-traditional” news sources which may prompt them to recall behavior they might not otherwise consider when asked about their daily news consumption.

combination of online and offline sources on a typical day. Just over a third (38%) rely solely on offline sources, and 2% rely exclusively on the internet for their daily news.

**The average online consumer regularly turns to only a few websites.**

Most news consumers utilize multiple platforms for news, but online their range of specific outlets is limited. The majority of online news consumers (57%) say they routinely rely on just two to five websites for their news. Only 11% say they get their news from more than five websites, and 21% regularly rely on just one site.

Moreover, many do not have strong loyalty to particular online sources. When asked whether they have a favorite online news source, the majority of online news users (65%) say they do not. Among those who do, the most popular sites are those of major news organizations such as CNN and Fox.

**Internet users use the web for a range of news, but local is not near the top of the list.**

The most popular online news subjects are the weather (followed by 81% of internet news users), national events (73%), health and medicine (66%), business and the economy (64%), international events (62%), and science and technology (60%).

Asked what subjects they would like to receive more coverage, 44% said scientific news and discoveries, 41% said religion and spirituality, 39% said health and medicine, 39% said their state government, and 38% said their neighborhood or local community.

**News consumption is a socially-engaging and socially-driven activity, especially online. The public is clearly part of the news process now. Participation comes more through sharing than through contributing news themselves.**

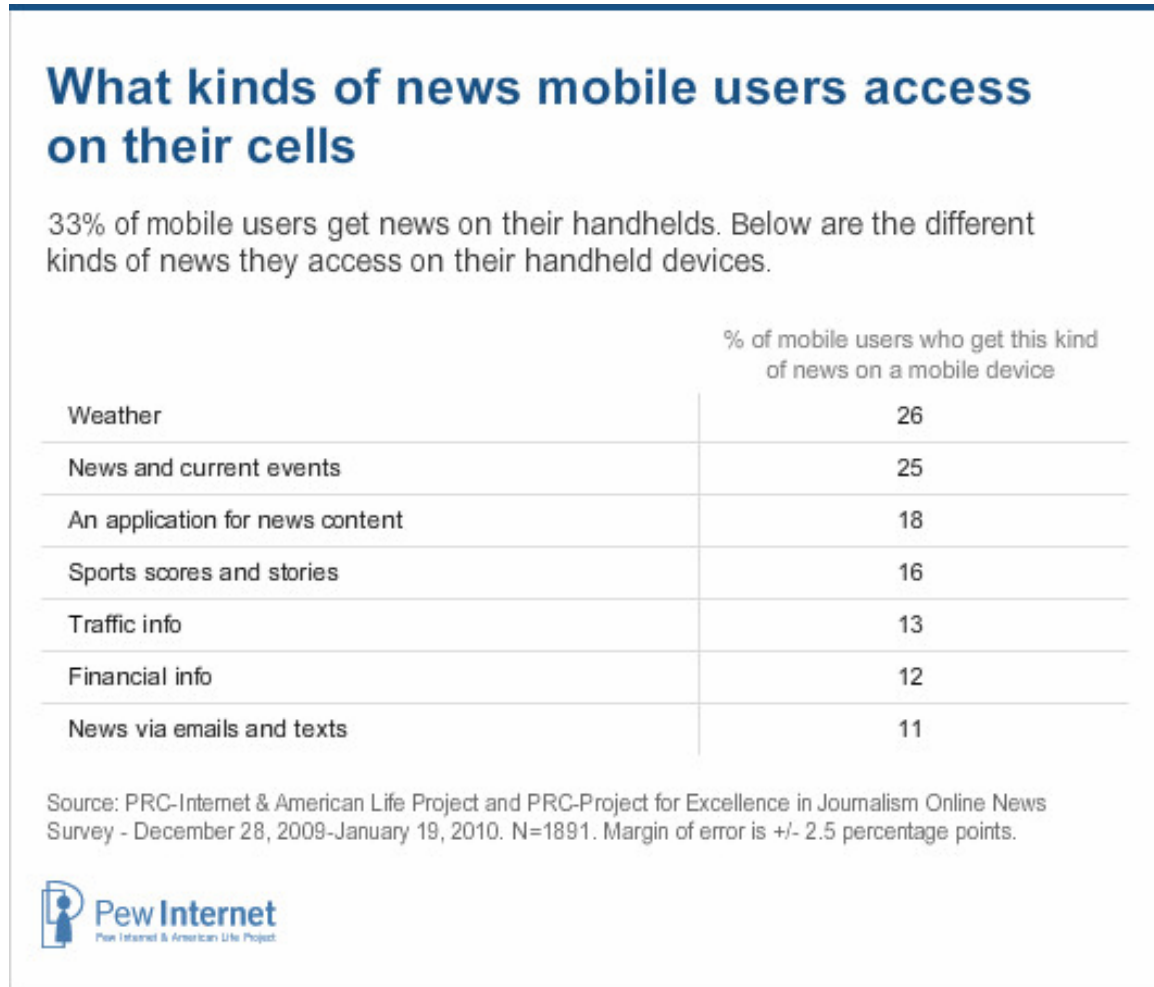
Getting news is often an important social act. Some 72% of American news consumers say they follow the news because they enjoy talking with others about what is happening in the world and 69% say keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation. And 50% of American news consumers say they rely to some degree on people around them to tell them the news they need to know. Online, the social experience is widespread:

- 75% of online news consumers say they get news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites and 52% say they share links to news with others via those means.
- 51% of social networking site (e.g. Facebook) users who are also online news consumers say that on a typical day they get news items from people they follow. Another 23% of this cohort follow news organizations or individual journalists on social networking sites.

Some 37% of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commentary about it, or dissemination of news via social media. They have done at least one of the following: commenting on a news story (25%); posting a link on a social networking site (17%); tagging content (11%), creating their own original news material or opinion piece (9%), or Tweeting about news (3%).

### News is pocket-sized.

Some 80% of American adults have cell phones today, and 37% of them go online from their phones. The impact of this new mobile technology on news gathering is unmistakable. One quarter (26%) of all Americans say they get some form of news via cell phone today—that amounts to 33% of cell phone owners. These wireless news consumers get the following types of news on their phones:



Wireless news consumers have fitted this “on-the-go” access to news into their already voracious news-gathering habits. They use multiple news media platforms on a typical day, forage widely on news topics, and browse the web for a host of subjects.

### News is personalized: The “Daily Me” takes shape.

Some 28% of internet users have customized their home page to include news from their favorite source or topics and 40% of internet users say an important feature of a news website to them is the ability to customize the news they get from the site. Moreover, 36% of internet users say an important part of a news website to them is the ability to manipulate content themselves such as graphics, maps, and quizzes.

**News is easier to follow now, but overwhelming. And most topics get plenty of coverage, in Americans' eyes.**

Americans send mixed messages in the survey about how they feel in a world where news is updated constantly and they can access news all the time. We asked respondents about how the volume of news might play into this: “Compared with five years ago, do you think it is easier or harder to keep up with news and information today?” Some 55% say it is easier, only 18% say it is harder. One quarter of adults (25%) say there is no difference between now and five years ago.

Yet even as they say it is easier to keep up with the news, Americans still feel overwhelmed. Fully 70% agreed with that statement: “The amount of news and information available from different sources today is overwhelming.” Some 25% “completely agreed” with that statement and 45% “mostly agreed.”

**Good news, bad news about media performance.**

When it comes to the quality of coverage itself, respondents give correspondingly mixed signals. Just under two-thirds (63%) agree with statement that “major news organizations do a good job covering all of the important news stories and subjects that matter to me.” Yet 72% also back the idea that “most news sources today are biased in their coverage.” Some of the explanation for this dichotomy seems to be rooted in the views of partisans. Liberals and Democrats are more likely to say the big news organizations do a good job on subjects that matter to them, while conservatives and Republicans are the ones most likely to see coverage as biased.

## **Acknowledgements:**

### **About the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project**

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the internet through surveys that examine how Americans use the internet and how their activities affect their lives.

The Pew Internet Project takes no positions on policy issues related to the internet or other communications technologies. It does not endorse technologies, industry sectors, companies, nonprofit organizations, or individuals.

### **About the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism**

The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism is dedicated to trying to understand the information revolution. We specialize in using empirical methods to evaluate and study the performance of the press, particularly content analysis. We are non-partisan, non-ideological and non-political.

The Project's goal is to help both the journalists who produce the news and the citizens who consume it develop a better understanding of what the press is delivering, how the media are changing, and what forces are shaping those changes. We have emphasized empirical research in the belief that quantifying what is occurring in the press, rather than merely offering criticism, is a better approach to understanding.

## **Part 2: Introduction: The news environment in America**

Americans' relationship with news is changing in dramatic and irreversible ways due to changes in the "ecology" of how news is available. Traditional news organizations are still very important to their consumers, but technology has scrambled every aspect of the relationship between news producers and the people who consume news. That change starts with the fact that those consumers now have the tools to be active participants in news creation, dissemination, and even the "editing" process.

This report is aimed at describing the extent of the transformation and the ways in which news serves a variety of practical and civic needs in people's lives. It focuses on those who receive and react to news and asks questions that are rarely asked about how people use the news in their lives, especially by exploiting the internet and cell phones. The report draws from a national phone survey of adults (those 18 and older) that documents how people's use of new technologies has disrupted the traditional flow of news to consumers and in communities.

The overarching narrative here is tied to technological change, generational differences, and the rise of a new kind of hybrid news consumer/participant. These shifts affect how people treat the news, relate to news organizations, and think of themselves as news makers and commentators in their own right.

