

Young People and News

A Report from the Joan Shorenstein Center on the
Press, Politics and Public Policy



July 2007

Young People and News

A report from the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy,
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Prepared by Thomas E. Patterson, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press,
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University



This research was funded by a generous grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, for the consideration of the Carnegie-Knight Task Force on the Future of Journalism Education. The Carnegie-Knight Initiative was launched in 2005 and focuses on curriculum reform at graduate schools of journalism, an innovative student internship program called News21, research, and creating a platform for educators to speak on journalism policy and education issues. All of these efforts grew out of a partnership involving the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the following member institutions: Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California; College of Communication, University of Texas at Austin; Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley; Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University; Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University; Missouri School of Journalism, University of Missouri-Columbia; Philip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland; and the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University.

July 2007

Executive Summary

Based on a national survey of 1800 randomly sampled teens, young adults, and older adults, this report examines the amount of daily news consumed by young people. The evidence shows that young Americans are estranged from the daily newspaper and rely more heavily on television than on the Internet for their news. A few decades ago, there were not large differences in the news habits and daily information levels of younger and older Americans. Today, unlike most older Americans, many young people find a bit of news here and there and do not make it a routine part of their day.

Contents

Introduction	<i>5</i>
Methodology	<i>6</i>
News Exposure	<i>8</i>
Heavy Users, Moderate Users, Marginal Users, and Non-Users	<i>11</i>
News Story Recall as an Indicator of News Use	<i>14</i>
The New Matrix	<i>21</i>
Endnotes	<i>24</i>
Appendix	<i>26</i>

Young People and News

Although much is known about the news habits of young Americans, much is in dispute or subject to refinement. Analysts agree on one thing: today's young people pay less attention to daily news than their counterparts of two or three decades ago. However, estimates of the decline vary widely, and some analysts claim the digital revolution is a generational watershed that is bringing young people back to news. "The notion is that no young person cares about news, and that is wrong," one such analyst said recently. "They're moving to a different distribution system."¹ Other analysts disagree, saying the Internet highway is leading young people to almost everything but the news. The scholar Robert Putnam claims that, as Internet traffic has expanded, news use has diminished as a proportion of the total traffic.²

Disagreements exist, too, over what the news "is." The definition matters in that it affects judgments about the amount of time young people spend on news. Does news include "infotainment" programs and publications that include public affairs along with lifestyle, crime, and celebrity offerings? What weight should be attached to the fact that some young people "think" infotainment is news? Some analysts argue that infotainment should be included in assessments of people's news exposure.³ Others claim that doing so violates any reasonable definition of news.⁴

Disagreement also stems from the conflation of media exposure and news exposure. Today's young adults spend enormous amounts of time attending to the media—upwards of six hours a day, excluding the considerable amount of time they spend on the phone.⁵ How could they spend all of this time attending to the media and somehow not be connected to the world of public affairs? But if they are connected, how does one account for such inconvenient facts as the inability of the large majority of young adults to identify the secretary of state by name?⁶

Disagreements also exist on how to strengthen young people's appetite for news. For some observers, time itself is the cure. "A reasonable percentage of young people are interested in news," said one analyst recently, "[and] more will be as they age."⁷ Other observers see the answer in education—strengthening students' sense of civic responsibility so that they will turn to news as a means of staying informed about public affairs.⁸ In fact, there is evidence that news consumption increases as people age and that interest in news is deepened by civic education. But the evidence also shows that news habits developed early in life affect later use and that appeals to civic virtue, whether aimed at getting

citizens to vote or to follow the news, have only a small influence on what they choose to do.

This report does not tackle all these disagreements, nor does it aim to settle all the issues it addresses. Rather, the report seeks to build upon existing studies, attempting here and there to advance what is already known about young people's news habits. A body of research evidence does exist, despite the disagreements. Indeed, a source of disagreement is the fact that, although there are many precisely worded survey questions, there are also many inexact questions. A 2004 survey received widespread attention when it reported that a fifth of young adults "regularly" get their news from comedy shows such as Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*. But how regular is "regularly"? As our report will show, when it comes to comedy shows, "regularly" is a lot closer to "sometimes" than to "daily."

Our study seeks to extend what is reliably known about young people and their daily news exposure. We conducted a large national survey that had several special features:

- The inclusion of teenage respondents, who've seldom been polled nationally on their news habits.
- A stratified sampling frame as a means of obtaining a large number of young adult respondents, thereby permitting more precise estimates of their news habits.
- A questionnaire designed to reduce the biased estimates that result from the fact that respondents regard news use as a socially desirable activity.
- An innovative measurement technique designed to "test" respondents' awareness of daily news events and to identify the sources of this information, whatever they might be.

Careful assessments of young adults' news habits are essential. Young people's interest in news will affect the economic vitality of news organizations and thus their ability to invest in quality journalism. Also at stake is the grassroots health of American democracy. Although it is inaccurate to equate the informed citizen with the news-consuming citizen, the news media, as the journalist Walter Lippmann noted, serve as citizens' window onto the world of public affairs.⁹ What they see or fail to see through that window will affect their understanding and response to that world. In this vein, this report will be a source of unease for those concerned about journalism and democracy in America. The evidence obtained through our national study presents a relatively dim picture of young Americans' interest in daily news.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys of young people's news habits have often been handicapped by sample size and composition. Only rarely are teenagers included in the sampling frame, and sample sizes often exceed no more than 600 respondents. Although the resulting sampling error of plus or minus 4 percent is acceptable for many purposes, the error rate applies only to the sample as a whole, and not to subgroups of respondents. If young adults constitute only 125 of the 600 respondents, the sampling error for comparisons within this group is an uncomfortably large plus or minus 9 percent. Even samples of 1000 respondents will include only 200 or so young adults—resulting in a still large sampling error of plus or minus 7 percent for comparisons within the age group.

To address this issue, we conducted two national surveys. The sampling frame for the first survey was divided into non-overlapping age groups—young adults (defined as those ages 18 to 30) and older adults (defined as those 31 years of age and older). The sampling was stratified; respondents were selected randomly, but the sampling rate was higher for young adults in order to ensure a large number of respondents within that age group. Altogether, 1298 respondents were interviewed for this survey; 613 of them were young adults and 685 were older adults. The sampling error is +/- 2.7% for the full adult survey, +/- 3.7% for the older adult subset, and +/- 4.0% for the young adult subset. The second survey was based on a random national sample of 503 teenagers (defined as ages 12-17). They were asked the same questions as those asked of the adult respondents. For the teenage survey, the sampling error is +/- 4.4%. All respondents were interviewed by phone by the polling firm International Communication Research (ICR) based in Media, Pennsylvania.

Measuring the Frequency and Depth of People's Daily News Habits

Socially desirable behavior is difficult to measure accurately in surveys. Some respondents invariably claim to engage in it even when they do not. Voting is a familiar example. Even though barely more than half of Americans vote in most presidential elections, about three-fourths of respondents in post-election surveys claim to have voted. So it is with news exposure. "Good citizens" pay attention to news. Accordingly, some Americans claim to pay more attention to news than they actually do.

Our survey included questions designed to combat this tendency. In the interviews, we measured both the *frequency* and the *depth* of Americans' news exposure. We used standard survey items to measure *frequency*, asking respondents to report their daily exposure to the news pages of the newspaper, local television news, national television news, radio news, Internet-based news, and news delivered by hand-held devices, such as the cell phone.^a The question for newspaper exposure, for example, was the following:

Q. Do you read the news pages of a newspaper every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

It should be assumed that our survey, like the other surveys that employ a version of these questions, overestimates the frequency with which Americans actually follow the news.^b But we did depart from a common method of measuring the *depth* of exposure in order to reduce response bias on this dimension. *Depth* of exposure refers to the degree to which people partake of the news when exposed to it.^c Many news surveys today measure exposure depth by asking respondents to report the average minutes they spend each day exposed to various news mediums. Such

- a. Only 3 percent of respondents claim to rely on a hand-held device for news, and the variation by age was small. Accordingly, this news source will not be included in the discussion that follows. Given the study's focus on daily news, respondents were not asked about their use of weekly news magazines.
- b. It is worth noting, however, that our survey had a built-in experimental component designed to test whether overstatement of news exposure can be dampened by "testing" respondents' news awareness before asking them about their general news habits. Some of our respondents were asked the questions in that order. Other respondents were asked about their general news awareness first and then tested for their awareness of specific news stories. This quasi-experimental feature of our survey is not discussed in this report but will be examined later in a conference paper. Interested scholars are invited also to analyze these data, or any of the other data produced by our survey. The survey data set can be obtained by contacting the report's author at thomas_patterson@harvard.edu.
- c. This dimension is one that cripples some surveys. They fail to probe the depth of respondents' news use, asking only about frequency of exposure. Such surveys invariably overestimate news exposure by failing to distinguish, for example, between people who watch a television newscast in its entirety every day and those who watch television news every day but stay tuned for only a few minutes—each type is categorized as a heavy user. Some of the misunderstandings and inaccurate claims about news use can be traced to such surveys and to the uncritical acceptance of their findings.

questions invite a socially desirable response. Respondents may exaggerate the minutes they spend on news.

