

# PewResearchCenter

## Journalism & Media

FEBRUARY 9, 2017

HOW AMERICANS ENCOUNTER, RECALL AND ACT UPON DIGITAL NEWS

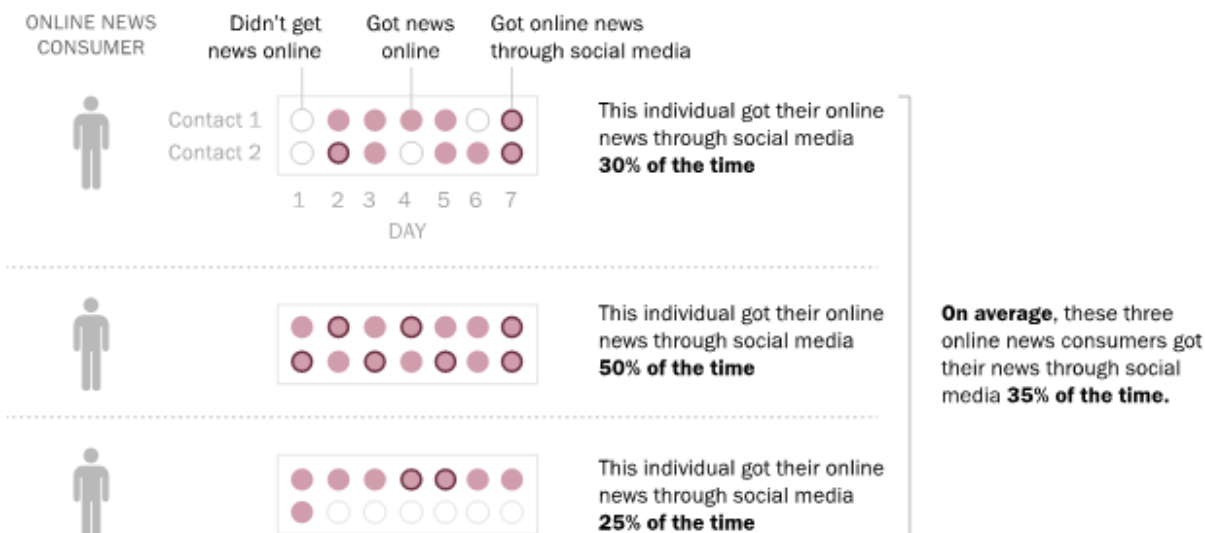
### 1. Part I: An analysis of individuals' online news habits over the course of one week

BY AMY MITCHELL ([HTTP://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/STAFF/AMY-MITCHELL](http://www.pewresearch.org/staff/amy-mitchell)), JEFFREY GOTTFRIED ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/JGOTTFRIED/](http://www.journalism.org/author/jgottfried/)), ELISA SHEARER ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/ESHEARER/](http://www.journalism.org/author/eshearer/)) AND KRISTINE LU ([HTTP://WWW.JOURNALISM.ORG/AUTHOR/KRLU/](http://www.journalism.org/author/krlu/))

The first part of this report examines individuals' online news tendencies over the course of one week.

To do this, as indicated in the illustration below, the frequency of each respondent's behavior was calculated as a percent of all the times he or she reported getting news online. For example, if someone got news 10 times, and did so through social media three of those times, that person got news through social media 30% of the time. Researchers then combined the figures for all 2,004 online news consumers (<http://www.journalism.org/2017/02/09/experiential-appendix-key-concepts/#news-consumer>) and calculated the average rate of each behavior.