### **People's daily news attention is high, but varies considerably by age.**

A bit more than half of American adults (56%) say they follow the news "all or most of the time." Another 25% say they follow the news "some of the time"; 12% say they do so "now and then" and 7% say they follow news "hardly ever" or "never." These findings match up with previous work by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press that found that only about a fifth of Americans did not get news "yesterday" – that is, the day before they took the survey.<sup>2</sup> Those who are well-educated, relatively well-off financially, and older are more likely than others to say they follow the news all or most of the time. The generational story is particularly striking. Younger adults are the least likely to say they follow the news avidly and the most likely to say they hardly ever or never get news:

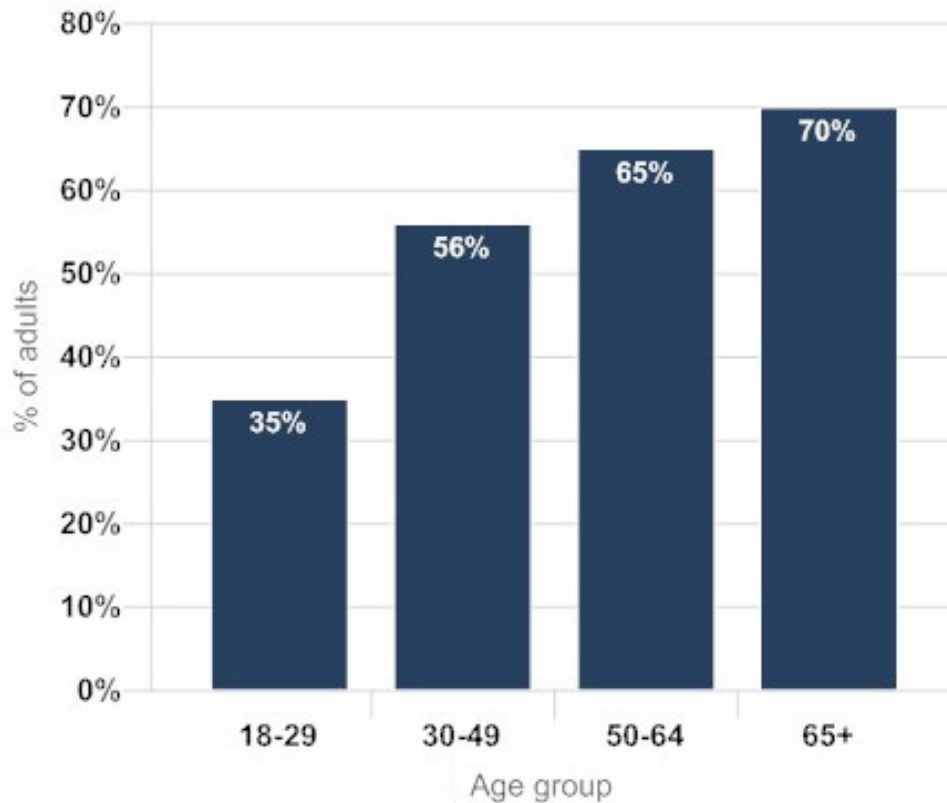
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<sup>2</sup> See "Key News Audiences Now Blend Online and Traditional Sources: Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment." Available at: <http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media>



## The young are least likely to be avid news consumers

The percentage of adults in each age group who say they follow the news all or most of the time



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.



### **Most people use several platforms as they search for news.**

When asked about their routines for getting news on a typical day, and specifically which news platforms individuals turn to daily, the results are striking. Almost all American adults (99%) say that on a typical day, they get news from at least one news platform (local or national newspapers, local or national television news broadcasts, radio, or the internet), including 92% who follow the news on multiple platforms on a typical day.

On a typical day:

- 78% of Americans get news from a local TV station
- 73% get news from a national television network such as CBS or a cable TV station such as CNN or FoxNews
- 61% get some kind of news online
- 54% listen to a radio news program at home or in the car
- 50% read news in the print version of a local newspaper
- 17% read news in the print version national newspaper such as the *New York Times* or *USA Today*.

In addition to exploring people's use of these six platforms, we asked them about getting news on their cell phones. We found that 26% of Americans get their news from time to time on their handheld device. However, when we isolate the segment of people who access the internet via their phones, we find that 88% of this group gets news at least occasionally on their mobile device. Complete details about these mobile news consumers are contained in Part 5 of this report.

It is also instructive to compare people who get news from a variety of sources on a given day with those who use only a few sources. Some 46% of Americans use between four and six of the media platforms cited in the bullets above on any given day. Another 46% use two or three platforms and 7% use just one platform. The notion that people have a primary news source, one place where they go for most of their news, in other words, is increasingly obsolete.

Six in ten Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online *and* offline sources on a typical day, and the internet is now the third most popular news platform, behind local television news and national television news. While 61% of Americans get news online on a typical day, some 71% get news online at least occasionally and there is a detailed analysis of who they are, what they do, and what they like, in Part 4 of this report.

While people access news on a medley of different platforms during the day, the story of their behavior on the internet is modest. As is the case with the general news ecology, most people do not express loyalty to one primary online news source, nor do they branch out to gather news from a wide array of websites. Most online news consumers (57%) say they use between two and five online news sources and 65% say they do not have a single favorite website for news. These findings are discussed in detail in Part 4 of the report on the internet and news.

The number of media platforms a person uses turns out to be a strong indicator of people's news-seeking behavior and attitudes about news and it will be used throughout this report as an analytical tool. For purposes of this introductory material, it is useful to note that those who use 4-6 platforms on any given day are 35% more likely than other Americans to say they follow the news all the time or almost all the time.

Who uses multiple platforms? As would be expected, those with the highest educational attainment and annual household incomes are more likely than other adults to use multiple news platforms. Among college graduates, half (52%) get news from at least four news platforms on a typical day. Overall, single platform users tend to be younger, less educated, and have lower household incomes than adults who use multiple news platforms. An individual's race/ethnicity is not related to the number of news platforms he or she uses on a regular basis.

Among those who rely on just one news platform on a typical day, the internet and local television news are the most popular sources. Slightly more than one-third (36%) of single platform users get their news from the internet, while 29% of this group get their news exclusively from local television.

On the traditional platforms, here are some of the salient demographic details:

**Local TV news:** This is the top source of news for Americans, so it is relatively popular across the board compared with other platforms. At the same time, some demographic groups are particularly likely to watch local TV news on a typical day when compared with other groups: women, African-Americans, and older Americans (those 65 and older). By comparison, those who are internet users and those who have a cell phone but no landline are less likely to get local TV news on a typical day than non-internet users and those who have a landline phone. Political Independents are significantly less likely to get local TV news than partisans in either party. Some 74% of Independents say they get news this way on a typical day compared with 81% of Democrats and 82% of Republicans.

**National broadcast and cable TV news:** These are some of the demographic groups that are particularly likely to watch national broadcast and cable TV news on a typical day when compared with other adults: African-Americans, those over age 50, and those who have premium broadband plans that provide extra-fast connections. As is the case with local TV news, Independents are less likely than Republicans or Democrats to get news from a national TV newscast.

**Radio news:** Looking at those who are most likely to listen to radio news either at home or in the car on a typical day, several demographic groups stand out: those between ages 30-64, college graduates, and those who use the internet and cell phones. Interestingly, those who are online are more likely to get radio news: 57% of internet users get radio news regularly, compared with 44% of non-users. Similarly, 53% of the cell-only population (those who have dropped their landline and rely exclusively on their cell phone) get radio news on a typical day, compared with 39% of those who rely exclusively on landlines. Radio news is also a major draw for Republicans and conservatives, compared with Democrats, moderates and liberals.

**Print version of local newspaper:** Those who are particularly likely to read news in a printed version of their local paper on a typical day include: whites, those over age 50, and people who do not own cell phones. Paradoxically, non-internet users *and* those

who have premium internet services are more likely than others to read local newspapers. Those who use text messaging and those who use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are less likely to read the print version of local newspapers on a typical day than those who do not use those tech applications.

### **Print version of a national newspaper like the *New York Times* or *USA***

**Today:** The readers of the printed version of national newspapers are decidedly upscale. College graduates, those who live in households earning \$75,000 or more, and internet users (especially those with premium plans) are more likely than others to read national newspapers on a typical day. Democrats are also disproportionately likely to get their news routinely from printed national newspapers.

### **There are some subjects that notable numbers of Americans would like covered more.**

Americans may complain about the mix of news stories they get across the variety of platforms, but a majority still think that topic by topic there is sufficient coverage. There is interesting variance across the topics, though, as significant majorities say there is enough coverage of such subjects as: *sports and athletes; business and finance; music and the arts; international news; technology; U.S. domestic policy* (see table below).

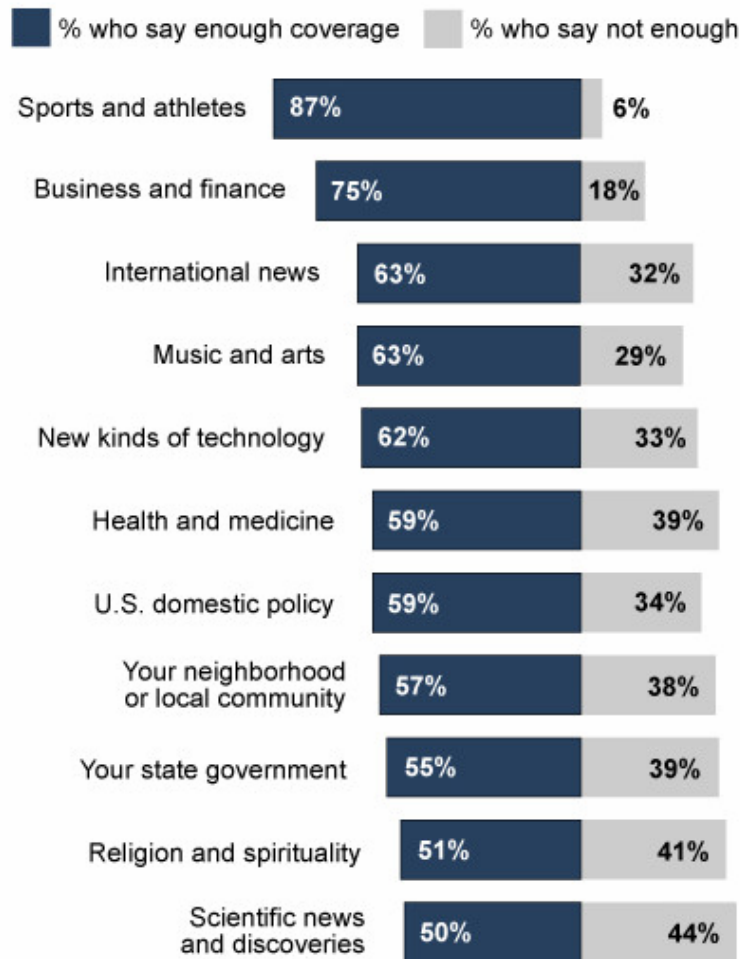
There are five subjects about which noteworthy pluralities of Americans say they would like more coverage. In some of these instances it is interesting to note that younger adults lead the pack in wanting more coverage:

- **Science news and discoveries:** 44% of Americans say there is not enough coverage of science-related news. Younger adults are more likely than senior citizens to express interest in increased coverage. Some 52% of those ages 18-29 would like more coverage of this news, compared with 41% of 50-64 year-olds and 34% of those age 65 and older. Those who use the most news platforms (between four and six on a typical day) are among the most interested in getting more science news: 48% of them say so.
- **Religion and spirituality:** 41% of Americans say there is not enough coverage of religious and spiritual issues. Women (44%) are more likely than men (37%) to seek more coverage of this area; young adults ages 18-29 (49%) are more likely than those over age 50 (35%) to say this; and bloggers (50%) are more likely than non-bloggers (40%) to say this. Race/ethnicity is also a factor, with African-Americans (57%) significantly more likely than both whites (38%) and Hispanics (43%) to say they would like to see more coverage of religion and spirituality.
- **Health and medicine:** 39% of Americans say there is not enough coverage of health and medical news. African-Americans (50%) are more likely than whites (36%) to say there is not enough coverage; non-internet users (43%) are more likely than internet users (37%) to say this.
- **Your state government:** 39% of Americans say there is not enough coverage of news about their state government. There are no significant demographic variations where this topic is concerned.