Even for respondents who are not so inclined, the use of minutes as the measurement metric is problematic. Some respondents unwittingly conflate media exposure time and news exposure time, which inflates their news use. Then too, most people have never sat down and calculated the number of minutes they spend on news on an “average” day. In the context of a telephone interview—an unwanted intrusion to many of the respondents—few people will take the time to reflect on how many minutes they actually spend reading the newspaper or watching television news. Finally, the minute-by-minute metric is confounded by the fact that people often use two mediums simultaneously, as when they read the newspaper while also watching television news. A study that used respondents’ daily logs as a check on their reported minutes of media exposure found that overlapping media use led the respondents to overstate their total exposure by nearly 20 percent.¹⁰

For such reasons, we felt it necessary to employ a different metric to measure depth of exposure. Instead of minutes, we asked respondents to describe the pattern in their typical use of particular media. The questions were these:

Q. When you read the news in the paper, do you usually read quite a few stories or do you usually just skim through the news sections?

Q. When watching television news, do you usually watch most or all of a news program or do you usually watch for a short while and then switch to something else?

Q. When hearing news on the radio, is it usually because you turned on the radio to hear the news or is it usually because the news just happens to come on when listening to something else?

Q. When getting news through the Internet, is it usually because you go to a website that provides the news or is it usually because you come across the news when using the Internet for another reason?

These questions tap tendencies that respondents readily recognize in their own behavior, thereby reducing the measurement error associated with questions that require hard-to-calculate answers. Nevertheless, the questions do not preclude socially desirable responses. Respondents could say, for example, that they read news stories somewhat closely when in fact they are the type of reader that usually just skims the news sections. However, the questions are designed to dampen overstatement by asking respondents about ordinary behaviors that have an implicit rather than obtrusive time dimension. Individuals who skim news stories, for example, spent less time reading the paper than those who pay close attention.

A Reality Check: Story Awareness

In a further attempt to obtain valid responses, and as a check on conventional methods of measuring news exposure, we employed an innovative method of assessing people’s attention to news.^d We tested respondents’ awareness of and information about news stories that had been reported within the previous 24 hours. On February 16, for example, the U.S. House of Representatives—in the first such action of its kind—passed a resolution criticizing President George Bush’s decision to deploy additional troops to Iraq as part of his “surge” strategy. Respondents interviewed during the coming day were asked:

Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story about a vote that was just taken in the U.S. House of Representatives on President Bush’s decision to send an additional 21,000 troops to Iraq?

Respondents who claimed familiarity with the story were then asked to identify a prominent fact within it:

Do you recall whether a majority of the House members voted to support the troop buildup or whether a majority voted against the troop buildup, or is this a part of the story you didn’t pay attention to or are unsure about?

d. We use the term “innovative” somewhat guardedly here in that, though we are unaware of any previous application of the method, it might well have been applied by other survey researchers in one field or another.

These questions were followed by questions designed to discover where, specifically, respondents had encountered the story. (These follow-up questions are described in a later section of this report.)

Two criteria were used to select each day's news story. First, it had to be a nationally prominent story—one that was reported heavily on national television and radio, in local newscasts and newspapers, and on news websites. In other words, it had to be a "top" story—the type of story that a person paying reasonably close attention to the day's news could be expected to see or hear. To reduce mistaken claims of exposure, a second criterion was applied in choosing the day's story: it had to be distinctive in the sense of not being easily confused with other stories, including earlier ones. For this reason, respondents were never asked whether they had encountered a story "about a suicide bombing in Baghdad." Such stories were daily fare during the interviewing period, and respondents could mistakenly claim awareness of such a story even if they had not encountered one during the past day.^e Not among the criteria was a requirement that the story relate to politics and public affairs. Any prominent story was a candidate for inclusion in the survey. As will be seen, respondents were more likely to recall top stories about celebrities, disasters, and the like than they were to recall top stories about government and public affairs.

The story-based questions were designed to identify tendencies in Americans' news exposure, rather than their attention to any particular story. Accordingly, the interviewing was spread out over an unusually long period—a span stretching from late January to early March of 2007.^f Twenty stories were employed during this period, meaning that on average 5 percent of the respondents were asked about each story. Major news stories differ in the amount of media attention they receive, as illustrated by two deaths—that of the race horse Barbaro and that of the actress Anna Nicole Smith—that occurred during the period of our survey. Each death met the criteria for inclusion in our survey and was included. However, the media frenzy that ensued in the 24 hours after Smith's death far outstripped the immediate coverage Barbaro's death received. By employing twenty stories during the survey, and by questioning only a small proportion of respondents about each, we sought to "average out" the variation from individual stories in order to estimate Americans' awareness of the "typical" top national news story.

The story questions are used in this report to show the amount of top news Americans get on a typical day, where they get it, who gets it, and whether they pay

enough attention to recall simple facts about it. To the degree younger and older Americans consume different quantities of news, and get their news from different sources, these differences will be revealed in rough proportion to their occurrence.

Respondents had free rein in identifying where they had encountered the story. They were not channeled into pre-set questions directing them to think only about conventional news outlets. If they encountered the story on a late night entertainment program or heard it from their uncle, this information was recorded. As will be seen, the profile of Americans' news use that emerges from the news-story question is somewhat different from the profile emerging from traditional measurement methods.

NEWS EXPOSURE: WHAT AMERICANS SAY THEY WATCH, READ, AND HEAR, AND WHAT THEY SAY THEY IGNORE

As stated, we sought to plumb both the frequency and depth of people's news exposure, with particular attention to differences between younger and older Americans. We begin our analysis with a look at Americans' exposure to daily news media.

Self-Reported Newspaper Exposure

Newspaper readership has fallen sharply in recent years.¹¹ The fact that most young Americans do not have a daily newspaper habit is among the reasons. Whereas 35 percent of our respondents over 30 years of age claimed to read the news every day, only 16 percent of those aged 18-30 said they read the news daily and a mere 9 percent of those aged 12-17 claimed daily exposure (see Table 1). In fact, half of all teens and young adults said they rarely if ever read a newspaper.

At that, these figures exaggerate young Americans' attention to the newspaper. Even when they bother to read the newspaper, teens and young adults do so for a shorter period than do older adults. Two-thirds of teen and young adult readers said they "usually skim through the news sections" as opposed to reading "quite a few stories" (see Table 2). Many older readers also habitually skim the news sections. Nevertheless, older adults were substantially more likely than teens and young adults to say they "usually read quite a few stories."

Self-Reported Television News Exposure

Although local and national television news programs have suffered a loss of audience in the past decade,

- e. There were days during the survey period when none of the day's top stories met the two criteria. In these cases, no interviews were conducted during the following 24 hours. To ensure that respondents using particular mediums would have had the opportunity to see, hear, or read the story, it was in most cases inserted in the survey roughly 24 hours after it first surfaced. In no case did a story remain in the survey for more than 24 hours after it was introduced.
- f. This time period applied to the adult survey only. The teenage survey was conducted during a shorter time span, though within the period that the adult interviews were collected. This feature affects the comparability of the two surveys on the story-based questions, a point that is addressed later in this report.

Table 1: Frequency of Exposure to News Mediums by Age

Newspaper's News Pages	Teenagers	Young Adults	Older Adults
Everyday	9%	16%	35%
Several times a week	17%	13%	14%
About once a week	23%	20%	15%
Less than once a week	5%	6%	3%
Hardly ever/ Not at all	46%	45%	33%
	100%	100%	100%
National TV News			
Everyday	31%	31%	57%
Several times a week	22%	26%	23%
About once a week	23%	16%	10%
Less than once a week	6%	3%	1%
Hardly ever/ Not at all	10%	24%	9%
	100%	100%	100%
Local TV News			
Everyday	30%	36%	62%
Several times a week	23%	25%	19%
About once a week	24%	14%	7%
Less than once a week	3%	5%	1%
Hardly ever/ Not at all	20%	20%	11%
	100%	100%	100%
Radio News			
Everyday	25%	29%	38%
Several times a week	13%	15%	20%
About once a week	18%	11%	10%
Less than once a week	8%	5%	2%
Hardly ever/ Not at all	36%	40%	30%
	100%	100%	100%
Internet-based News			
Everyday	20%	22%	20%
Several times a week	23%	16%	11%
About once a week	15%	13%	11%
Less than once a week	10%	4%	4%
Hardly ever/ Not at all	32%	45%	54%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 2: Depth of Exposure to News Mediums by Age

	Teenagers	Young Adults	Older Adults
Newspaper's News Pages			
Read quite a few stories	28%	32%	47%
Just skim stories	68%	66%	49%
Both/ Don't know	4%	2%	4%
	100%	100%	100%
National TV Newscasts			
Watch most or all of newscast	40%	37%	57%
Watch for a short while & switch	58%	60%	38%
Both/ Don't know	2%	3%	5%
	100%	100%	100%
Local TV Newscast			
Watch most or all of newscast	33%	43%	64%
Watch for a short while & switch	64%	54%	30%
Both/ Don't know	3%	3%	6%
	100%	100%	100%
Radio News			
Turned on radio to hear news	15%	22%	31%
Just happens to come on when listening to something else	81%	72%	65%
Both/ Don't know	4%	6%	4%
	100%	100%	100%
Internet-based News			
Seek out the news	32%	46%	55%
Just happen to come across it	65%	48%	40%
Both/ Don't know	3%	6%	5%
	100%	100%	100%

Note: Table only includes respondents who said they made use of a particular news medium.

they have retained a larger following than has the newspaper.¹² Nearly 60 percent of our older respondents claimed, in the case of both national and local TV, to watch the news daily. A mere 10 percent said they seldom if ever watch it. Young adults and teens pay significantly less attention to TV news. In the case of both local and national TV news, about 30 percent of teens and young adults alike claimed to watch it on a daily basis while about 25 percent of them said they seldom if ever watch it.

