SECTION FOUR

key cross-cutting trends

NEWS CONSUMPTION

TYPES OF NEWS

THE MEDIA FOOD CHAIN AND FUNCTIONS OF JOURNALISM

DIVERSITY

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

HOW BIG IS THE GAP AND WHO SHOULD FILL IT?

We have looked at the media landscape in terms of the traditional sectors that produce and/or disseminate news, information, and journalism. But the lines between these sectors are becoming increasingly blurred. In this world of converging media, TV is on the phone, the Internet is on the TV, and the newspaper is on the tablet. This section looks at the media landscape through different lenses. Rather than looking at individual market sectors—such as "newspapers" or "mobile"—it examines trends that cut across many platforms. In some cases, we draw on material that appeared in the first parts of this report; in others, we introduce new information. In all, we attempt to answer these questions: Overall, which parts of the media system are healthy and which are most vulnerable? How well is the media performing its most important functions? How have changes in the media world affected communities that have historically been underserved by mass media, such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities?

If there is a vacuum in news, information, and journalism, how significant is it—and how likely is it that commercial markets alone will fill the void?

20 News Consumption

Consuming More Media

The media system has provided consumers with more choices with each passing decade. Cable and satellite TV dramatically increased the number of channels available, including many dedicated to national and business news, and the digital revolution seems to generate new options every time we blink.

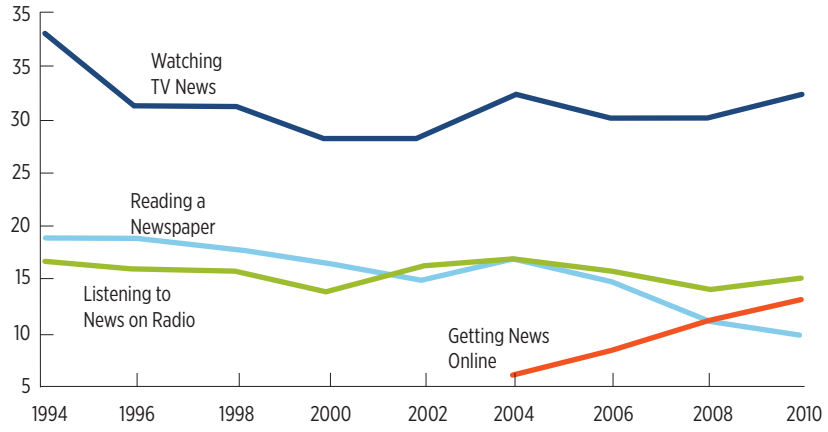
Americans have responded to the proliferation of media choices by increasing their consumption. Looking at the full range—TV, radio, print, mobile devices, computers, video games, movies, recorded music—the average number of hours a typical American spends taking in some form of media rose from 7.4 hours per day in 1980 to 11.8 in 2008.[1]

The consumption of news has fluctuated in recent years. The average American spends 70 minutes a day taking in the news, according to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (although that number does not include news read on cell phones, iPads, or other digital devices).[2]

Americans have not abandoned traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers); they spend 57 minutes with those sources, roughly the same as in 2000.[3] But they spend an additional 13 minutes each day getting news online.[4]

TIME SPENT WITH THE NEWS "YESTERDAY"

Average minutes spent:



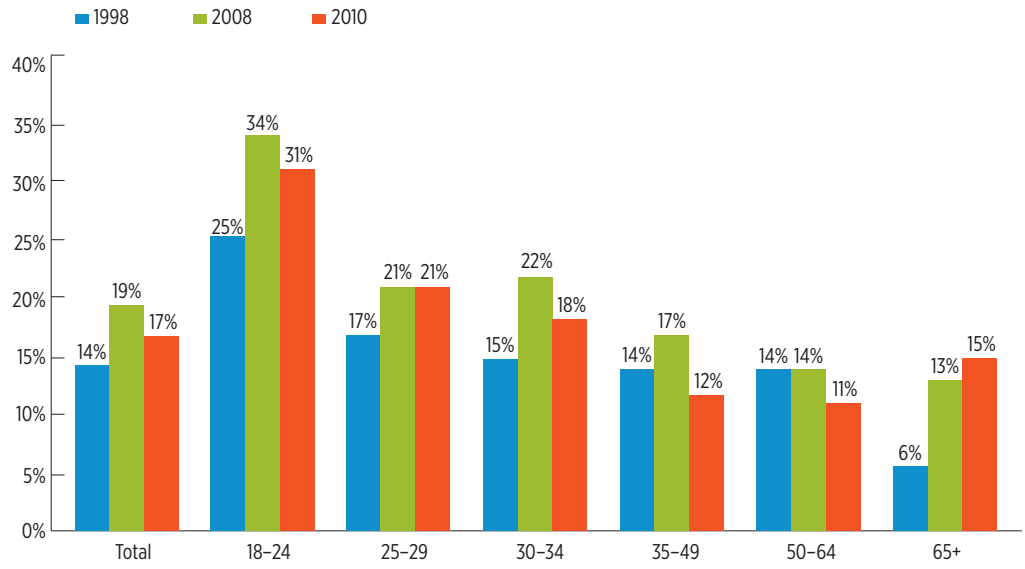
Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press[5]