- Your neighborhood or local community: 38% of Americans say there is not enough coverage of their neighborhood and local affairs. Young adults (41%) are more likely than senior citizens (31%) to believe this; those who get news on the internet (44%) are more likely than others (36%) to express this view.

## The topics that get enough attention—and those that don't

"Is there enough coverage of this topic?"



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

## Political Independents differ somewhat in their news tastes from Democrats and Republicans.

Independents are currently the largest political group in America today, representing 34% of U.S. adults. People who identify as Independents show their distinctiveness in several of these news categories. They are more likely than partisans of either the Democratic or Republican parties to say they want certain topics to get more attention from news organizations. Their distinctive wish list includes more coverage of science, health and medicine, their local communities, U.S. domestic policy, and international news.

### Independents have a different wishlist for news coverage

% who say they would appreciate more coverage of these subjects

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Scientific news	42	44	49*
Health and medicine	30	38*	45*
My neighborhood	36	35	42
U.S. domestic policy	31	33	38*
International news	27	33	35

\* indicates a significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.



### Part 3: How people use the news and feel about the news

News meets a mixture of social, civic, personally-enriching, and work-related needs in people’s lives. The 93% of Americans who say they follow the news at least occasionally report a variety of reasons for doing so. Surprisingly, the most popular reasons for following the news do not relate to personal entertainment or professional motivations. Instead, they have to do with social interaction and/or a sense of civic responsibility:

- 72% of the news-consumer cohort said one reason they consume news is because they enjoyed talking about it with family, friends and colleagues
- 69% of this group say they feel they have a social or civic obligation to stay informed
- 61% say they often find information in the news that helps them improve their lives
- 44% say news provides a relaxing diversion or personal entertainment
- 19% say they need to follow the news for their jobs

There were not many differences among demographic groups in terms of the functions the news plays in their lives. Women in this news-consumer cohort are more likely than men to say they get information from the news that improved their lives. College graduates are more likely than those who have no college experience to cite all the uses as important to them. And some differences are tied to race and ethnicity:


### Reasons people use the news

93% of adults follow the news at least occasionally. In each group, the % who cite these reasons for getting news:

	All news-following adults	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
Enjoy talking with friends, family, about what's happening in the world	72%	71%	79%*	74%
Feel special social or civic obligation to stay informed	69%	71%*	70%*	55%
Find information in news that helps improve my life	61%	59%	69%*	65%
Provides me with entertainment, relaxing diversion	44%	43%	50%	44%
Need to follow news for my job	19%	19%	19%	16%

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

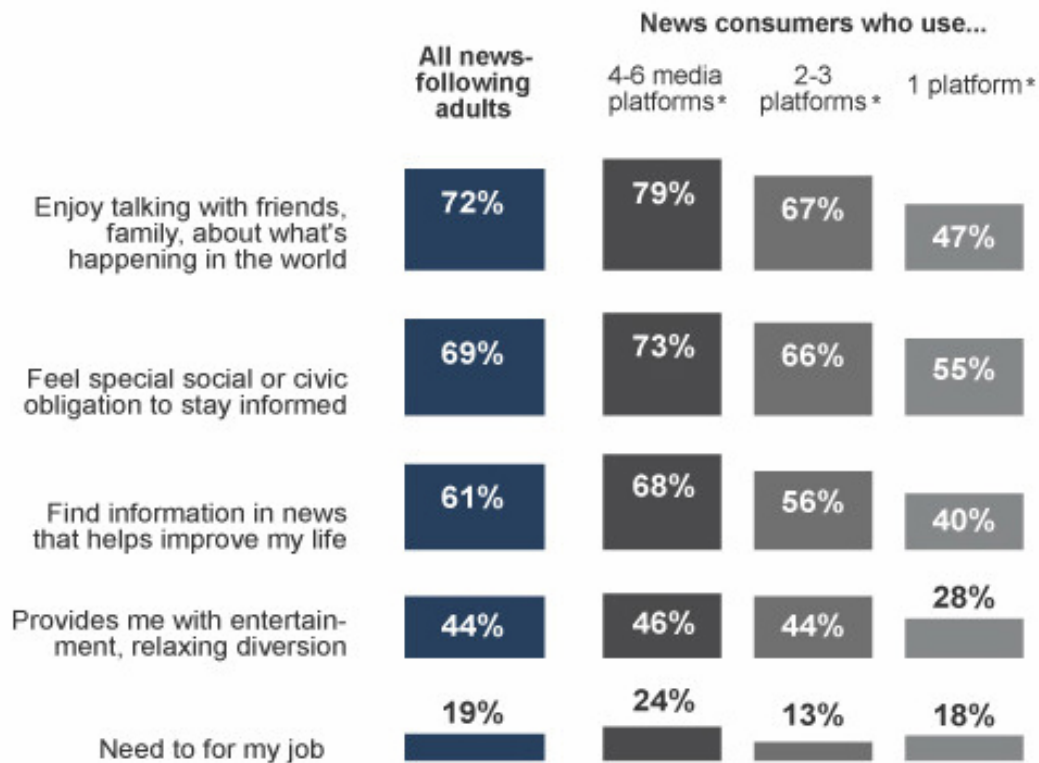
Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,120. Margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points.



Those who read the print version of national newspapers are significantly more likely than many other platform users to say they talk to friends about the news, that they find news information that helps improve their life and that national newspapers are important for their jobs.

## News junkies have many uses for the news

Those who use the most platforms on a typical day like news more



\* Platform options were: Local print newspaper, national print newspaper, local TV news, national TV news, radio, internet.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,120. Margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points.





**Americans have a love-hate relationship with the new information environment and news organizations' performances.**

We asked respondents to react to several statements about the performances of news organizations and the general information environment, and found several paradoxes.

There is a significant amount of cultural concern expressed in media coverage, scholarly commentary, advertising and marketing professionals who lament message “clutter.” There is also concern among mental health professionals who fret that information overload is a rising problem for Americans. We asked survey respondents a question about how the volume of news might play into this: “Compared with five years ago, do you think it is easier or harder to keep up with news and information today, or is there no real difference compared to five years ago?” Some 55% say it is easier, only 18% say it is harder. One quarter (25%) feel there is no difference between now and five years ago.

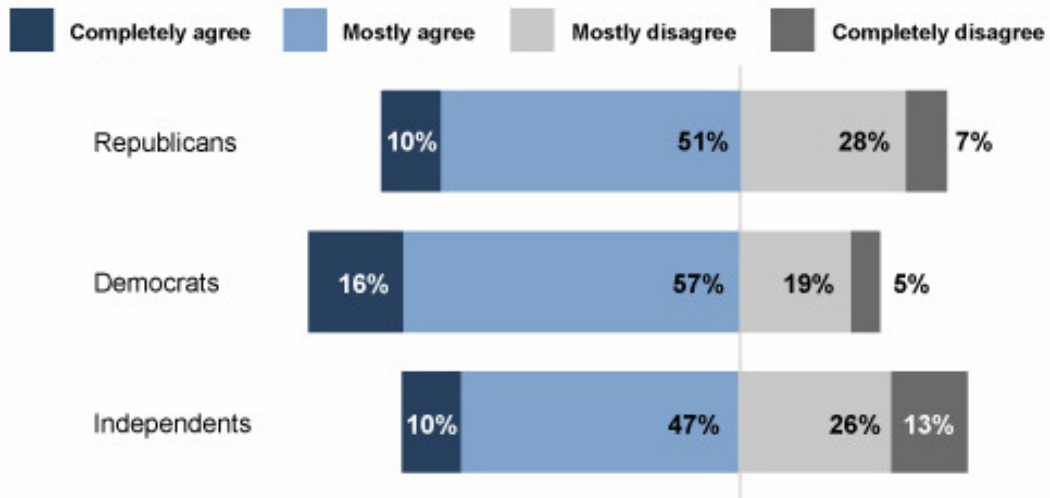
Women are slightly more likely than men to believe it is easier than in the past – 58% vs. 52%. Those with higher educational attainment and those who live in higher-income households are also more likely than others to express the upbeat view. And those who use a lot of different media platforms are similarly positive: 63% of those who use 4-6 different media platforms on a typical day say it is easier to get news nowadays, in contrast to just 38% of those who use just one media platform on a typical day who feel that way. Finally, tech users of all kinds are more likely than those without tech to say it is easier to keep up today: Internet users (especially those with premium high-speed plans), those with wireless connections, those with cell phones, and those who use social network sites are more likely than others to think it is easier now to follow the news.

Yet even as they say it is easier to keep up with current events, Americans still feel overwhelmed. Some 70% agree with the statement: “The amount of news and information available from different sources today is overwhelming.” One quarter (25%) “completely agree” and another 45% “mostly agree.” Among those most likely to say things are overwhelming are people who use the most media platforms: 73% of those who use 4-6 platforms daily agree it is an overwhelming environment, compared with 55% of those who only use one platform who say they feel that way.

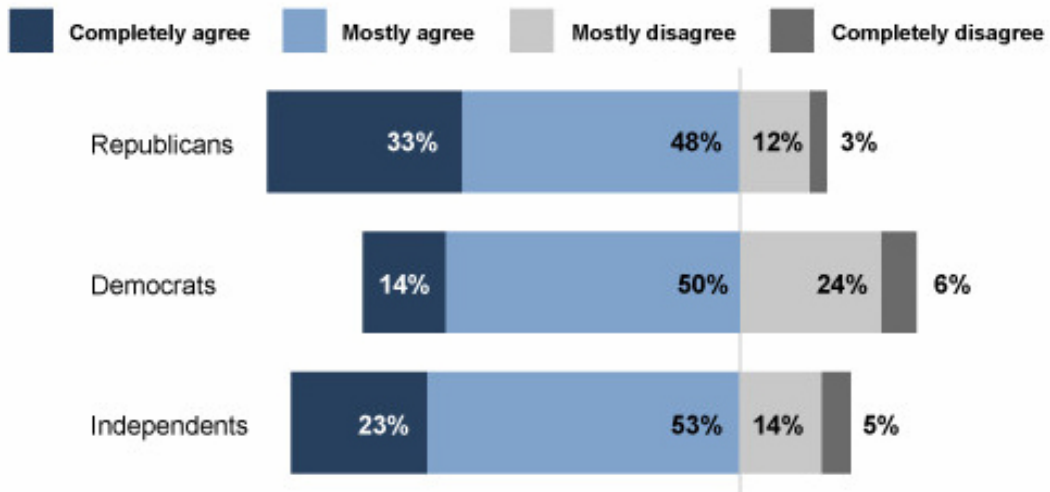
When it comes to the quality of coverage itself, respondents give correspondingly mixed signals. Just under two-thirds (63%) agree with statement that “Major news organizations do a good job covering all of the important news stories and subjects that matter to me.” Yet 72% also back the idea that, “Most news sources today are biased in their coverage.” Some of the explanation for this dichotomy seems to be rooted in the views of partisans. Liberals and Democrats are more likely to say the big news organizations do a good job on subjects that matter to them, while conservatives and Republicans are the group most likely to see coverage as biased.