Younger Americans also watch for shorter periods than do older Americans. By a ratio of three to two, older respondents were more likely to say they “usually watch most or all of the newscast” than to say they “usually watch for a short while and then switch to something else.” The ratio was nearly the reverse for teens and young adults.

Self-Reported Radio News Exposure

Radio news has had a renaissance in recent decades, partly because Americans have been spending more time in their cars, where a third of all radio listening occurs.¹³ Nevertheless, among all age groups, radio’s news audience is substantially smaller than television’s.

Nearly 40 percent of the older respondents said they listen to radio news every day. Only 32 percent in this age group claimed to seldom if ever listen. Among teens and young adults, however, the non-listeners greatly outnumber the regular listeners. Nearly half of teens and young adults (44 percent and 45 percent, respectively) said they seldom or never listen to radio news, which is nearly twice the number (25 percent and 29 percent, respectively) who said they listen daily.

Radio news listening is a less deliberate activity than newspaper reading or TV news viewing. Most listeners said they ordinarily hear radio news when it “just happens to come on when listening to something else.” Younger people are particularly likely to be inadvertent listeners. About 80 percent of teens and 70 percent of young adults said their radio news exposure “just happens.” Even among older adults, radio news exposure is largely inadvertent—65 percent of these listeners say it “just happens.” In short, though fairly large numbers of Americans hear radio news with some frequency, only a minority—and for teens and young adults, a small minority—do so because they turn on the radio for the purpose of “hearing the news.”

Self-Reported Internet News Exposure

Internet-based news exposure rose sharply in the 1990s and early 2000s, but the growth recently has slowed substantially.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Internet is a significant news medium, as well as the one where age differences are least important. About a fifth of our respondents—older adults, young adults, and teenagers alike—claimed to get news from the Internet on a daily

basis.

Age differences emerge, however, when the depth of this exposure is examined. Among older respondents who obtain news from the Internet, 55 percent claimed to do so because they “seek” it. The figure drops to 46 percent among young adults and to a mere 32 percent among teens. Two-thirds of the teens who get at least some news from the Internet said it typically occurs when they “just happen to come across it.”

HEAVY USERS, MODERATE USERS, MARGINAL USERS, AND NON-USERS

Age differences in news consumption widen when the frequency of individuals’ news exposure is combined with the depth of their exposure. “Heavy Users” of a news medium can be defined as daily users who attend closely to its news content. “Moderate Users” can be said to be those who use a medium several times weekly and do so deliberately, and those who use it daily but engage it lightly. “Marginal Users” pay less attention, though the frequency or depth of their exposure is such that the medium is at least an occasional source of their news. “Non-users” are those who say they seldom or never use the medium and those who use it less than weekly while paying only marginal attention when doing so.

Table 3 provides the distribution of heavy, moderate, marginal, and non-users by age for each of the news mediums discussed above. The following sections highlight the major tendencies.

Users by Medium

News use differs by age for every medium, especially in the case of the newspaper. Whereas one in five older adults is a heavy user of its news, only one in twelve young adults and a mere one in twenty teens rely heavily on the newspaper. The picture is marginally brighter in the case of television news. For both national and local television news, about one in six young adults, and a like proportion of teens, are heavy viewers. Nevertheless, this level is far below that of older adults—more than twice as many of them, two in every five, are heavy viewers of national news and a somewhat higher number follow local TV news closely. Radio news has a smaller regular audience than television but the age ratio is similar. Older adults are more than twice as likely as young adults or teens to be heavy listeners. In fact, less than one in ten young adults and teens listens closely to radio news.

Age differences shrink for Internet-based news but do not disappear. Even though older adults are somewhat less likely than young adults and teens to access the Internet, they are marginally more likely than young adults or teens to rely heavily on it as a news source. Nevertheless, only a small fraction of each age group uses it extensively. Roughly one in seven older adults, one in eight young adults, and one

in twelve teenagers are heavy users of Internet-based news.

When news use is viewed from the perspective of the non-users, teens and young adults far outnumber older adults. Indeed, in the case of the newspaper, radio, and the Internet, an absolute majority of teens and young adults are non-users. The newspaper, particularly, has little appeal to young Americans. Two-thirds of teens and young adults more or less ignore its news coverage. Radio news and Internet-based news get more attention than the newspaper, but, even in these cases, most teens and young adults largely avoid exposure. Smaller but still substantial proportions—two in five—have little interest in national and local television news.

News to Nowhere?

Citizens who want to stay informed do not have to avail themselves of every conceivable source of news. To be sure, news outlets differ in the depth of their coverage and therefore in their capacity to inform. Studies have found, for example, that regular newspaper readers are better informed about current events than regular TV news viewers, even when levels of education and political interest are controlled.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the key variable in whether citizens are aware of public affairs is their exposure to news rather than the precise media mix through which they obtain it.¹⁶

How many older and younger Americans are broadly attentive to news? To obtain a rough estimate, we combined respondents' use of the various media (shown in Table 3) by creating an additive scale in which each news medium was weighted equally.^g For

each medium, heavy users were assigned a score of "2," moderate users were assigned a score of "1," and marginal users and non-users were scored as "0." The resulting scale ranged from a score of 8 (respondents who are heavy users of news in each of the four mediums—television, radio, newspaper, and the Internet) to a score of 0 (respondents who made little or no use of all four news mediums).^h

There is substantial variation by age in the average scores. The mean score was 2.66 for older adults, 1.85 for young adults, and 1.29 for teens—the difference between the older group and the younger groups is statistically significant at the .001 level. A regression analysis using respondents' age and education level as the independent variables and respondents' media-use score as the dependent variable further confirms the influence of age on news exposure.ⁱ Age and education were equally powerful predictors of respondents' news exposure. Studies of only a few decades ago showed that education was highly correlated with news use whereas age was not.¹⁷

The raw scale scores tell the story more directly. Twenty eight percent of teens and 24 percent of young adults (compared with 11 percent of older adults) had a score of "0," meaning they paid almost no attention to news, whatever the source. An additional 32 percent of teens and 24 percent of young adults (compared with 12 percent of older adults) had a score of "1," meaning that they paid little or no attention to three of the mediums and made only moderate use of the fourth. In other words, depending on how strictly the standard is set, a third to three fifths of teens and a fourth to half of young adults (compared with an eighth to a quarter of older

- g. We created the scale in different ways to see whether the different methods produced similar rankings and led to the same conclusions. The scales were highly correlated, indicating that our conclusions would be largely independent of the scale selected. Nevertheless, some ways of combining the exposure data are more defensible than others. A simple addition of the use levels, for example, would overweight television viewing. It was the only medium where we asked respondents about their attention to both national and local news, even though this question could reasonably have been asked about the other media as well. The newspaper has its national and local sections, radio has local stations and national outlets, and the Internet hosts both local and national news sites (as well as international ones). To address such issues, we added the two television variables together and divided the score by two, thus giving the television variable the same weight in our additive scale as the other three mediums.
- h. If anything our scaling method overestimates the relative difference in the news habits of younger and older Americans. The scale includes Internet-based news, which is beyond the reach of those without a computer, a group dominated by older adults. Respondents who did not use the Internet for news got the lowest score on this component of the scale, even if their non-use is attributable to the lack of computer access. One way to check for the bias this might have introduced into the scale is to create the scale omitting the Internet variable for all respondents. When we did this, the profile of older adults improved somewhat in absolute terms and relative to young adults. Thus, the Internet access problem would not have altered our basic finding and conclusion that young adults have relatively low levels of news interest and lag far behind older adults in their news interest.
- i. Teenage respondents were excluded from the regression analysis because their education is still in progress.

Table 3: Levels of Use of News Mediums, by Age

	Teenagers	Young Adults	Older Adults
Heavy Users			
Newspaper	5%	9%	21%
National TV news	17%	16%	40%
Local TV news	15%	19%	47%
Radio news	6%	8%	18%
Internet-based news	8%	13%	15%
Moderate Users			
Newspaper	13%	13%	21%
National TV news	22%	26%	29%
Local TV news	22%	26%	24%
Radio news	22%	26%	24%
Internet-based news	19%	19%	11%
Marginal Users			
Newspaper	15%	15%	13%
National TV news	19%	20%	15%
Local TV news	42%	38%	17%
Radio news	15%	12%	20%
Internet-based news	21%	9%	11%
Non-Users			
Newspaper	68%	64%	45%
National TV news	42%	38%	17%
Local TV news	40%	33%	16%
Radio news	58%	54%	38%
Internet-based news	52%	59%	64%

Note: Usage level was determined by combining respondents' frequency and depth of exposure. See text for explanation of the combinations used to create the categories.

adults) pay little to no attention to daily news coverage.

Age differences were equally pronounced at the upper end of the scale. Forty percent of older adults had a score of “4” or higher, compared with 17 percent of young adults and only 12 percent of teens. Underlying the under-representation of teens and young adults among the ranks of Americans who are avid news consumers is that fact that, even if teens and young adults do follow the news closely in one medium, they are unlikely to do so in a second medium, which is not case for older adults. (The tendency of young Americans to rely heavily on a single medium for their news will be discussed further in the report’s final section.)

Clearly, there is a wide generational gap in news consumption.¹⁸ The daily news is not an integral part of the daily lives of most teens and young adults.