More Americans Are Skipping the News

But that robust overall number belies a small but worrisome trend. The percentage of Americans who reported that they had gone "newsless" the day before they were asked in a Pew survey rose from 14 percent in 1998 to 17 percent in 2009—and it was highest, 31 percent, among 18 to 24 year olds.

How can that be? After all, technology offers a stunningly wide variety of ways to get news, and young people are most facile with the newest technologies. It is possible that such surveys fail to include programs like the *Daily Show* that convey news but which respondents might not have thought to mention when surveyed. The most likely explanation is that while sources of news have increased, so have entertainment and sports choices. A study of 12 media markets in the 1980s, when cable TV was becoming more popular, showed that as consumers had more choices, they watched local news less frequently than those with broadcast TV only.[7] In addition, scholar Markus Prior conducted an experiment in which participants were randomly given one of two sets of choices and asked to make a decision:

SHARE OF ADULTS GOING "NEWSLESS" ON TYPICAL DAY



Source: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press[6]

1 Watch nightly broadcast network news or turn off television.

2 Watch broadcast network news, cable news, a comedy or sitcom, a drama, a science fiction program, a reality show, or a sports program, OR turn off the television.

When given choice set number one, 79.9 percent chose to watch news instead of turning off the set. When offered choice set number two, only 35.4 percent chose to watch broadcast network news, and an additional 8 percent chose cable news.[8]

In general, the increasing possibility that consumers can more easily avoid news has led some to fear that Americans' "incidental" exposure to news has declined. The traditional media, including TV and newspapers, in some ways thrust news on the unwilling and unexpecting. Sociologist Paul Starr testified at an FCC workshop:

> "Many people have bought and read their local paper primarily because of their interest in sports, stocks, the comics, or job opportunities, but they have nonetheless still scanned the front pages and learned something about their community. Online, however, anyone interested in sports, stocks, jobs, and so on can go to specialized, free sites that are typically better than what their local paper offers—except that those sites don't expose them, even minimally, to the news of their community. The incidental learning of a bundled metropolitan paper disappears, just as much of the incidental learning from exposure to local radio and television news is dropping with the fragmentation of television and audio audiences."[9]

This is not a black-and-white issue. Those using Internet portals like Yahoo!, MSN, and AOL to get sports scores may come across news headlines along the way. Facebook users will have news on various topics thrust before them by their friends. Indeed, news is so ubiquitous that one study concluded that those with a pre-existing interest in news are likely to stumble upon more and more of it, even when they are not trying.[10]

Both trends may be true at the same time: news junkies have more ways of finding news and everyone else has more ways of avoiding it.

Americans have not abandoned traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers). They spend 57 minutes with those sources, roughly the same as in 2000. But they spend an additional 13 minutes getting news online.

Americans Are Spending More on Media—and the Financial Beneficiaries Have Changed

From 2003 to 2008, the average annual spending per person on media and information rose from approximately $740 to $882[11]—an increase of 19 percent. This growth rate is greater than for other categories of consumer spending; for instance, spending on "apparel and services" rose only 9.8 percent during that period.[12] In terms of dollars, most of the increase can be attributed to rising consumer payments to satellite and cable TV service providers: the average spent on cable and satellite TV during this period was $294. In terms of percentage, spending on mobile phone service is growing the fastest.

ANNUAL MEDIA SPENDING PER CONSUMER[13]

Year	TV and Radio	Entertainment	Print	Pure Play Internet	Pure Play Mobile	Total
2003	$234.65	$244.20	$193.89	$60.39	$4.54	$737.67
2004	$257.58	$249.89	$193.85	$60.31	$7.54	$769.17
2005	$283.24	$234.41	$195.75	$57.88	$9.59	$780.87
2006	$313.34	$240.27	$193.25	$54.06	$12.33	$813.25
2007	$339.67	$241.67	$195.69	$55.45	$15.66	$848.14
2008	$366.72	$239.75	$189.17	$57.46	$18.55	$871.65

Source: U.S. Census Bureau[13]

Since consumers now get some material for free that they used to pay for—many online newspapers and magazines, for instance—it has been tempting to think that Americans are paying less for content. In reality, however, they are paying more than ever before. They may pay less for individual pieces of content, but they pay more for *access* to the content. The two-thirds of Americans with broadband at home, on average, pay $41 per month, and those with cell phones (86 percent of adults, nearly a third of whom own smartphones with online access) pay $92 per month.[14]

What has changed is not whether Americans are willing to pay—but to whom they are sending the cash. Much of the money Americans now spend on media goes to cable TV companies; Internet service providers (which often are cable companies); and mobile phone service providers. Pre-Internet and pre-cable, when most of what Americans spent on media went to newspapers—since TV and radio were free—the majority of the money went to the companies that created the content. Now, much of it goes to companies that do not create content.