## Democrats, Republicans, and Independents view journalists' performances differently

**Major news organizations do a good job covering all the important news subjects that matter to me**



**Most news sources today are biased in their coverage**



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

**People have different approaches to news: Some like it straight, some like it with a point of view.**

Americans do not approach the news with a unified set of expectations and norms. Only half say their preference is for objective, straight news: 49% say they prefer getting news from sources that do not have a particular point of view; 31% prefer sources that share their point of view; and 11% say they prefer sources whose point of view differs with theirs. The rest say they don't know their preference or don't want to declare it.

The people who are more likely than others to prefer sources with *no point of view* include: internet users who get news online, whites, and those with higher levels of educational attainment. Those without strong partisan ties (i.e. Independents) or ideological connections (i.e. moderates) are also more likely than partisans to want their news straight.

Those who are disproportionately likely to seek out news sources that *match their own views* include Republicans and conservatives. Democrats, in contrast, are more likely than other groups to seek out news that either supports their own views or differs from their own views (as opposed to seeking out news coverage that has no particular point of view).

There is no notable technological element to the preference for news that matches one's own views – heavy tech users, light tech users and non-tech users are relatively close in their preferences. Broadband and wireless news seekers are no more or less likely than others to want to find news sources that share their viewpoint.

This cohort that prefers news from compatible sources is an interesting group of news consumers for several other reasons. For instance, they are significantly more likely than others to say that consuming news is entertaining and relaxing to them. They are more likely to say they would like more coverage of religious and spiritual news. And they are more likely to say most news sources are biased.

**People's approaches to the news are driven by specific story subjects and a hope for learning by serendipity. Social networks act as alert systems for the most engaged news consumers.**

When asked a series of questions about their personal posture towards the news, people express a variety of approaches. Majorities of American adults identify at least somewhat with each of the three postures we asked about: whether they like to come across news they have not thought about much before; whether they only follow news about specific topics; and whether they rely on people around them to keep them informed.

## Personal approaches to the news

% who say how well each statement describes them

	Describes me very well	Describes me somewhat	Doesn't describe me at all
I like coming across news about topics and issues that I have not thought about very much before.	34	48	17
I only follow news about specific topics that really interest me.	28	39	31
I rely on the people around me to tell me when there is news or information I should know about.	15	35	49

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.



Who are the 34% of respondents who most appreciate serendipitous encounters with news items? They are disproportionately composed of those who are avid news followers, those who use several news media platforms on a typical day (especially the internet), and those with college degrees and higher levels of household income.

How about the 28% who most identify with only following specific news topics? This group is skewed towards those who prefer news sources that share their point of view, men, minorities, and those under age 30. Interestingly, there are no significant differences in the answers to this question that align by ideological viewpoint or party identification.

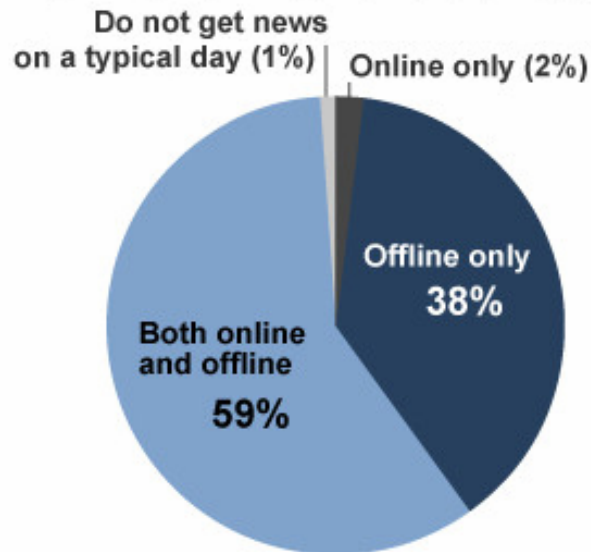
Some 15% say that relying on their social networks for tips and alerts to stories they need to know describes them very well. This group is especially weighted towards the young. Some 22% of members of the Millennials cohort (those ages 18-32) say they rely on their networks. Only 11% of Baby Boomers (ages 46-64) say they rely on their networks this way. Those who use social networking sites such as Facebook are also more likely to rely on their tribe for news tips, 17% vs. 10% of those who are not social networking site users. And those who are less personally engaged with news gathering are more reliant on their networks to stay vicariously informed: 27% of those who “hardly ever” or “never” follow the news say they rely on their networks for tips, compared with 12% of those who follow the news “all or most of the time.”

## **Part 4: News and the internet**

Six in ten American adults (61%) get news online on a typical day, placing it third among the six major news platforms asked about in the survey, behind local television news and national or cable television news. While the internet is growing as a news platform, it has not displaced completely offline news sources for most American adults: A majority of Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online and offline sources on a typical day. Just over a third (38%) rely solely on offline sources, while just 2% rely exclusively on the internet for their daily news.

### **Daily news consumption: Where Americans get their news on a typical day**

A majority of Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online and offline sources on a typical day.



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

Asked more generally if they ever get news online, and if they ever get news online about 12 specific topics (such as weather, sports, national news, and business or finance), 71% of American adults say they get news online at least occasionally.<sup>3</sup> This equates to 94% of all internet users.

### **Who gets their news online?**

Online news users skew younger than the general adult population. About two-thirds of online news users (68%) are under age 50, including 29% who are under age 30. Given their younger age profile, it is not surprising that this group is also more likely than other Americans to have never been married (24% v. 9%) and/or to have young children (36% v. 17%). Online news users tend to be employed full-time (50%), two-thirds (67%) have at least some college education (including 22% with a bachelor's degree and 15% with advanced degrees), and their annual household income trends higher than American adults in general. Racially, this group skews toward Hispanics and whites; while 50% of non-Hispanic African-Americans get their news entirely offline, the same is true of just 38% of non-Hispanic whites and 32% of Hispanics.

Because they represent such a large segment of internet users, the demographic profile of online news users mirrors that of the online population as a whole, and it reflects the same characteristics that drive both broadband and wireless use. Yet even among internet users, those who get news online stand out in terms of their high income and education levels, their young age, their racial/ethnic identity, and their use of broadband and wireless (see table below).

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this section and the report, “online news users” are defined as the 71% of Americans who answered “yes” when asked if they ever get news online, or who said they ever get news online about at least one of 12 specific topics asked about in the survey.

## Who are online news users?

How online news users compare to other internet users and other adults

	Online news users	Other internet users	Total other adults
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	29% *	16%	9%
30-49	39 *	29	24
50+	31	53 *	66 *
Median Age	40	50	58 *
<b>Education</b>			
Less than a HS degree	6%	10%	24%*
High School Grad	58	80 *	65
College Grad+	36 *	11	10
<b>Income</b>			
Less than \$30,000	24%	26%	46%*
\$30,000-\$49,999	19	26 *	16
\$50,000-\$74,999	15	13	7
\$75,000+	29 *	16	7
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White, non-Hispanic	71% *	72%	66%
Black, non-Hispanic	9	19 *	18 *
Hispanic	12 *	6	11
<b>Home internet connection</b>			
Broadband	84% *	48%	2%
Premium broadband	34 *	11	1
Dial-up	6	11	2
Wireless internet user	69	42	15

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

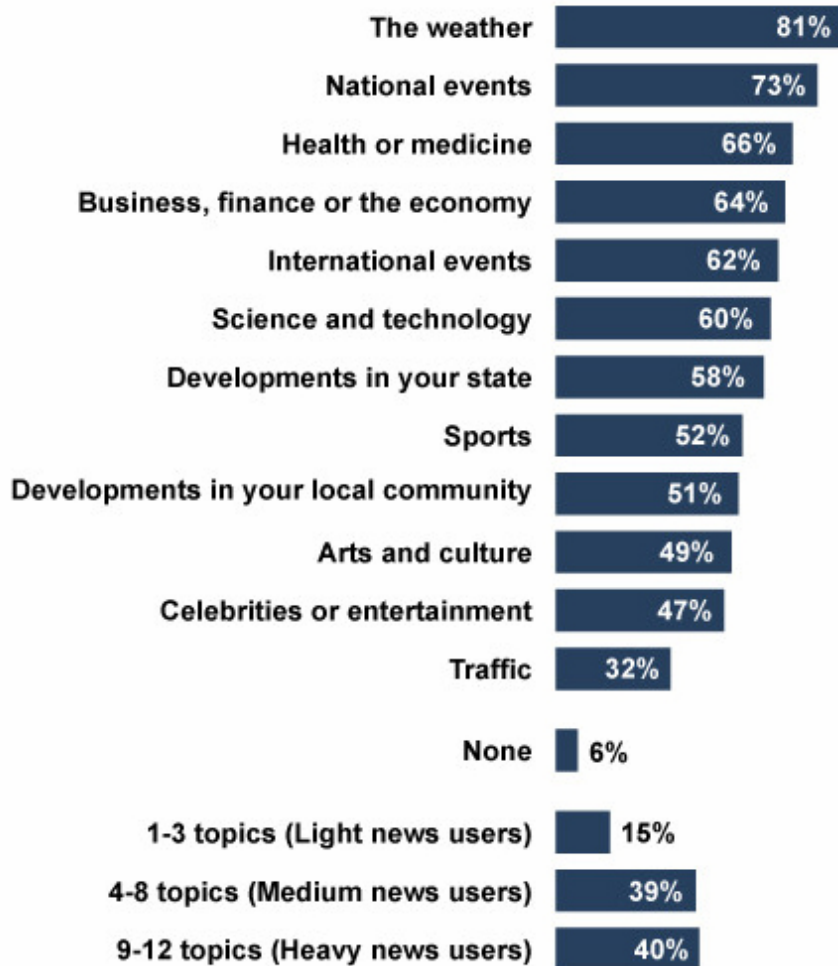
Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

## Americans explore a wide variety of news topics online.

Internet users were asked how many, if any, of 12 specific news topics they explore online. Of those 12 news topics, the most popular are weather and national events.