NEWS STORY RECALL AS AN INDICATOR OF NEWS USE

We turn now to our second approach of measuring news exposure—people’s awareness of top news stories. As was explained earlier in this report, our survey included a battery of questions designed to measure respondents’ familiarity with specific news events. Each day of the survey, respondents were questioned about their awareness of a current top story. The next day, a new top story was the basis for questioning. The following are examples of these questions, annotated by the date the questions were inserted into the survey:

[JANUARY 30] Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day or so about the death of a famous race horse?

[ASKED OF THOSE WHO CLAIMED EXPOSURE TO THE STORY] Do you recall whether the horse died of natural causes or if it was put to death because of injury, or is this something you didn’t pay attention to or are unsure about?

[FEBRUARY 7] Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a debate in Congress on the Iraq war in which each member will be given 5 minutes to speak on the issue?

[ASKED OF THOSE WHO CLAIMED EXPOSURE TO THE STORY] Do you recall whether this debate will take place in the Senate or in the House of Representatives or is this something you didn’t pay attention to or are unsure about?

[FEBRUARY 21] Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story about the British government’s decision to withdraw its troops from Iraq?

[ASKED OF THOSE WHO CLAIMED EXPOSURE TO THE STORY] Do you recall whether the British government said it would withdraw all of its troops by the end of this year or did it say it would withdraw only some of its troops by then, or is this a part of the story you didn’t pay attention to or are unsure about?

[MARCH 2] Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about violent tornadoes that swept through several southern states killing at least 20 people?

[ASKED OF THOSE WHO CLAIMED EXPOSURE TO THE STORY] Do you recall whether the largest number of deaths was among students in a school or was it among patients in a hospital, or is this a part of the story you didn’t pay attention to or are unsure about?

Altogether, twenty stories were employed over the course of the survey. Only a small proportion of respondents were asked about each story in order to minimize its contribution to the measure’s variance.^j The goal was to obtain a snapshot of Americans’ awareness of the “typical” top story, as opposed to their awareness of individual stories.^k

j. On average about 30 young adults and 30 older adults were questioned about each story, though the number varied somewhat from one interviewing day to the next. The respondents have been weighted to equalize the number of younger and older respondents exposed to each story, so that no story would contribute more to the variation within one age category than it did to the variation in the other.

The questions constitute an “easy” test of news awareness. The lead-in question provided enough information to aid the memory of any respondent who might have paid even passing attention to the story in question. Respondents who claimed awareness of the story were then assisted in their recall of the factual element by being offered two choices, one of which was factually correct.

At that, the test was too “hard” for most respondents. Roughly half said they were unaware of the story, and some of the respondents who claimed awareness were insincere or mistaken. A few respondents said, for example, that they saw the story in question in a weekly news magazine—an impossibility in that respondents were questioned about a story for only a short period after it surfaced and therefore before it could have appeared in a weekly magazine. It can safely be assumed that some respondents who cited a plausible source of the story also wrongfully claimed to have encountered it. Wrongful claims were also apparent in answers to the question about the story’s factual element. Of the respondents who picked one of the two factual alternatives, as opposed to those who admitted they could not recall it, roughly one in five picked the incorrect one. It should be assumed that about the same proportion of those who picked the correct one did so by guessing. When guessing is taken into account,^l only about 40 percent of the respondents who claimed

exposure to a story actually knew the factual element. (The figures presented in the following sections have not been adjusted to account for guessing or wrongful claims.)^m

Story and “Fact” Recall by Age

On rare occasions, a news story will spread rapidly across nearly the whole of the population. A study found that within three hours of its occurrence, the vast majority of Americans knew of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.¹⁹

The ordinary top story reaches many fewer people, and the age differences are substantial (see Table 4). The young adult respondents were substantially less likely (43 percent versus 62 percent) than the older respondents to claim exposure to the story. Teenage respondents were even less likely to claim exposure; their recall level was 10 percentage points below that of the young adults.ⁿ Younger adults and teens were also less likely to correctly identify the story’s factual element. Sixty percent of the older respondents who claimed to be aware of the story identified accurately the factual component. Among the young adults, the figure was 50 percent. In other words, whereas slightly more than a third of older adults claimed awareness of the story and identified accurately the factual element, only about a fifth of the young adults did so.^o

- k. It should be noted that this measurement approach is not ideally suited to assessing the news habits of individual respondents because someone who normally pays little attention to news might by chance have seen the story in question on the day he or she was interviewed whereas someone who ordinarily pays close attention might have happened by chance to have missed the story in question on the day he or she was interviewed. Accurate comparisons across groups can be made, however. A group with a higher than average level of news exposure will collectively have a greater awareness of top stories than a group with a lower than average level of news exposure.
- l. The standard procedure for correcting for guessing, and the one used for these estimates, is to reduce the proportion of accurate responses by the proportion of inaccurate ones.
- m. An examination of the data indicated that younger adults were somewhat more likely to make errors—for example, a larger proportion of them who claimed to see the story picked the wrong alternative when asked about the factual element.
- n. The teenage group is not included in Table 5 because the baseline for their story responses differs from that of young adult and older adult respondents, who were interviewed throughout the survey period. The teenage respondents were interviewed over a one-week period midway through the survey and were sampled separately from the other respondents. This feature of the survey design did not affect the previous analysis of respondents’ news habits because the teens constitute a representative sample and thus, within sampling error, their news habits are representative of those of teens as a whole. And because the teen respondents were asked exactly the same questions about the frequency and depth of their news exposure as were the young adults and older adults, direct comparisons can be made on those survey items. Direct comparisons cannot be made, however, across the full range of story-specific questions. The set of stories about which the teens were questioned is only a subset of the stories (five of the twenty stories) that were employed in the interviews with young adults and older adults. Because different stories elicited different levels of recognition, the only valid age-group comparisons are those where respondents in each age group were questioned about the same set of stories. A separate analysis was conducted on the subset of stories directed at the teen respondents, which allows direct comparisons across the three age groups. The results of this analysis are the basis for the references to teens in this section of the report. For example, the statement—“Teenage respondents were even less likely to claim exposure; their recall level was 10 percentage points below that of the young adults”—is based on the difference in the recall levels of young adults and teens on the five stories asked of both teens and young adults.
- o. If the conventional method for correcting for “guesses” had been applied, the proportions would have been 31 percent of the older respondents and a mere 17 percent of younger adults—small numbers by almost any accounting.

Awareness of Story Types: Hard News and Soft News

Although politics, government, and public affairs account for most top news stories, these “hard news” stories do not account for anywhere near all of them. In fact, coverage of “soft news” stories—stories about disasters, celebrities, and the like—has increased markedly during the past three decades.²⁰

Over the course of our survey, respondents were questioned about twenty stories, of which six were in the soft-news category. These stories, which included, for example, Anna Nicole Smith’s death (February 8) and the mountain-top rescue of three climbers and their dog (February 19) were more familiar on average to both younger and older respondents than were the hard news stories, which included, for example, Britain’s announcement of a planned troop pullout from Iraq (February 21) and the 400-point plunge in the Dow Jones industrial average in reaction to a near 10 percent drop in China’s stock market (February 27). In fact, the difference in respondents’ familiarity with the two types of stories was nothing short of extraordinary. About 75 percent of the respondents claimed to have encountered the typical soft news story, whereas only about 45 percent claimed to be aware of the typical hard news story. Of those who claimed exposure, 68 percent correctly identified the factual element in the case of a soft news story while only 45 percent did so for a hard news story.

Older respondents were more aware of both soft and hard news stories than younger respondents were, but the difference was greater in the case of hard news stories (see Table 5). For the soft news stories, the ratio was five-to-four—83 percent of older adults and 68 percent of young adults claimed awareness. For hard news stories, the ratio was five-to-three—54 percent of older adults claimed awareness while only 33 percent of young adults did so. Among teens, the awareness level of hard news stories was a whopping 30 percentage points below that of older adults but only 17 percentage points lower in the case of soft news stories.^p

Not only were the younger respondents less likely than older respondents to be aware of hard news stories, they were also less likely to correctly identify the factual element of such stories. Whereas 50 percent of older adults who claimed awareness of a hard news story correctly identified the factual element, only 39 percent of young adults did so.

Thus, even when young adults and teens consume news, which occurs at a measurably lower rate than among older adults, they are attracted disproportionately to stories that have little or no public affairs content. Said differently, young adults’

overall level of news consumption exaggerates their attention to the type of news that contributes to an informed citizenry.

Additional evidence for this claim is provided by what at first was a puzzling finding of our survey. Research studies have found that older adults are more likely than young adults to discuss public affairs,²¹ which would lead to the prediction that older respondents would be more likely to obtain news stories through another person. Yet, our survey yielded the opposite finding: young adults exposed to a story were three times more likely than older adults (12 percent versus 4 percent) to say they had heard about it from another person. Teen respondents were even more likely to report that another person, rather than direct news exposure, was the story source—28 percent of teens who claimed exposure to a story said they heard about it from another person.

This finding rests in part on young people’s response to soft news stories. Most of the time that a teen or young adult obtained the story through another person, the story in question was a soft news story. Anna Nicole Smith’s death and other soft news stories created a “buzz” among younger respondents that was not matched among older respondents.