Polarization

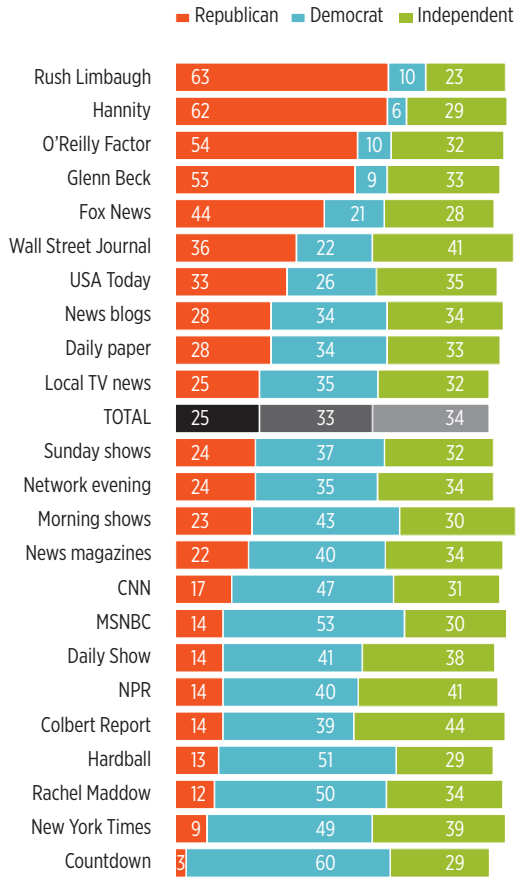
The Internet has given people tools to stitch together communities and connect with friends and strangers, locally as well as across vast distances. However, concern has grown that that the modern media landscape—specifically, its proliferation of media choices—has contributed to "polarization," with consumers gravitating toward shows or networks viewed by other people like themselves. The following Pew table charts ideological and partisan proclivities by show and network.

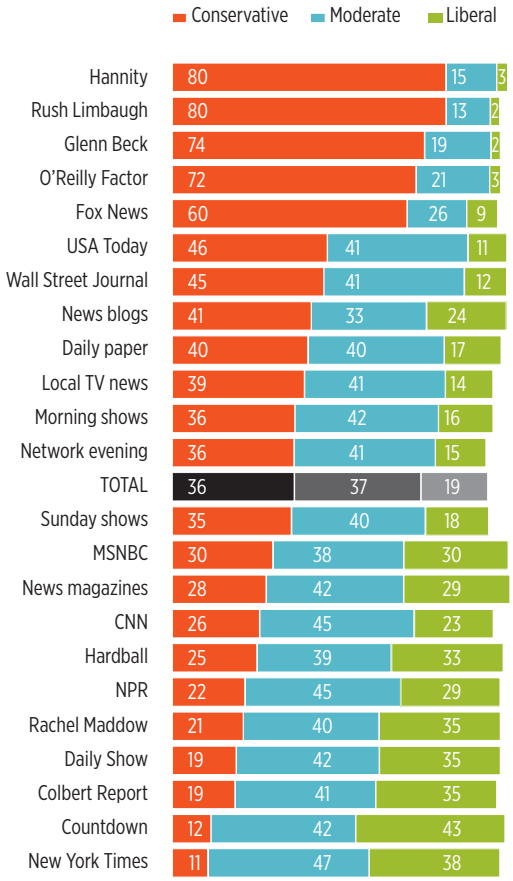
Academics have documented that when presented with a wide variety of choices, many Americans choose media outlets more in line with their views.[15] And the more people know about politics, the more likely they are to choose media that is also consumed by people like them. On the other hand, other studies have shown that people

In the Internet era, it has become conventional wisdom that Americans are less willing to pay for media than in the past. In reality, they are paying more than ever before.

AUDIENCE PROFILES: PARTY AND IDEOLOGY

Percentage of each audience who are . . .





Source: "Americans Spending More Time Following the News," by the Pew Research Center on The People & The Press (2010)

who look at their favorite ideological sites also look at other news sites.[16] Whether these patterns are worrisome or not continues to be debated widely, though it is not the focus of this report. Another question that could be studied in this regard: do polarization patterns make it harder for news models to take root that do not cater to one ideological perspective or another? If increasing numbers of people tend to gravitate toward more opinionated news, does that make it harder for more of the less-opinionated outlets to develop enough scale to create sustainable business models?