### Americans explore a wide variety of news topics online

The percentage of internet users who get news and information online about each topic



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,675. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



Overall, Americans explore a wide variety of news topics online. Four in ten internet users (40%) say they get news and information online about at least 9 of these 12 topics. In this report we sometimes call them “heavy online news users.” Another 39% explore 4 to 8 of these topics online. We call this group “medium online news users.” Some 15% get news on between 1 and 3 of these topics. We call them “light online news users.” Just 6% of online adults do not use the internet to gather information about any of these topics.

Among internet users who get news online, certain subgroups explore a greater variety of topics than others. Those most likely to be among the *heavy online news user* cohort are:

- 30-49 year-olds when compared with both younger and older online news users
- Individuals living in households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or more, when compared with those earning less
- College graduates, when compared with individuals with lower educational attainment
- Democrats, when compared with Republicans and Independents
- Broadband users, wireless internet users, and those who go online daily
- Individuals who use a greater number of news platforms, as well as those who use a greater number of online sources, on a typical day
- Individuals who get news on their cell phones (discussed in detail in Part 5 of this report)

**Most individuals use just a handful of online news sources and do not have a favorite.**

While internet users who get news online tend to explore a wide variety of news topics, they are fairly modest in the number of internet sites they use to gather that information. One in five online news users (21%) say they routinely rely on just one website for their news and information, and another 57% rely on between two and five websites. Surprisingly, asked whether they have a favorite online news source, the majority of online news users (65%) say they do not. Among those who do, the most popular sites are those of major news organizations such as such as CNN and Fox.

To get a sense of their daily online news consumption, we asked online news consumers if, on a typical day, they used a number of different online sources, ranging from the websites of major newspapers and TV news organizations to posts from journalists and news organizations on sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Portal websites like GoogleNews, AOL and Topix are the most commonly used online news sources, visited by over half of online news users on a typical day. Also faring well are the sites of traditional news organizations with an offline presence, such as CNN, BBC and local or national newspapers. Twitter updates, either from either journalists and news organizations or from other individuals and organizations (including friends and family), were the least commonly used news sources of those asked about. The vast majority of online news users (84%) use five or fewer of the 14 news sources asked about

on a typical day, including 14% who do not use any and another 34% who use just one or two.

## What online sources do people use?

% of each group of online news users who use each source on a typical day

	All online news users 18+	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50+
A portal website like GoogleNews, AOL or Topix that gathers news from many different sources	56%	68%*	57%*	45%
A website of a TV news organization such as CNN, Fox or CBS	46	50*	47	40
A website that specializes in a particular topic like health, politics, or entertainment	38	40	38	35
A website of a national or local newspaper	38	36	42	36
An individual or organization, other than a journalist or news organization, that you follow on a social networking site like Facebook	30	44*	31*	17
A website of an international news organization such as the BBC or The Guardian, or a foreign language news site	18	19	20*	15
A website that offers a mix of news and commentary, such as the Drudge Report or Huffington Post	17	12	20*	17
The website of a radio news organization such as NPR	15	14	16	14
A news podcast from an organization such as NPR or the New York Times	14	15	14	12
A news organization or an individual journalist you follow on a social networking site like Facebook	13	22*	14*	4
The website of an individual blogger (who does not work for a major news organization)	11	13*	13*	8
A news website such as Digg or NewsTrust where users rank stories	7	7	7	5
Twitter updates from an individual or organization other than a journalist or news organization	6	8*	6*	2
Twitter updates from a journalist or news organization	4	6*	4*	1
Use none of these on a typical day	14	7	11*	23*
Use 1-2 of these on a typical day	34	30	35*	35*
Use 3-5 of these on a typical day	36	44*	35	31
Use six or more on a typical day	16	19*	18*	11

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,582. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



While overall, most individuals who get news online use just a handful of internet sources on a typical day, younger online news users tend to frequent more sites on a daily basis. The youngest online news users, those under age 30, are particularly likely to use portal news sites and to get news from journalists, news organizations, and others on Facebook. Online news users age 30-49 are more likely than both older and younger news users to make a daily visit to the website of a local or national newspaper or a website that offers a mix of news and commentary.

In addition to these distinct preferences for certain online news sources across different age groups, it is not surprising that affinities for online news sources also reflect a user's political party and ideology. In general, Democrats and those who describe themselves as liberal are most likely to get news on a typical day from:

- A news organization or individual journalist they follow on a social networking site such as Facebook
- The Twitter posts of individuals who are not journalists, or organizations other than the major news organizations
- The websites of international news organizations
- The websites of radio news organizations such as NPR
- News podcasts from organizations such as NPR or the New York Times

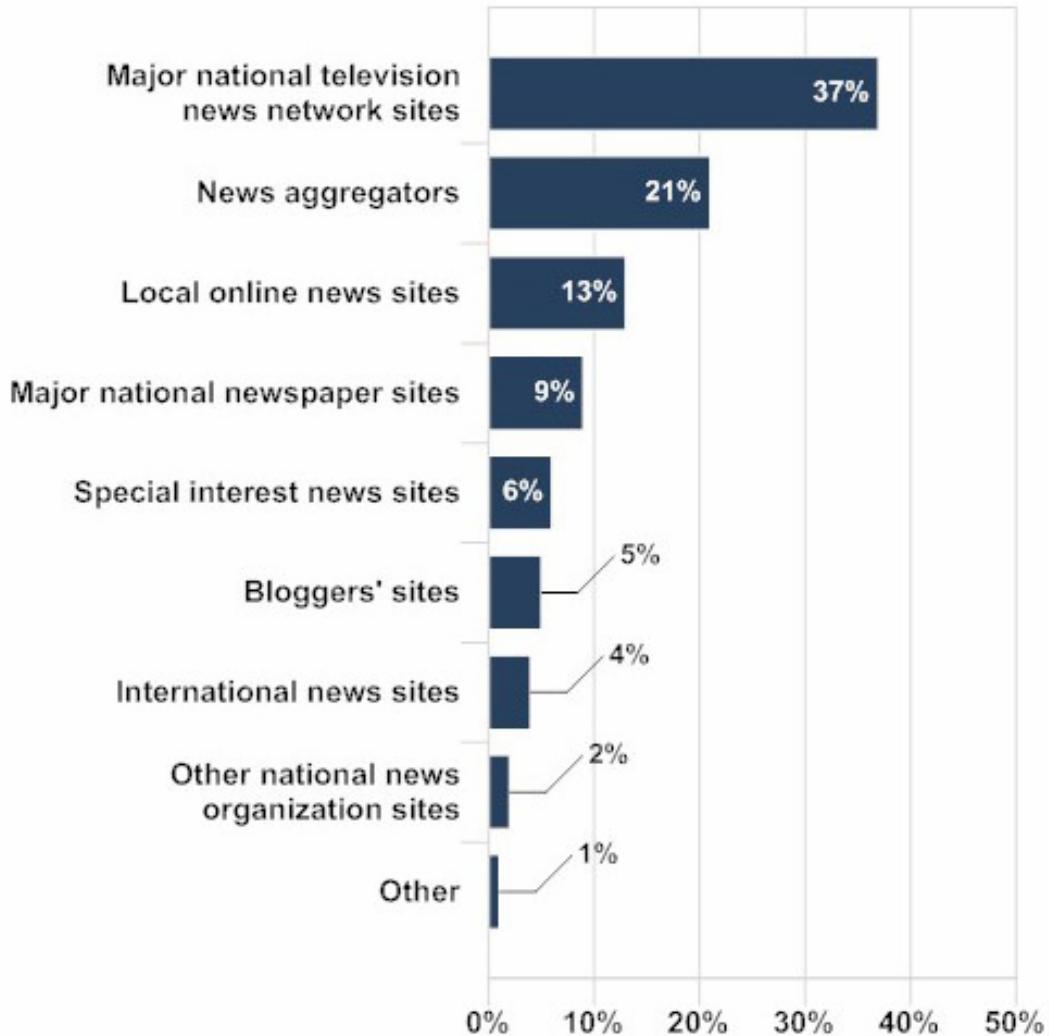
In contrast, Republicans and those who describe themselves as conservative are more likely to make a daily visit to the website of a major TV news organization, and are also more likely than other online news users to utilize just 1-2 internet news sources on a typical day.

Overall, a surprisingly small segment of online news users (35%) say they have a favorite internet news site. Men are slightly more likely than women (39% v. 30%) to have a favored site online, as are college grads when compared to other online news users (44% v. 29%) and those with incomes of at least \$50,000 annually when compared with those earning less (39% v. 30%). The most active online news consumers—individuals who explore the greatest variety of topics online and those who use the greatest number of online sources on a typical day—are also more likely than other online news consumers to have a favorite site.

Among those who have a favorite site, the most popular sites are those of major national television news organizations such as CNN and Fox, favored by more than a third of online news consumers who named a favorite site. Also popular are news aggregators such as Yahoo and MSN, indicating that many online news consumers like to get news about a variety of topics in one place. Still, among those who named a favorite online news source, 13% cited a local site, such as a local television station's site, a local newspaper's site, or a website or blog specifically developed to provide local news.

## The most popular types of news sites among those with a favorite

% who cited each type of site as their favorite



Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=548. Margin of error is +/- 5 percentage points.

**“Serendipitous News Discovery” and “Hunting and Gathering” top “News Reception” as methods for getting news online.**

One major concern about the internet is that people would use new technology to retreat into their narrow interests and that accidental news consumption—discovering things you didn’t know would interest you—would erode. This serendipitous news discovery, according to some scholars, is essential to forming public opinion and creating informed consensus and stable cohesion around public policy that makes governing possible. So, the prospect that technology might reduce the likelihood of that happening is a major civic concern.

To get a sense of the different approaches employed by online news users, and how active or passive online news consumption is, we asked how often online news users:

- Go online specifically to get news?
- Come across news while they are online doing other things?
- Get news forwarded to them through email, automatic alerts and updates, or posts on social networking sites

The answers to these questions reveal that it is most common for online news users to chance upon news while they are online doing other things—what could be called “serendipitous” news consumption. Eight in ten online news users (80%) say this happens at least a few times a week, including 59% who say this happens everyday or almost everyday. Only slightly less common, however, is the hunting and gathering approach to online news consumption. About seven in ten online news users (71%) say they go online specifically to get news at least a few times a week, including almost half (48%) who say they do this everyday or almost everyday.

Meanwhile, a smaller segment of online news users say that news finds them—44% get news forwarded to them through email, automatic updates and alerts, or posts on social networking sites at least a few times a week, which includes 28% who receive news everyday or almost everyday. One quarter of online news users (25%) say they never have news forwarded to them.

Demographic groups who tend to be daily internet users—including younger adults, the more educated, those with higher incomes, and broadband and wireless users—report more frequent chance encounters with news as well as more frequent hunting and gathering experiences. The youngest adults (those under age 30) and cell phone users are most likely to have news forwarded to them. Getting “news on the go” via one’s cell phone, and the significance of receiving news alerts on one’s phone, is discussed in detail in Part 5 of this report.