Cognitive factors help explain why young adults are less attuned to hard news stories. Soft news stories have a uniqueness that makes them memorable and sharable, at least in the short term. The death of *Barbaro* is not the death of Anna Nicole Smith, just as a tornado tearing through a Georgia school is not the rescue of three mountain climbers and a dog from Mount Hood. The subjects of many hard news stories have a numbing sameness—another act of Congress or another presidential speech—that can block them from memory even when they get heavy coverage. A lack of knowledge, too, can be a barrier to comprehending many hard news stories. Individuals who poorly understand politics or are confused by it can fail to note a hard news story, much less a key fact about it. Studies indicate that people can hear something over and over without recognizing its existence if they have little prior knowledge or awareness of it. Their mind fails to recognize it amidst the noise of the hundreds of informational messages that come their way each day.²² In this tendency rests the significance of recent studies that show most young adults are poorly informed politically.²³ Many of them are ill-equipped to process the hard news stories they encounter.

It was not always this way. A few decades ago, as the scholar Martin Wattenberg demonstrates in his recent study, young adults’ level of political information was nearly that of older adults.²⁴ So, too,

p. The comparison of teens and older adults here is based only on the five news stories about which each of these groups was questioned.

Table 4: Story Awareness and Factual Identification, by Age

Aware of Story?	Young Adults	Older Adults
Yes	43%	62%
No	57%	38%
	100%	100%
Factual Identification		
Correct	50%	60%
Incorrect	10%	10%
DK	40%	30%
	100%	100%

Table 5: Soft News and Hard News Story Awareness and Factual Identification, by Age

	Soft News		Hard News	
Aware of Story?	Young Adults	Older Adults	Young Adults	Older Adults
Yes	68%	83%	33%	54%
No	32%	17%	67%	46%
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Factual Identification				
Correct fact	61%	74%	39%	50%
Incorrect fact	7%	3%	13%	16%
Unsure of fact	32%	23%	48%	34%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

was young adults' news exposure. The frequency and depth of Americans' exposure to television and newspaper coverage varied only marginally by age. In the late 1950s, for example, 53 percent of those in the 21-29 age group regularly read newspaper coverage of national politics, compared with 61 percent in the 30-44 age group, 60 percent in the 45-60 age group, and 57 percent of those over 60. From this evidence, Wattenberg concludes: "Overall, the correlation between age and level of attention to political stories in the newspaper was a mere .03. In sum, young, middle aged, and old alike took in newspaper coverage at about the same rate." Examining the shape of the television news audience in 1967, Wattenberg found a similar pattern. Young adults were less likely to watch the nightly news, but not by a wide margin. "There was little variation in news viewing habits by age," Wattenberg observes. "TV news producers could hardly write off young adults, given that two out of three said they had watched such broadcasts every night."²⁵

Where Americans First Got the Story

Analysts who take an optimistic view of young adults' interest in news often center their argument on "the new media" and the constantly expanding number of places where Americans can access news and news-related information. "Young people are more curious than ever but define news on their own terms," says one such analyst. "They get news where they want it, when they want it. Media is about control now. We used to wait for the news to come to us. Now news waits for us to come to it. That's their expectation. We get news on cable and on the Internet any time, any place."²⁶

To investigate this possibility, and also to obtain a sharper picture of where Americans, young and old, are getting their news, we asked those respondents who claimed awareness of the top story to indicate where they had first encountered it. The lead question was as follows:

Q. Where did you first learn of this particular news story? Was it through the newspaper, television, radio, the Internet, your cell phone, another person, or some other source?

If a respondent claimed, for example, to have first encountered the story on television, the next question was:

Q. Was it a television newscast, talk show, or entertainment show?

If the respondent said "television newscast," the follow-up question was:

Q. Was this a local newscast or a national newscast?

If the respondent said "national newscast," the next question was:

Q. Was it a broadcast network news program—such as ABC, CBS, or NBC News—or was it a cable network news program—such as CNN, Fox, or MSNBC? (INTERVIEWER: RECORD SPECIFIC NETWORK, AS OPPOSED TO "BROADCAST NETWORK" OR "CABLE NETWORK.")

At this point, the respondent was asked to identify other sources, if any, where they had also encountered the story. (The "other sources" question will not be discussed in this report because it did not produce a markedly different source distribution than was obtained from the "first source" question.)

As Table 6 indicates, respondents of all ages relied mostly on television for their news stories. Over 40 percent of teens and young adults and more than 60 percent of older adults who claimed awareness of the story in question (hereafter "the story") cited a television program as their source. No other news medium was cited even half as often. Radio news, at 15 percent, was the second most frequently cited medium by older adults. Fifteen percent of young adults and 10 percent of teens mentioned the radio, placing it third behind the Internet, which was the source of the story for 18 percent of both young adults and teens. The daily newspaper was at the bottom of the list for young adults and teens. Less than 5 percent of them cited the daily newspaper as their story source. The corresponding figure for older adults was a modest 9 percent, which was also the percentage of older adults who claimed that the Internet was their story source.⁹

These patterns roughly approximate those obtained through the measures discussed earlier. In both cases, television was far and away the most relied upon medium for young and older adults alike. On the other hand, the newspaper is a fading medium no matter what the measure. This finding is not particularly surprising when it comes to young adults, but it does confirm, contrary to what some in the newspaper industry have argued, that the newspaper has little appeal to younger Americans. Radio,

q. It should be noted that some of the respondents who obtained the story via the Internet did so through a newspaper's website. However, a substantially larger number obtained it through a television network's website, such as cnn.com, or a search engine's site, such as google.com.

Table 6: Where Respondents Claimed to First See the News Story

	Teenagers	Young Adults	Older Adults
Newspaper	3%	4%	9%
Television	41%	47%	62%
Radio	10%	16%	15%
Internet	18%	18%	9%
Another person	28%	12%	4%
Cell phone	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	2%	-
Can't recall	0%	1%	1%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 7: Percent of Respondents Who Claimed to Have Encountered the News Story, by Media Use

	Non-Users	Marginal Users	Moderate Users	Heavy Users
Newspaper	46%	55%	53%	67%
National TV News	39%	45%	60%	60%
Local TV News	40%	43%	57%	62%
Radio	47%	49%	53%	67%
Internet-News	47%	54%	57%	63%

however, was a more significant story source than would have been predicted from the earlier measures, or from the scant attention it gets from media scholars and commentators. Radio is easily America's most underrated news medium, partly because its newscasts on most stations are secondary to music and other content. This feature of radio news, however, is its strength. Radio has a larger inadvertent news audience—people who tune in for something other than news but get the news, too—than any other medium. This audience confines itself to radio's brief newscasts. Listeners without an interest in news simply switch stations when encountering lengthier programming, a reason that NPR, like the broadcast networks, has an aging audience.²⁷ In our survey's news story question, less than 1 percent of young adults cited NPR as their story source. However, for young adults with a passion for music but only a passing interest in news, radio is a primary source of news. In fact, radio news exposure was about as highly related to story recognition as was exposure to other

media (see Table 7).

Looked at through the lens of actual news stories, the Internet emerged as a more important news source for young adults and teens than it did when examined in the context of their news habits. Nearly a fifth of young adults and teens cited the Internet as their story source. It should be kept in mind that this proportion is based on the number of respondents who claimed awareness of the story. When all young adults and teens are taken into account, less than a tenth encountered the story through the Internet. Nevertheless, the Internet is clearly an important news source for young Americans who attend to news.

The American news system today is highly fragmented. News outlets abound, none of which has anywhere near a controlling share of the market, a fact readily apparent when respondents' specific story sources are examined. CNN was the most frequently cited story source. Ten percent of older adults, 9 percent of young adults, and 2 percent of teens who claimed awareness of the story said they saw it on

Table 8: Specific Sources Where Respondents Claimed to First See News Story

Television	All Respondents			Respondents Who Saw Story		
	Teens	Young	Old	Teens	Young	Old
Local newscast	4%	8%	12%	10%	19%	21%
Broadcast Network newscast	4%	3%	8%	8%	8%	14%
Cable newscast network	2%	5%	10%	4%	13%	18%
Other news-type program	.1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%
National newscast	2%	-	1%	6%	2%	2%
Nat'l talk show (host named)	-	1%	1%	-	2%	1%
Talk show (DK Host)	.1%	1%	-	3%	1%	1%
Television (DK Type)	5%	-	1%	11%	-	2%
Radio						
NPR	-	1%	1%	-	1%	2%
All news commercial station	1%	-	1%	1%	1%	2%
Music station w/ brief newscasts	2%	1%	2%	4%	4%	4%
Radio newscast (DK Type)	-	1%	-	-	2%	1%
Syndicated talk show (e.g. Limbaugh)	-	1%	1%	-	1%	2%
Local talk radio	1%	1%	2%	1%	4%	4%
Talk radio (DK)	1%	1%	-	1%	1%	1%
Radio (DK)	1%	1%	-	1%	1%	1%
Internet						
Nat'l news organization website	4%	3%	1%	8%	8%	3%
Local news organization website	-	-	-	-	1%	-
ISP/ Search engine website (e.g. google)	3%	3%	3%	7%	8%	6%
Other site (e.g. blogs)	1%	-	1%	-	2%	1%
Not sure	1%	-	-	-	-	-

r. Talk radio by comparison was cited with some frequency by teens, young adults, and older adults alike—accounting for roughly a fourth of the non-traditional story sources. A local radio talk show was mentioned as the story source in most of these cases, although syndicated national programs, such as Rush Limbaugh’s, accounted for a third of the talk-radio mentions.