*Twice a day, online news consumers were asked if they got digital news in the past two hours*

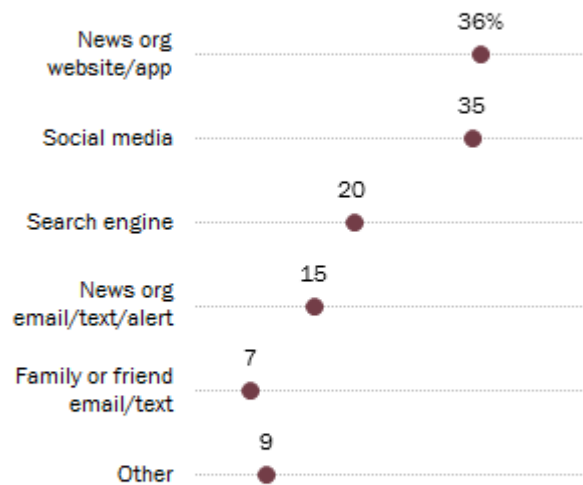




## News websites and social media equally common as pathways to news; most consumers partial to one method

### Social media and news websites equally likely to be pathways to online news

*% of the time, on average, consumers got online news through ...*



Note: Respondents were asked about the news they got on their main topic in each instance. Numbers add to more than 100% because respondents could report using more than one pathway in each survey.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 24-March 1, 2016.

"How Americans Encounter, Recall and Act Upon Digital News"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The study asked about five separate pathways: news organizations' websites and apps; social media; search engines; emails, texts and alerts from news organizations; and emails and texts from friends or family. Each mini-survey asked online news consumers to indicate any and all pathways used to get news about the topic (<http://www.journalism.org/2017/02/09/experiential-appendix-key-concepts/#main-news-topic>) they got most in the past two hours.

Overall, social media and news organizations' websites and apps were used far more than the other three. On average, 36% of the times individuals got news online, they did so by going directly to a news organization's website or app. That's about the same rate at which they got news through social media (35%). Less common was getting news through search engines (20%); through emails, texts and alerts from news organizations (15%); and through emails and texts from friends or family (7%).

In addition, most people tended to favor one pathway over the others.

About two-thirds (65%) of online news consumers got news through the same pathway more than half of the times they got news.<sup>1</sup> Again, social media and news organizations' websites and apps were the most common. About a quarter (26%) of online news consumers consistently got news through social media, and about the same portion (23%) did so from news organizations' websites and apps. Less than one-in-ten consistently got

news through search engines (8%); through news organizations' emails, texts and alerts (7%); or through the emails and texts of friends or family (1%).

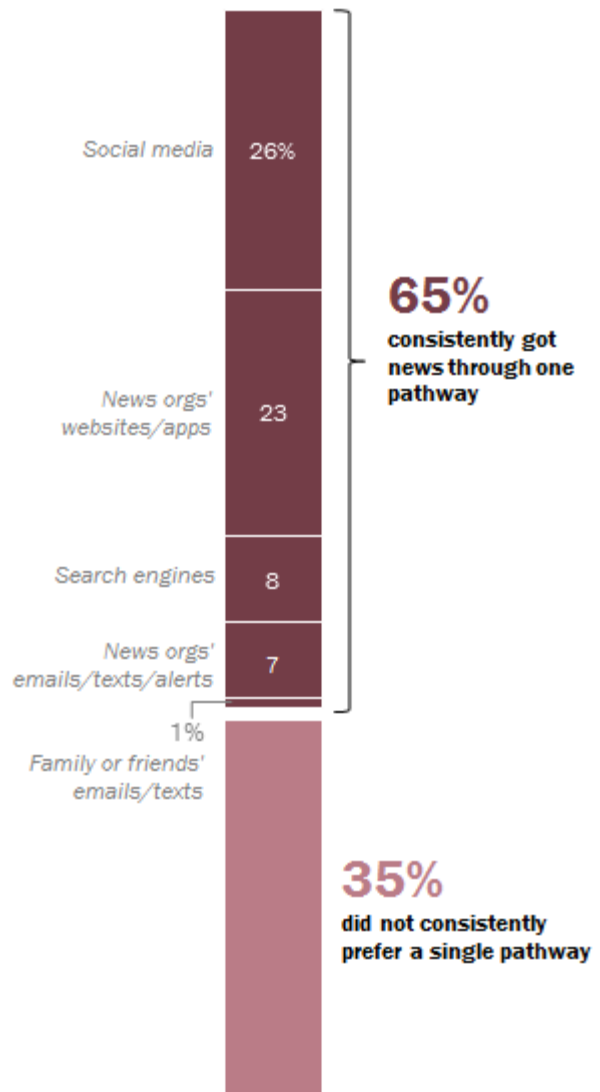
The remaining 35% of online news consumers did not have a preference for one of the five pathways asked about – either grazing across pathways or using some other means of finding news, such as through a news aggregator or browser home page.