## **Part 5: News on the go – wireless access**

Mobile tech devices, such as laptops, cell phones, smartphones and other handheld devices, are dramatically changing the way Americans access information in their lives.<sup>4</sup> Currently, 53% of adults access the internet wirelessly either through a laptop or a cell phone, BlackBerry or other handheld device. Pew Internet studies have shown that wireless internet users are different from other online adults in important ways: they are 36% more likely than wired internet users to access the internet on a given day, and they engage in virtually all online activities (including email, social networking, and blogging) at higher rates than other internet users.

To understand the impact of wireless mobility on news consumption, the current survey asked owners of cell phones, BlackBerries and other handheld devices about different ways they might get news on the go. Overall, 26% of American adults say they get some form of news via cell phone – that amounts to 33% of adult cell phone owners and 88% of adults who have mobile internet. To arrive at that figure we asked the 80% of American adults who own cell phones if they access the internet or email by phone; some 37% say they do. Among this subgroup of internet-using mobile phone users, we found that the vast majority get some kind of news online:

- 72% check weather reports on their cell
- 68% get news and current events information on their cell
- 49% have downloaded an application that allows them to access news, weather, sports, or other information on their cell
- 44% check sports scores and related information on their cell
- 35% check traffic information on their cell
- 32% get financial information or updates
- 31% get news alerts sent by text or email to their phones
- 88% say yes to at least one of the above

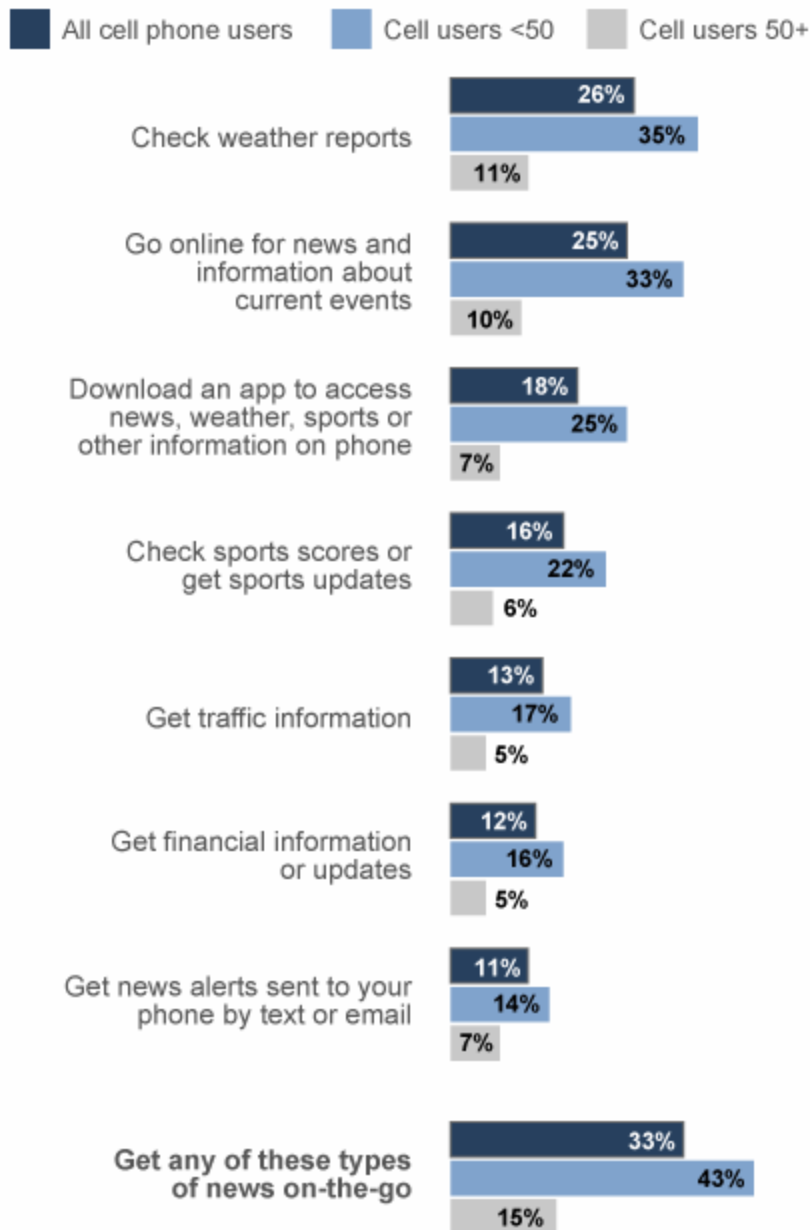
Overall, cell users under age 50 are almost three times as likely as their older counterparts to get news on the go (43% v. 15%), and they engage in all cell-based news consumption activities at higher rates than older cell phone users.

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<sup>4</sup> Horrigan, John. (2009) “Wireless Internet Users,” Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, Washington, DC. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/12-Wireless-Internet-Use.aspx>.

## News on the go with handheld devices

Younger cell users are more likely to use their mobile gadgets to get news and information\*



\*Platform options were: Local newspaper, national newspaper, local TV news, national TV news, radio, internet. Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1891. Margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points.

**On-the-go news consumers: Who are they?**

The typical on-the-go news consumer is a white male, age 34, who has graduated from college and is employed full-time. Given their younger profile, it is not surprising that 40% of this group are parents of young children (compared with 30% of the general adult population), and 32% have never been married. One in three (32%) live in households with incomes of \$75,000 or more. As a subset of the broader mobile internet population, on-the-go news consumers reflect many of their characteristics (see table below).

Not surprisingly, on-the-go news consumers maximize their cell phone use. They are 67% more likely than other cell phone users to text message, more than twice as likely to take pictures with their phones, and four times as likely to use their phones to instant message. They are also especially heavy internet users—80% of this on-the-go group are online on a given day, compared with just 67% of other internet users—and they engage in activities such as blogging (20% v. 11%), using social networking sites (73% v. 48%), and using status update sites like Twitter (29% v. 14%) at significantly higher rates than other internet users.



## Wireless and news on-the-go populations

How do they compare to the general adult population?

	% all adults	% wireless internet users	% on-the-go news consumers
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	23%	32%	38%
30-49	35	42	45
50+	41	25	16
<b>Median Age</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	49%	52%	57%
Female	51	48	43
<b>Employment</b>			
Full-time	42%	52%	59%
Part-time	12	14	12
Retired	19	7	2
Other	27	27	27
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	50%	50%	44%
Never Married	20	28	32
Other	30	22	24
<b>Parent</b>			
Have children	30%	38%	40%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>			
Less than a HS degree	12%	7%	5%
High School Grad	60	56	59
College Grad	28	38	37
<b>Household Annual Income</b>			
Less than \$30,000	30%	22%	22%
\$30,000-\$49,999	17	17	18
\$50,000-\$74,999	12	15	17
\$75,000+	22	32	32

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

**On-the-go news consumers are voracious.**

The news consumption of this on-the-go group, in addition to being mobile, is voracious. While they are no more likely than other adults to say they follow the news “all or most of the time,” they utilize a greater number of news platforms. More than half of on-the-go news consumers (55%) use at least 4 different news platforms on a typical day. They are 50% more likely than other adults to read the print version of a national newspaper (23% of on-the-go v. 15% all other adults). The only news platform they are *less* likely than other adults to use on a typical day is their local television news, and this difference is only slight.

Moreover, the majority of on-the-go news consumers (62%) get news from at least three different online news sources on a typical day, including one quarter (25%) who use at least six different online sources in a typical day. These mobile newsies use each of the 13 different types of online news sources asked about at higher rates than other online news consumers. Asked how many websites they routinely rely on for news and information, 60% say they use 2-5 and another 16% say they use 6 or more.

In addition to using multiple news platforms, on-the-go news consumers are interested in a wide variety of news topics. With the exception of health and medicine, they are more likely than other online adults to use the internet to get news or information about every one of the twelve topics asked about in the survey. Half of on-the-go news consumers (49%) use the internet to get information about at least nine of those twelve topics, compared with 35% of other internet users.

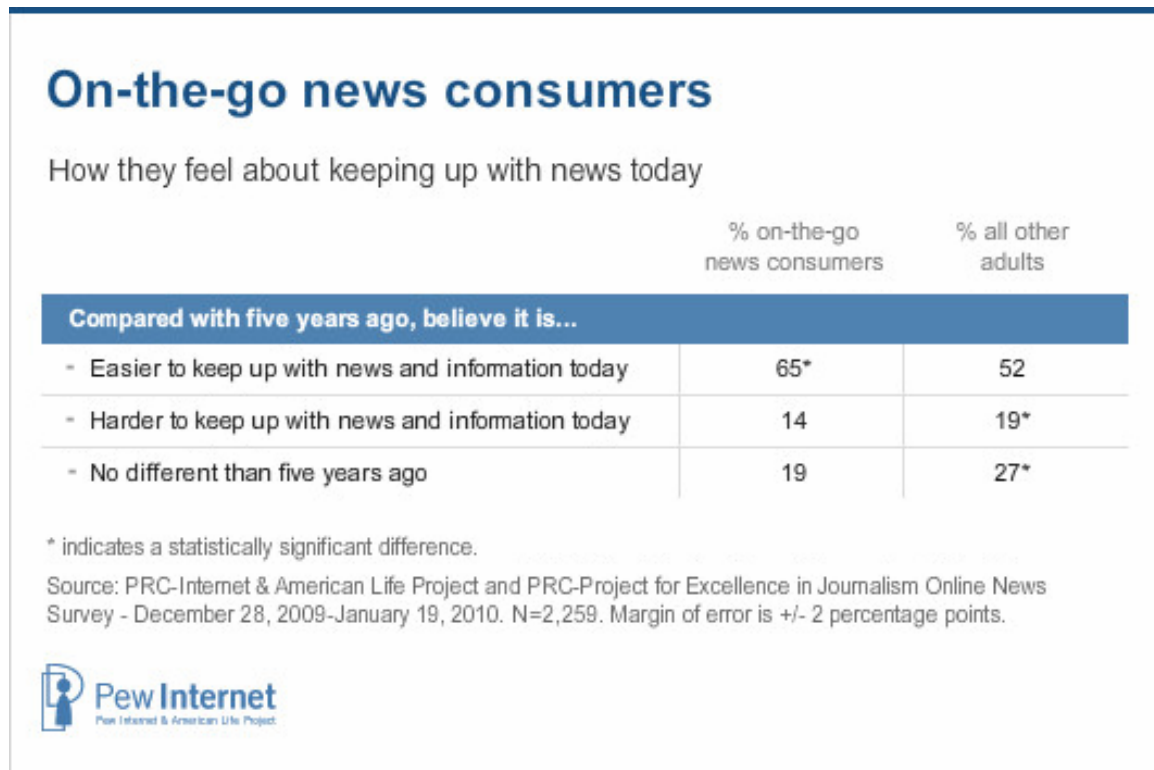
## On-the-go news consumers

This group is characterized by heavy internet use and heavy news consumption

	% on-the-go news consumers (n=490)	% online news consumers (n=1582)	% all internet users (n=1675)	% all adults (n=2259)
Go online on a given day	80%	75%	72%	54%
Use email	93	93	92	69
Use social networking sites	73	59	57	43
Use status update sites like Twitter	29	20	19	14
Blog	20	15	14	11
Use 4-6 news platforms on a typical day	55	54	52	46
Read the print version of a national daily newspaper	23	19	18	17
Use 3 or more online news sources on a typical day	62	52	49	37
Routinely use 6 or more websites for news or information	16	11	11	8
Get news online about at least 9 different topics	49	42	40	30
Go online specifically to get news everyday or almost everyday	60	48	46	34
Come across news when they are online doing other things everyday or almost everyday	66	59	56	42
Get news forwarded to them everyday or almost everyday	36	28	27	20

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=2,259. Margin of error is +/- 2 percentage points.