Table 8: Specific Sources Where Respondents Claimed to First See News Story (continued)

Daily Newspaper	All Respondents			Respondents Who Saw Story		
	Teens	Young	Old	Teens	Young	Old
Local Paper	1%	1%	3%	3%	3%	6%
Non-local Paper	-	1%	1	-	1%	3%
Online Paper	-	-	-	-	1%	1%
Another Person						
Spouse	-	-	-	-	1%	1%
Family Member/ Relative	4%	1%		10%	3%	1%
Friend	3%	1%	1%	7%	3%	1%
Co-worker	-	2%	-	-	5%	1%
Someone Else	5%	-	-	11%	-	1%

CNN. Only a few other outlets were close to CNN’s level, and all of them were television outlets, either of the broadcast (e.g., ABC News) or cable (e.g., Fox News) variety. Nearly all of the remaining outlets were mentioned by less than 1 percent of the respondents. Nonetheless, traditional news outlets—newspapers, radio newscasts, and local and national television newscasts—collectively dominated the source mentions, accounting for three-fourths of all media mentions (see Table 8). Internet sites, talk shows, and other non-traditional sources accounted for the other fourth.

Conspicuously missing from the list of other sources were television entertainment programs. Only a tiny number of the teen or young adult respondents cited *The Daily Show* or other late-night television programming as their story source. Such programs have a hard-core following, but it is a relatively small audience in the context of the full news system.^f

The notion that young adults get their news from “a different distribution system” is not borne out by our evidence. It is true that teens and young adults make more use of “the new media” than older adults and are relatively more dependent on the Internet for news. Reliance on the new media increases as age

decreases, as the distributions in Table 9 indicate. However, the fact that many young adults spend a lot of time on the Internet and on the cell phone does not necessarily mean that they are using them as news sources. When it comes to news, young adults are far more likely to get their information from television than from one of the new media²⁸ and, within television, from a newscast rather than from an entertainment program.⁵ The large fact about teens and young adults is not that they are heavily dependent on new media but that they partake only lightly of news, whatever the source. A shift in sources is occurring, and it is in the direction of the new media, but the larger tide has been the movement away from a daily news habit.

THE NEW MATRIX: SELECTIVITY AND AVOIDANCE

As early as the 1940s, audience surveys produced an important if not particularly surprising finding: news audiences overlap. People’s interest in news, not the medium of delivery, was the force behind exposure to news. Americans who regularly read the news sections of a daily paper were more likely than other citizens to

s. A difference between young and older adults in their television preferences is that older adults rely more heavily on broadcast television newscasts than do younger adults, while the latter rely more heavily on cable television newscasts. Our study did not try to measure or explain such differences. The findings of other research would suggest, however, that a main reason why younger adults rely more heavily on cable television news is that it can be accessed at nearly any hour and thus can more easily be fitted to one’s personal schedule than broadcast television news with its dinner-hour placement. As well, young adults did not grow up on broadcast television and thus do not have a “brand loyalty” to ABC, CBS, and NBC.

read also a weekly news magazine and to listen to radio newscasts.²⁹

Studies of the 1960s and 1970s found the same general pattern, but with a twist. The correlation matrix now included television news, and its audience showed less overlap. Although regular readers of newspapers and news weeklies were more likely than light readers to watch television news, a substantial number of TV news regulars paid little attention to print news. Georgetown University's Michael Robinson was one of the first scholars to identify these viewers' significance. They constituted an "inadvertent news audience," brought to the news less by an interest in news than by an addiction to television.³⁰ The news in most markets monopolized dinner-hour television, and viewers who were intent on watching television had no choice but to sit through it.

Over time, some of these viewers developed an outright liking for news, and it rubbed off on their children. Television news was an early-evening ritual in many families and, though the children might have preferred to watch something else, it was the only programming available at the dinner hour. By the time these children finished school, many of them had acquired a news habit of their own.³¹

Television's capacity to generate interest in news through force feeding ended in the 1980s with the rapid spread of cable television. Viewers no longer had to sit through the news while waiting for entertainment programming to appear. Television evening news did not lose its regulars, a reason in the cable era why its audience has aged as it has shrunk. But TV news did lose the ability to create interest in news among adults who preferred other programming. And its capacity to generate interest in children was greatly diminished. Fewer of their parents were watching the news and, even if they were watching, the children, as a Kaiser Family Foundation study revealed, were usually in another room watching something else.³²

It was a historic moment. For 150 years the daily news audience had been expanding. The invention of the hand-cranked rotary press drove down the price of the newspaper from five cents to a penny in the 1830s, and newspaper readership immediately began to rise. By the end of the 1800s, helped along by the invention of newsprint and the steam-driven press, some metropolitan dailies were selling as many as 100,000 copies a day. Radio news came along in the 1920s, and television news followed in the 1950s. But as cable subscriptions rose rapidly in the 1980s, the news audience began to shrink with young adults in the vanguard.

To be sure, some Americans get more news now than was possible in earlier times. Twenty-four hour cable news, on-demand Internet news, and round-the-clock political talk radio are readily available to the interested citizen. Yet the same media system that

provides a rich array of news content also makes it possible for citizens to avoid the news with ease. And large numbers of Americans, particularly young Americans, largely ignore the daily news.

Some analysts look to the Internet to reverse the trend. They note the depth and breadth of its news content, and its ability to deliver news on demand. A University of Connecticut study, sponsored by the Knight Foundation, found "[a] majority of American high school students say they're plugged into mainstream news on the Internet at least weekly. Eleven percent say they consume news daily on the Internet."

What is unclear about the Internet is its capacity to create a daily news habit for those without one. Although, like television, the Internet has its addicts, their pursuits are determined largely by the interests they bring to the Web. Their pre-existing tastes and needs govern the sites they choose, a process that tends to reinforce these predispositions.³³ A recent study indicates that the Internet is not even particularly powerful in strengthening the news habit of those who use it as a news source. Compared with the typical newspaper reader or television news viewer, the typical Internet-news user spends many less minutes per day attending to the medium's news.³⁴ Even the on-demand feature of Internet news can work against the formation of an online news habit because it breaks the link between ritual and habit. Newspaper reading, for example, is a morning routine for some Americans—the almost unthinking walk to the door to retrieve the paper, followed by the almost unthinking opening of the paper to the preferred section. Research has found that online news exposure is less fixed by time, place, and routine—elements that reinforce, almost define, a habit.³⁵

The full integration on the Internet of words and images, which is only a few years away, could change this reality in ways that make Internet-based news more seductive for those who do not already have an interest. However, this integration will move the Internet closer to cable television, which, compared with broadcast television in its early decades, has more power to reinforce existing preferences, whether for news or for entertainment, than to generate new ones.

These considerations are reflected in Table 9, which shows the correlation matrix for our respondents' daily use of the different news mediums.[†] The matrix's relationships do not mirror those of the news matrix of the 1970s and earlier. Then, the correlations were strong across age groups and mediums, though less so for television because of its sizeable inadvertent news audience. The correlations in the new matrix are considerably smaller. Although it is still true—and will continue to be so—that people who follow (or ignore) the news in one medium are more likely to follow (or ignore) it elsewhere, the relationship has weakened. Compared with times past,

Table 9: The “New” Matrix: Correlation of News Use Across Media, by Age

TEENAGERS				
	Newspaper	Television	Radio	Internet
Newspaper	-			
Television	.151	-		
Radio	.080	-.010	-	
Internet	.178	.211	.055	-
YOUNG ADULTS				
Newspaper	-			
Television	.288	-		
Radio	.145	.124	-	
Internet	.117	.088	.112	-
OLDER ADULTS				
Newspaper	-			
Television	.235	-		
Radio	.146	.034	-	
Internet	-.039	-.061	.181	-

the level of citizens’ attention to news in one medium is a weaker predictor of how much news they will obtain from other media.

The new matrix reflects a softening demand for daily news, as well as an emerging “division of attention” to the various media. If the newspaper, weekly news magazine, and television once served pretty much the same interest—whether it was a person’s news interest or entertainment interest—the media today invite different uses. In the new matrix, news has its place, or no place, depending on personal preference. Mediums, too, have their place, or no place. For many younger Americans, the newspaper has almost no appeal. If these individuals have a news interest, they will find a television or Internet outlet for it, but not necessarily both. If they do not have an interest in news, they might nonetheless make heavy use of the media for other purposes.

The Internet is a versatile medium. It satisfies many of the interests and needs met by older media,

while also providing the two-way communication they do not. It is a medium that for many purposes readily displaces—improves upon and substitutes for—older media. The robustness of today’s media system has made it easy for people to pick and choose, in terms of medium as well as content. The sharp decline in newspaper circulation in the past decade, and the continuing drop in television news viewing, coincides with, and relates to, the emergence of the Internet as a medium of news, entertainment, work, and schooling. The number of hours in a day is fixed, and choices between media have to be made. Thus, the weakened correlation between what Americans get from one medium and what they get from another. A person might read the newspaper for its public affairs coverage, watch television for its entertainment programs, and use the Internet for gaming and social interaction, or any of a dozen other content and medium combinations.

The Internet cannot be faulted for the decline in

t. The “news use” variables in the correlations are those described earlier that combine frequency and depth of exposure to each medium.

news interest among young adults. Other factors, including a weakening of the home as a place where news habits are acquired, underlie this development.³⁶ Notwithstanding the cartoon father with his nose buried in the paper after a day at work, news exposure in the home was a family affair. The newspaper sections were shared, as was the space around the radio or in front of the television set. Today, media use is largely a solitary affair, a single face staring at the television or computer screen, contributing to the tendency of media use to reinforce existing interests rather than to create new ones.