On-the-go news consumers who follow the news at least now and then tend to put the information they find online to practical use. In this sense, they are the most instrumental news consumers, twice as likely as other regular news consumers to say they need to follow the news for their jobs (30% v. 15%). They are also slightly more likely than others to say that they find information in the news that improves their lives (66% v. 59%) and that they enjoy talking about the news with their friends and family (77% v. 70%).

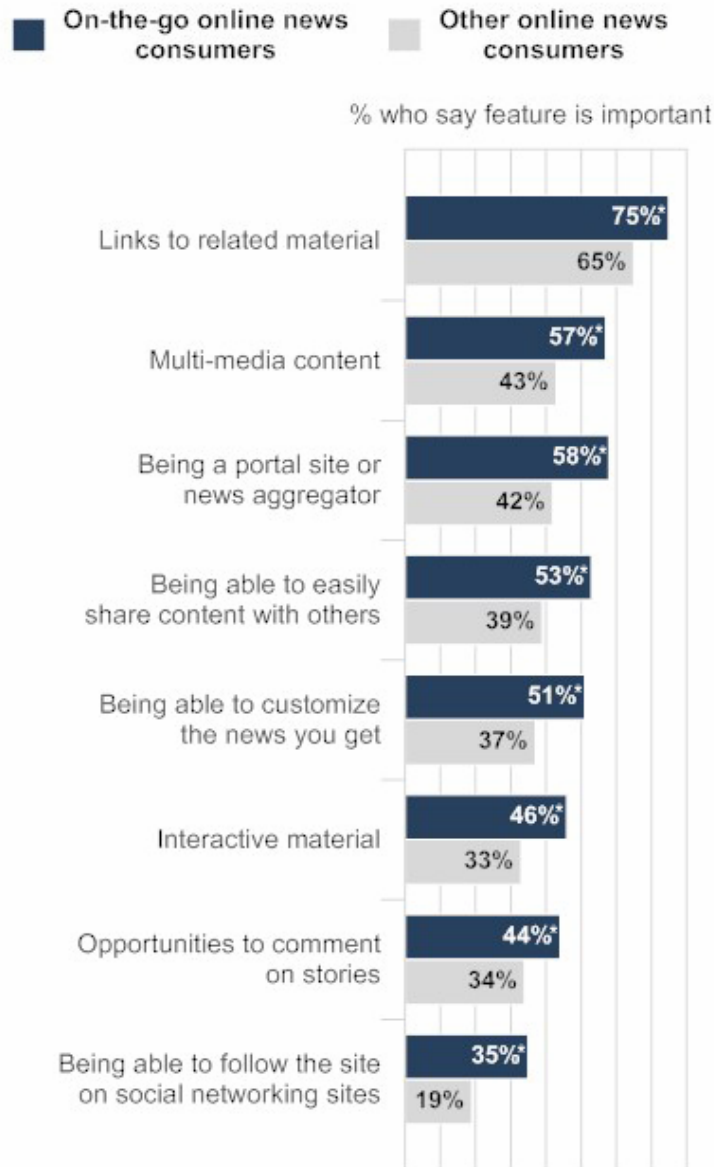


It is no surprise that two out of three mobile news consumers (65%) say that it is easier to keep up with news and information today than it was five years ago. Only 14% of this group believes it is harder to keep up with news today. On-the-go news consumers are slightly more likely than other adults, however, to see bias in most news sources today (78% v. 69%) and to say the statement “I only follow news about specific topics that interest me” describes them very well (34% v. 26%).

On-the-go news consumers are excited about the advanced features of today’s online news sites, and are consistently more likely than other online news consumers to say features such as interactive material, links to related information, being able to comment on stories, and being able to easily share content are important to them. They are particularly more likely to value portal news sites and being able to easily share content as the most important features they look for in a news site.

## Features that appeal to on-the-go news consumers

On-the-go news consumers are more likely to weigh advanced features in their decisions about which sites to use



\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1582. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

In addition to seeking out advanced features in their news sites, on-the-go consumers are also especially likely to contribute material or actively share it with others. Almost half of on-the-go news consumers (46%) are what we term “news participators”—a group that is examined more fully in Part 6 of this report. News participators engage in one of the following activities:

- Tagging or categorizing online news content
- Contributing their own article, opinion piece, picture or video to an online news site
- Commenting on a news story or blog they read online
- Posting a link to a news story or blog on a social networking site
- Using Twitter to post or re-tweet a news story or blog

By comparison, 31% of all other internet users (those who are not on-the-go mobile news consumers) are news participators.

**A third of the on-the-go news user group is constantly “on alert” for updates and headlines.**

Within this active group of on-the-go news consumers is a super-intense group of newsies—those who not only use their phones to get news, but also have news alerts and updates sent to their phones. They make up 35% of the on-the-go news consumer population, and represent 13% of all online news consumers and 12% of all internet users.

Among this group of newsies, seven in ten (70%) say they follow the news all or most of the time (compared with 56% of all adults), 71% go online to get news daily or almost daily, and 56% say they get news forwarded to them everyday or almost everyday. Half of those (50%) say they read most or all of what is forwarded to them.

Compared with other on-the-go news consumers, this on-alert group is even more likely to:

- Read the print version of a local newspaper (55% v. 43% of other on-the-go news consumers)
- Watch a national television news broadcast (80% v. 67%)
- Listen to a radio news program (63% v. 52%)
- Enjoy talking with friends and family about what’s going on in the world (83% v. 66%)
- Feel they have a social or civic obligation to stay informed (80% v. 61%)
- Find information in the news that improves their lives (79% v. 53%)
- Agree with the statement “the amount of news and information available today is overwhelming” (76% v. 64%)
- Agree with the statement “Major news organizations today do a good job covering all of the important news stories and subjects that matter to me” (77% v. 58%)
- Say they do not rely on other people to keep them informed (59% v. 45%)

- Enjoy coming across news and topics they have not thought about before (42% v. 33%).
- Go online specifically to get news daily or almost daily (71% v. 53%)

And once online, this group of on-alert news consumers is more likely than other mobile news consumers to:

- Use the internet to get news about business or finance (77% v. 67%)
- Visit the website of a national or local newspaper (55% v. 37%), TV news organization (68% v. 44%), radio news organization (28% v. 13%), or international news organization (30% v. 18%)
- Visit a website that specializes in a particular topic like health, politics or entertainment (54% v. 38%)
- Get a news podcast (26% v. 15%)
- Visit a website that offers a mix of news and commentary, such as the Drudge Report or Huffington Post (29% v. 17%)
- Follow a news organization or individual journalist on a social networking site (27% v. 13%)
- Routinely rely on six or more websites for news (23% v. 13%)
- Have a favorite news source online (44% v. 32%).
- Visit their favorite online news source several times a day (23% v. 10%).
- Say that being able to follow a news site on a social networking site is important to them (43% v. 28%)
- Say that being able to easily share news content is important to them (61% v. 45%)
- Often click on links to related material (36% v. 25%)
- Watch an online feed of live or breaking events (89% v. 61%) or a video of a news story that happened in the past (85% v. 70%)
- Participate in online news creation (57% v. 40%)

## **Part 6: News gets personal, social, and participatory**

Americans' relationship to the news is being transformed in several directions thanks to the new tools and affordances of technology. Encounters with news are becoming more personal as users customize their experience and take charge of the flow of news into their lives. News is becoming a shared social experience as people exchange links and recommendations as a form of cultural currency in their social networks. And news is becoming a participatory activity, as people contribute their own stories and experiences and post their reactions to events. This chapter explores these changes in more detail.

### **Getting the news is a social activity for many users.**

Recall that earlier in this report we noted the evidence in this survey that people's connection to the news is a social activity equally as much as it is a learning activity and productivity enhancer. Some 72% of Americans who follow the news at least now and then say they enjoy talking with friends, family, and colleagues about what is happening in the world and 69% feel that keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation. Moreover, in the age of technological social networking, some now say they rely on the people around them to tell them when there is news they need to know. Half of Americans (50%) say that describes them very well or somewhat well.

How does this play out online? The act of sharing of news and conversation about news is an integral part of email exchanges and social media activity. Of the 71% of the adult population who get news online, 75% of them say they get news forwarded to them through email or posts on social networking sites. That amounts to 71% of all internet users. When news is passed along to them, 38% of this cohort read the material all or most of the time; 37% read it some of the time, and 23% say they hardly have time to read it.

Of these internet users who get news online, 50% say they pass along email links to news stories or videos to others. (That represents 48% of all internet users.) Those who follow the news avidly, who are on-the-go consumers, who use social networking sites or Twitter or have a blog are much more likely than others to send along links to news in their emails than other internet users are.

Beyond the chatter about news that takes place in email exchanges, a notable number of internet users are beginning to treat news organizations, particular journalists, and other news mavens as nodes in their social networks. In this survey we found that 57% of online Americans use social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn – and 97% of them are online news consumers. Some 51% of the social networking users who are in the online-news population say that on a typical day they get news from people they follow on sites like Facebook. That amounts to 28% of all internet users who get news via social networking with friends.

In addition 23% of the social networking users who get news online say they specifically get news from news organizations and individual journalists they follow in the social networking space. In other words, they have friended or become a fan of a journalist or news organization and they catch up on news through this relatively new channel of news



dissemination. That amounts to 13% of all internet users. Overall, 30% of internet users get news from friends, journalists or news organizations they follow on social networking sites on a typical day.

In addition, we found that in the general internet population, 19% of online Americans use Twitter or other status update functions. Of those Twitter users, virtually all (99%) are online news consumers. And 28% of those who are in the online news consumer cohort say they get Twitter updates about news from friends and colleagues they follow on Twitter and 18% follow the Twitter feeds of news organizations or individual journalists. Combined, that amounts to 6% of all internet users who get news via Twitter feeds.