In this fact rests a basis for pessimism about the future of daily news and young adults. Our findings suggest that some news surveys have overestimated either the amount of news young adults consume or the capacity of non-traditional media to take up the slack from young people's flight from traditional news sources. The findings also suggest that future surveys should concentrate on young people's behavior, as opposed to their spoken preferences. In surveys, young people say they like Internet news more than television news, but their behavior says otherwise. Young people say that the newspaper is more educational than other media, but they do not as a consequence use it as their news source. Intentions are not deeds. As Aristotle wrote in *Ethics*, "We are what we repeatedly do."

ENDNOTES

¹Quoted in *Poynteronline*, September 22, 2006.

²Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 221.

³Matthew A. Baum, *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴James McCartney, "News Lite," *American Journalism Review*, June 1997, pp. 19-21.

⁵The U.S. Census Bureau puts the figure at nine hours a day, but this amount includes such things as phone calls and business-related activities.

⁶Pew Research Center for the People & the Press survey, 2006.

⁷Quoted at a Poynter Institute Roundtable on the State of the News Media 2006, web download, May 9, 2007.

⁸API interview with David Mindich, February 16, 2005.

⁹Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997), ch. 1. Originally published in 1922.

¹⁰Donald F. Roberts, Uila G. Foehr, Victoria J. Rideout, and Mollyann Brodie, "Kids and Media at the New Millennium," A Kaiser Family Foundation Report, November 1999, p. 19. Respondent in their study, which examined media exposure broadly, gave survey answers averaging a total of 6 ½ hours of daily exposure whereas the daily logs kept by respondents showed the actual figure to be roughly 5 ½ hours.

¹¹Project for Excellence in Journalism, *The State of the News Media 2007*, p. 3.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Arbitron Annual Report, 2006.

¹⁴Project for Excellence in Journalism, *The State of the News Media 2007*, p. 1.

¹⁵See, for example, Steven Chaffee and Joan Schleuder, "Measurement and Effects of Attention to Media News," *Human Communication Research* 13 (1986): 76-107.

¹⁶See, for example, Glenn Leshner and Michael L. McKean, "Using TV News for Political Information during an Off-Year Election: Effects on Political Knowledge and Cynicism," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74, 1 (1997): 69-83.

¹⁷This finding is not unique to this study. See David T.Z. Mindich, *Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 20.

¹⁸Pew Research Center for the People & the Press report, "Online Papers Modestly Boost Newspaper Readership: Maturing Internet News Audience Broader Than Deep," July 30, 2006.

¹⁹Everett M. Rogers and Nancy Seidel, "Diffusion of News of the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001," *Prometheus* 20 (September 2002): 209-219.

²⁰Thomas E. Patterson, *Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can Do About It*. Report of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2000.

²¹Thomas E. Patterson, "Young Voters and the 2004 Election." Report of the Vanishing Voter Project, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, February 2, 2005.

- ²²See, W. Gill Woodall, Dennis K. Davis, and Haluk Sahin, "From the Boob Tube to the Black Box: Televised News Comprehension from an Information Processing Perspective," *Journal of Broadcasting* 27 (1983): 1-22.
- ²³See Cliff Zukin, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, and Michael X. Delli Carpini, *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 81-85.
- ²⁴Martin P. Wattenberg, *Is Voting for Young People?* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 32.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ²⁶Quoted in Merrill Brown, "Abandoning the News," *Carnegie Reporter*, Vol. 3, Nr. 2 (Spring 2005), p. 2.
- ²⁷Mindich, *Tuned Out*, p. 31.
- ²⁸This finding conforms to that of a Frank Magid survey for The Carnegie Corporation. See, Brown, "Abandoning the News."
- ²⁹See, Paul Lazarsfeld and Patricia L. Kendall, *Radio Listening in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1948).
- ³⁰Michael J. Robinson, "Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Video Malaise," *American Political Science Review*, 70 (June 1976): 409-32
- ³¹Patterson, *Doing Well and Doing Good*.
- ³²Roberts, et al, "Kids and Media at the New Millennium."
- ³³*Ibid.*
- ³⁴Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Online Papers Modestly Boost Newspaper Readership: Maturing Internet News Audience Broader Than Deep," opinion survey report, July 30, 2006.
- ³⁵Maria E-Len Rios and Clyde H. Bentley, "Use of Online News Sites: Development of Habit and Automatic Procedural Processing," paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Conference, August 2001, Washington, DC.
- ³⁶Patterson, *Doing Well and Doing Good*.
- ³⁷Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part B
- ³⁸Carnegie Corporation of New York and Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), "The Civic Mission of Schools," New York, 2003, p. 16.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁰National Center for Education Statistics, "NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card Highlights," U.S. Department of Education, November, 1999. See also, Judith Torney-Purta, Rainer Lehmann, Hans Oswald, and Wolfram Schulz, *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries* (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2001), pp. 62-63.
- ⁴¹Bruce O. Boston, "Restoring the Balance between Academics and Civic Engagement in the Schools," report of the American Youth Policy Forum and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Washington, D.C., 2005, p. 3.
- ⁴²Carnegie Corporation of New York and Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), "The Civic Mission of Schools," New York, 2003, p. 6; National Newspaper Association survey, 2005.
- ⁴³"Mandatory Testing and News in the Schools: Implications for Civic Education," report of the Carnegie-Knight Task Force on the Future of Journalism Education, January 2007.
- ⁴⁴National Council for the Social Studies, "Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for the Social Sciences," Washington, D.C., 1994, p. vii.
- ⁴⁵Patterson, *Doing Well and Doing Good.*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁶Marvin Kalb, *The Rise of the 'New News': A Case Study of Two Root Causes of the Modern Scandal Coverage*, report of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1998.
- ⁴⁷Tom Rosenstiel, Marion Just, Todd Belt, Atiba Pertilla, Walter Dean, and Dante Chinni, *We Interrupt This Newscast: How to Improve Local News and Win Ratings, Too* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ⁴⁸Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).
- ⁴⁹Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- ⁵⁰Commission on Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press*, report issued by Robert Hutchins, president, University of Chicago, 1947.

Appendix

The respondents surveyed for this study were randomly selected and contacted by telephone by the polling firm International Communication Research. Details on the sampling procedures and the number of respondents are provided in the introductory section of this report.

The survey had a built-in experimental component. One third of respondents were asked about their general news habits as the final questions and one-third as the first questions. The other third did not get this battery of questions. All respondents were asked the story-specific battery of questions.

General News Habit Questions

QA1. People tend to get their news about government and public affairs from different sources. How often, if at all, do you get your news from each of the following sources?

From a daily newspaper. Do you read the news pages of a newspaper every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever (GO TO QA2)
- Not at all (GO TO QA2)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA2)

When you read the news in the paper, do you usually read the stories somewhat closely or do you mostly just skim them?

- Read quite a few
- Mostly skim
- Some of both/both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

QA2. How often, if at all, do you get your news from national television, such as ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, or MSNBC. Do you watch national television news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week

- Hardly ever (GO TO QA3)
- Not at all (GO TO QA3)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA3)

When watching national television news do you usually watch most of the newscast or do you usually watch for a short while and then switch to something else?

- Watch most or all
- Watch for a short while and then switch to something else
- Something in between these two/both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

QA3. How often, if at all, do you get your news from local television. Do you watch local television news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever (GO TO QA4)
- Not at all (GO TO QA4)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA4)

When watching local television news do you usually watch most of the newscast or do you usually watch for a short while and then switch to something else?

- Watch most or all
- Watch for a short while and then switch to something else
- Something in between these two/both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

QA4. How often, if at all, do you get your news from radio. Do you listen to radio news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever (GO TO QA5)
- Not at all (GO TO QA5)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA5)

When hearing news on the radio, is it usually because you turned on the radio in order to hear the news or is it usually because the news just hap-

pens to come on when you're listening to something else?

- Turned on radio to hear news
- Just happens to come on when listening to something else
- Something in between these two/both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

QA5. How often, if at all, do you get your news from the Internet. Do you obtain news from the Internet every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever (GO TO QA6)
- Not at all (GO TO QA6)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA6)

When getting news through the Internet, is it usually because you seek out the news or is it usually because you just happen to come across it?

- Seek out the news
- Happen to come across the news
- Some of both/both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

QA6. How often, if at all, do you get your news from your cell phone or other hand-held electronic device. Do you get news through it every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all?

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever (GO TO END)
- Not at all (GO TO END)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO END)

When getting news through your cell phone or other hand-held device, is it usually because you seek out the news or is it usually because you just happen to come across it?

- Seek it out the news
- Happen to come across the news
- Some of both/Both about equally
- Not sure/don't know

Story-Specific Questions

Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story during the past day about _____ (news event that has been reported nationally was placed here; this item change each day of the survey; these items can be found under the heading "Particular Story Questions.")?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall ___ or ___ (a specific aspect of the aforementioned event), or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Yes, do recall it (or describes that part)
- No, do not recall it
- Not sure/don't know

Q3. Where did you first learn of this particular news story? Was it through the newspaper, television, radio, the Internet, your cell phone, another person, or some other source?