The importance of news to social experiences online also shows up in one other way in our survey. A significant portion of online news consumers judge news organization websites by the degree to which they facilitate the social sharing of news. Some 44% of these online news consumers say that one of the factors they use in choosing where to get news online is whether it is easy to share the site's content with others through emails or postings on social networking sites. A quarter of these online news consumers (25%) say an important factor for them is being able to follow the news organization through social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. As the table below shows, young online news users have substantially stronger attachments to the social features of websites than older users.

## The young are most interested in many features

% of online news users who say these features are important

	All online news users	Age 18-29	Age 30-49	Age 50-64	Age 65+
Links to related material	<b>68%</b>	72%*	72%*	63%*	50%
Multi-media content like photo essays or video clips	<b>48%</b>	57%*	51%*	39%*	22%
Being a portal site or news aggregator that gathers news from all over the internet	<b>48%</b>	55%*	49%*	43%*	31%
Being able to easily share the sites news content with others, through emails or posting to other websites like Facebook	<b>44%</b>	57%*	45%*	35%*	24%
Being able to customize the news you get at the site	<b>42%</b>	48%*	46%*	34%*	25%
Interactive material like charts, quizzes, graphics, and maps that you can manipulate yourself	<b>38%</b>	45%*	39%*	31%	26%
Opportunities to comment on stories	<b>37%</b>	51%*	33%	33%	25%
Being able to follow the news site through social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter	<b>25%</b>	39%*	25%*	14%*	7%

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,582. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



Overall, the social dimension of websites ranked third on users' most important priorities in choosing the news websites they pick, behind links to related material to the news story and the site's willingness to be a portal that collects news from around the web.

## For those who see many features as important, some stand out

Which feature is most important?	All online news users
Links to related material	22%
Being a portal	19%
Easily share news with others	11%
Customize the news	10%
Multi-media content	9%
Opportunities to comment	5%
Interactive material	5%
Able to follow organization on social networking site	3%

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,582. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



### The “Daily Me” and the “Daily Us” are taking shape for many users.

We noted earlier that 67% of Americans say they only follow specific subjects that are of particular interest to them. Online tools like news filtering and aggregator sites allow people to apply different kinds of customization to their news experiences.

In this survey we found that 28% of all internet users say they have customized the home page on their browser to include their favorite news sources or topics. Interestingly, this does not seem to be a strategy of those who are trying to narrow the flow of news in their lives or as a coping mechanism for information overload. Instead, customization is used by the most voracious and wide-ranging news consumers. Those who use the most news media platforms on a typical day (4-6) and those who have the widest range of online sources (6-14) are far more likely than others to have customized their home page. Those who are involved with social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogging are also more likely to have tweaked their home page towards news that interests them.

This preference among online news consumers also translates into a priority when they are picking news websites to visit. Some 42% of the internet users who get news online – or 30% of all internet users – say that it is important to them when choosing news sites to be able to customize the news they get at that site. It is fascinating to note that this feature applies equally as much to those who say they prefer to follow specific topics (51% of them like being able to customize news on a site) and those who say they rely on others

to keep them abreast of news (52% of them like this feature on a news website). At the same time, disproportionate numbers of those under age 50, blacks, wide-ranging platform users and browsers for online news, and social media users say this is a preference for them on a news website.

Another way that people personalize the news is by getting alerts about news developments. Some 71% of internet users say they get news forwarded to them through email and automatic alerts and updates and 11% of cell phone owners have alerts sent to their phones via text or email.

Yet another way that people connect in a personal way with news is through interactive material. Some 36% of internet users (38% of online news users) say an important part of the news websites they choose is whether it has interactive content like charts, quizzes, graphics and maps they can manipulate themselves. Those who use a large number of news media platforms on a typical day (4-6), those who use a wide range of online news sources (6-14), and those who are interested in a diverse set of online topics are more likely than others to cite this preference for interactive material.

Finally, there are several other ways that people can customize their online news experiences. In effect, they can create a kind of news “playlist” by using the internet to look at news events at the time of their choosing and to the level of depth that matters to them. In this survey we asked questions about people’s use of video content on news sites and found that 68% of internet users have watched a video online of a news story or event that happened in the past and 62% have watched a video feed of a live or breaking events. Those who use a lot of media platforms on a typical day, who have a diverse set of news interests, and who visit a relatively high number of online news sites are more likely than others to have used news sites this way. In effect, they are reallocating their attention to news to fit their own needs and schedule.

**News creation, commentary and dissemination is now a participatory activity for a sizable group of Americans.**

Some 37% of internet users have actively contributed to the creation, commentary, or dissemination of news. We arrived at that figure by adding up the number of internet users who said they did any of the following activities:

- 25% of internet users have commented on an online news story or blog item about news that they read
- 17% of internet users have posted links and thoughts about news on a social networking site like Facebook. That translates into 30% of social network site users.
- 11% of internet users have tagged or categorized content online
- 9% of internet users have contributed their own article, opinion piece, picture, or video to an online news site
- 3% of internet users have used Twitter to post or re-Tweet a link to a news story or blog. That amounts to 18% of Twitter users.

News participators are information omnivores and technophiles. They stand out from the pack in the same way as those who have set up their cell phones to be “on alert.” In fact, among news participators, 19% have news alerts sent to their cell phones. News participators are fond of social media: 76% of news participators use social networking sites; 34% of news participators use Twitter, and 26% of news participators are bloggers. The average participator uses 4-6 media platforms on a typical day; seeks out nine or more news topics online; and surfs 3-5 different kinds of news websites on a typical day.

The typical online news participator is white, 36 years-old, politically moderate and Independent, employed full-time with a college degree and an annual income of \$50,000 or more. Interestingly, while white adults make up the bulk of the online news participator population, black internet users are significantly more likely to be news participators than their white and Hispanic counterparts. Almost half of black internet users (47%) are news participators, compared with just 36% of white internet users and 33% of Hispanic internet users. Not surprisingly, the youngest internet users (18-29 year-olds) are more likely than their older counterparts to be online news participators, with just under half of that age group (46%) contributing to the creation, commentary, or dissemination of news online. Men and women are equally likely to participate in online news production.

News participators’ appetites for news are greater than other online news gatherers on every subject we queried:

## News participators care about all news subjects more than other online news consumers

% who get this kind of news online

	News participators (N=577)	Other online news consumers (N=1,013)
Weather	88% *	83%
National events	86% *	72%
Health or medicine	77% *	65%
Business, finance, the economy	77% *	61%
International events	75% *	59%
Science and technology	74% *	56%
Developments in my state	70% *	55%
Sports	58%	53%
Developments in my community	62% *	48%
Arts and culture	64% *	43%
Celebrities and entertainment	57% *	44%
Traffic	40% *	30%

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,675. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



On a typical day of browsing news online, news participators are more likely to get news from every kind of news site asked about in the survey:

- 320% more likely than other online news consumers to visit the site of a blogger (21% v. 5%)
- 300% more likely to visit a news posting, ranking and rating site like Digg or NewsTrust (12% v. 3%)
- 133% more likely to listen to a news podcast (21% v. 9%)
- 133% more likely to visit the site of an international news organization such as the BBC (28% v. 12%)

- 100% more likely to visit a site that offers a mix of news and commentary such as the Drudge Report or Huffington Post (24% v. 12%)
- 73% more likely to visit the website of a radio organization (19% v. 11%)
- 72% more likely to visit a site that specializes in a particular topic like health, politics or entertainment (50% v. 29%)
- 55% more likely than other online news consumers to visit the website of a national or local newspaper (48% v. 31%)
- 46% more likely to visit the website of a TV news organization (57% v. 39%)
- 35% more likely to visit a news portal like GoogleNews or AOL (66% v. 49%)

Participants also appreciate websites that make the news experience interactive, personal, and helpful to social engagement. Naturally, they also highly prize news sites that facilitate commenting on stories.

## News participators care about all news site features more than other online news consumers

% who say each feature is important to them

	News participators (N=577)	Other online news consumers (N=1,013)
Links to related material	80%*	60%
Being able to share site's news content with others	63%*	32%
Multimedia content	61%*	38%
Aggregator of news from around the internet	60%*	40%
Opportunities to comment on stories	55%*	26%
Being able to customize news	52%	35%
Interactive content like graphics and quizzes	48%*	31%
Being able to follow news site via social networking page	40%*	15%

\* indicates a statistically significant difference.

Source: PRC-Internet & American Life Project and PRC-Project for Excellence in Journalism Online News Survey - December 28, 2009-January 19, 2010. N=1,675. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.



And what kinds of stories would participators like to get more often from news organizations? They disproportionately say they would like more news about science and technology, state government, health and medicine, and their local community. When it comes to their news wish list, the biggest gap between participators and other Americans involves international affairs. Some 42% of news participators say they would like more coverage of this topic by news organizations, compared with 28% of all other adults who desire more content of this nature.



## Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between December 28, 2009 and January 19, 2010, among a sample of 2,259 adults, age 18 and older in English. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,675), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, half of the time interviewers first asked to speak with the youngest adult male currently at home. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first stage weight is the product of two adjustments made to the data – a Probability of Selection Adjustment (PSA) and a Phone Use Adjustment (PUA). The PSA corrects for the fact that respondents in the landline sample have different probabilities of being sampled depending on how many adults live in the household. The PUA corrects for the overlapping landline and cellular sample frames.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced to match national population parameters for sex, age,

education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the January-June 2009 National Health Interview Survey.<sup>5</sup> Weighting was accomplished using Sample Balancing, a special iterative sample weighting program that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using a statistical technique called the Deming Algorithm. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the national population.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

<b>Table 1: Sample Disposition</b>		
Landline	Cell	
21,854	9,000	Total Numbers Dialed
1,231	162	Non-residential
1,091	11	Computer/Fax
4	---	Cell phone
9,105	3,463	Other not working
1,466	191	Additional projected not working
8,957	5,174	Working numbers
41.0%	57.5%	Working Rate
489	64	No Answer / Busy
1,477	1,218	Voice Mail
19	5	Other Non-Contact
6,972	3,887	Contacted numbers
77.8%	75.1%	Contact Rate
561	592	Callback
4,363	2,227	Refusal
2,048	1068	Cooperating numbers
29.4%	27.5%	Cooperation Rate
300	168	Language Barrier
---	320	Child's cell phone
1,748	580	Eligible numbers
85.4%	54.3%	Eligibility Rate
51	18	Break-off
1,697	562	Completes
97.1%	96.9%	Completion Rate

<sup>5</sup> Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, January-June, 2009. National Center for Health Statistics. December 2009.

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 22 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 20 percent.