- Newspaper (GO TO Q3a)
- Television (GO TO Q3b)
- Radio (GO TO Q3c)
- Internet (GO TO Q3d)
- Another person (GO TO Q3e)
- Cell phone (GO TO Q3f)
- Magazine (GO TO QA1)
- Some other source (GO TO Q 3g)
- Not sure (GO TO QA1)

Q3a. Which newspaper was this? Was it your local newspaper or a different one like USA Today or the Wall Street Journal (PROBE FOR NAME OF NEWSPAPER IF NOT THE LOCAL ONE)?

- My local paper (GO TO QA1)
 - USA Today
 - Wall Street Journal
 - New York Times
 - Washington Post
 - Los Angeles Times
 - Chicago Tribune
 - Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
 - Not sure/don't know
- All responses go to QA1*

Q3b. Was this television program a newscast or a talk show?

- Newscast (GO TO Q3b1)
- Talk show (GO TO Q3b2)
- Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA1)

Q3b1. Was this a local newscast or a national newscast?

- Local newscast (GO TO QA1)
- National Newscast (GO TO Q3b1a)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA1)

Q3b1a. Which network's newscast were you watching when you saw the story?

- ABC News
- NBC News
- CBS News
- CNN
- Fox News
- MSNBC
- Daily Show with Jon Stewart
- Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert
- Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
- Not sure/don't know
All responses go to QA1

Q3b2. Which talk show were you watching?

- Oprah Winfrey
- O'Reilly Factor (Bill O'Reilly)
- Hardball with Chris Matthews
- Larry King Live
- David Letterman Show
- Jay Leno Show
- Conan O'Brien Show
- Real Time with Bill Maher
- Daily Show with Jon Stewart
- Colbert Report with Stephen Colbert
- Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
All responses go to QA1

Q3c. Was the radio program a newscast or a talk show?

- Newscast (GO TO Q3c1)
- Talk show (GO TO Q3c3)
- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA1)

Q3c1. What type of radio station was it? Was it a news and public affairs station or was it a music station that provides the news every hour or so or was it another type of station?

- News station (GO TO Q 3c2)
- Music station with brief newscasts (GO TO QA1)
- Other type (RECORD RESPONSE) (GO TO

QA1)

- Not sure/don't know (GO TO QA1)

Q3c2? Was it an NPR station or a commercial station?

- NPR
- Commercial station
- Other type (RECORD RESPONSE)
- Not sure/don't know
All responses go to QA1

Q3c3. Which radio talk show was it?

- A local talk show
- NPR show
- Rush Limbaugh
- Sean Hannity
- Bill O'Reilly
- Howard Stern
- Michael Savage
- Don Immus
- Al Franken
- Laura Schlessinger
- Laura Ingraham
- Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
- Not sure/don't know
All responses go to QA1

Q3d. What type of website was this? Was it a news website or was it another type of website that has news on it?

- News organization's website (GO TO Q3d1)
- Another type of website (GO TO Q3d2)
- Not sure what type of website it is (GO TO Q3d2)
- Don't remember (GO TO QA1)

Q3d1. Which news organization's website was it?

- Local newspaper's website
- Local television station's website
- Local radio station's website
- New York Times
- Washington Post
- USA Today
- Wall Street journal
- CNN
- MSNBC
- Fox
- ABC, CBS, or NBC
- PBS
- NPR
- Google News
- Yahoo News
- AOL
- Comcast/Cox Cable homepage
- Drudge Report

- Blogger
 - Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
 - Don't know/not sure
- All go to QA1*

Q3d2. Which website was it?

- Google
 - Yahoo
 - AOL
 - Window's Internet Explorer
 - Other (RECORD RESPONSE):
 - Not sure/don't know
- All go to QA1*

Q3e. Did the person tell you about this story in person, by phone, or through email?

- In person
 - By phone
 - Through email
 - Other
 - Not sure/don't know
- ALL GO TO Q 3E1*

Q3e1. Was this person your spouse, another family member or relative, a friend, a co-worker, or someone else?

- Spouse
 - Family member/relative
 - Friend
 - Co-worker
 - Someone else
- Don't recall
All go to QA1

Q3f. Was the source of the cell phone information a call from another person, a text message, a web site you visited, a podcast, or something else?

- Another person
 - Text message
 - Website
 - Podcast
 - Something else (RECORD RESPONSE)
- All go to QA1*

Q3g. Which magazine was that?

- Time
 - Newsweek
 - US News
 - Economist
 - Other (RECORD RESPONSE)
 - Not sure/don't know
- All go to QA1*

Particular Story Questions

(First Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story during the past day about a very large battle near an Iraqi city in which more than a hundred Iraqi insurgents were killed by U.S. forces?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether this battle took place near the capital city of Baghdad or near the holy city of Najaf, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Baghdad or capital city
- Najaf or holy city (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Second Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about the death of a famous race horse?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the horse died of natural causes or whether it was put to death because of injury, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Natural causes
- Was put down (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Third Interviewing Day) (Note: This question was dropped from the story analysis because the ICR computer system failed to include it in the interviews with respondents in the 31-and-over age category)

Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day that reported an important archeological discovery relating to Stonehenge, the ancient stone monument in England?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1

- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the archeological discovery was at Stonehenge itself or was it several miles away, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Stonehenge itself
- Several miles away (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Fourth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about the blunder Senator Joe Biden made when announcing his presidential candidacy?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether Senator Biden's blunder was a comment about another presidential candidate or a comment about President Bush, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Comment about another presidential candidate/about Barack Obama (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Comment about President Bush
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Fifth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a major report on global warming that has just been issued by an international panel of leading scientists

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the report said that sea levels would rise significantly during the next century or that sea levels would stay pretty much the same and might even fall, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Sea levels will rise (CORRECT ANSWER)

SWER)

- Sea levels will fall or stay the same
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Sixth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a NASA astronaut who has been arrested on criminal charges?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the astronaut is alleged to have threatened another person or is alleged to have stolen something valuable or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Threatened another person (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Stolen something valuable (Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know)

(Seventh Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a debate in Congress on the Iraq war in which each member will be given 5 minutes to speak on the issue?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether this debate will take place in the Senate or in the House of Representatives or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Senate
- House of Representatives (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Eighth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about the testimony that NBC's Tim Russert is giving at the Scooter Libby criminal trial in Washington?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether Tim Russert is testifying on behalf of Scooter Libby or is Russert testifying against Scooter Libby, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Testifying on behalf of Scooter Libby
- Testifying against Scooter Libby (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Ninth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about the death of TV actress Anna Nicole Smith?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether she died in Florida or in California, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Died in Florida (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Died in California
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Tenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about weapons from Iran allegedly being used against U.S. forces in Iraq?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether this information was released at a White House news conference or was it released at a military briefing, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Released at a White House news conference
- Released at a military briefing (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Eleventh Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a gunman who shot and killed five people in a shopping mall?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the shooting took place in Florida or in Utah, or is this something you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Took place in Florida
- Took place in Utah (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Twelfth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a nuclear disarmament agreement that the Bush administration helped to negotiate?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall the country that has agreed to disarm? Was it Iran or was it North Korea, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- North Korea (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Iran
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Thirteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a large layoff of workers by one of the nation's automakers?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall which automaker it was? Was it Ford, Chrysler, or General Motors, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Ford
- Chrysler (CORRECT ANSWER)
- General Motors
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Fourteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story about a vote that was just taken in the U.S. House of Representatives on President Bush's decision to send an additional 21,000 troops to Iraq?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether a majority of the House members voted to support the troop buildup or whether a majority voted against the troop buildup, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Voted to support the troop buildup
- Voted to oppose the troop buildup (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Fifteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story about the press conference that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held after her meeting in Jerusalem with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether Secretary Rice announced that an agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians had been reached or whether she said the two sides had been unable to reach agreement, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Ended with an agreement
- Ended without an agreement (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Sixteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story about the rescue of three mountain climbers who along with their dog got stranded in a snow-storm?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the rescue took place at Mount Washington in New Hampshire or was at Mount Hood in Oregon, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Mount Washington in New Hampshire
- Mount Hood in Oregon (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Seventeenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about the British government's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the British government said it would withdraw all of its troops by the end of this year, or that it would withdraw part of its force, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Withdraw all of its troops
- Withdraw part of its force (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Eighteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about statements that Vice President Dick Cheney made about China during a speech he gave in Australia?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether Vice President Cheney praised China for its policies or did he criticize the Chinese government, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Praised China
- Criticized China (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Nineteenth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about a very sharp drop in the price of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the drop in the U.S. stock market was triggered by a drop in China's stock market or was it triggered by the slowdown in the U.S. housing market, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Drop in China's stock market (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Slowdown in U.S. housing market
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

(Twentieth Interviewing Day) Q1. Now I would like to ask you about something that has been in the news during the past day. Not everyone will have heard about it. Do you recall a news story of the past day about violent tornadoes that swept through several southern states killing at least 20 people?

- Yes
- No—go to QA1
- Don't know—go to QA1
- Refused—go to QA1

Q2. Do you recall whether the largest number of deaths was among students in a school or was it among patients in a hospital, or is this a part of the story you didn't pay attention to or are unsure about?

- Students at a school (CORRECT ANSWER)
- Patients at a hospital
- Didn't pay attention/not sure/don't know

The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy



John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138



Phone: 617-495-8269
Fax: 617-495-8696
www.shorensteincenter.org

Joan Shorenstein Center
PRESS • POLITICS



• PUBLIC POLICY •

John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University