As for the topic of the news, politics was by far the most popular during the week studied (Feb. 24 to March 1, 2016), which came at the height of the presidential primary and included Super Tuesday. On average, 40% of the times people got news, government and politics was their primary or only news topic (i.e. their *main news topic* (<http://www.journalism.org/2017/02/09/experiential-appendix-key-concepts/#main-news-topic>)). All other topics fell far behind, with entertainment, the next highest, at just 16%. No other topic – including community, business and finance, or sports news – was the main topic more than 10% of the time.

On average, when consumers got news, it was about just one topic 47% of the time. They got news on two topics a quarter of the time on average, and on three or more topics 28% of the time. However, over the course of the study, respondents reported getting fewer topics, which might be in part due to asking the survey multiple times over the week.

## Most favor a single pathway for online news

*% of consumers who got online news through the same pathway more than half of the time*



Note: Respondents were asked about the news they got on their main topic in each instance. Consistency is defined as getting news through the same pathway more than half of the time.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 24-March 1, 2016.

"How Americans Encounter, Recall and Act Upon Digital News"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The findings reveal that consumers do occasionally come across news while already getting news about something else. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the time, on average, people learned about their main topic of news after getting news about another news topic. But that was less often than purposefully seeking news out (39% of the time on average) or happening upon it while doing something else online (36% of the time).



## Age and gender differences across a week of online news behaviors

### Pathways to news

Consistent with previous findings

(<http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/young-adults/>)

, younger online news consumers are more likely

than older ones to get news through social media.

On average, 18- to 29-year-old online news consumers got their news through social media 47% of the time, about double the rate of those 50 and older (23%), and about on par with those ages 30 to 49 (42%). The one pathway in which older online news consumers (those 50 and older) stand out, on the other hand, is news organizations' emails, texts and alerts. The other three pathways were accessed at about the same rate by all age groups.

Looking at gender, women who consume news online got news through social media somewhat more often than male online news consumers – 39% versus 30% of the time, on average. Younger women particularly stand out. Women ages 18-29 and 30-49 got news through social media about half of the time on average (47% and 49%, respectively), compared with 28% for women 50 and older. Men, meanwhile, stand out for a greater tendency to go directly to a news website or app.

## Social media is a more common pathway to news for younger and female online news consumers

*% of the time, on average, consumers got online news through ...*

	Social media	News org website/app	Search engine	News org email/text/alert	Family or friend email/text
18-29	47%	31%	19%	9%	7%
30-49	42	36	18	13	5
50+	23	37	23	19	8
Men	30	43	21	14	6
Women	39	29	20	15	7

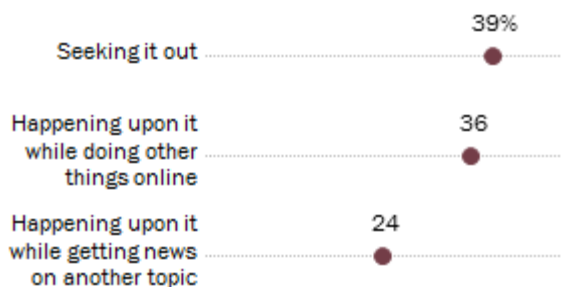
Note: Respondents were asked about the news they got on their main topic in each instance.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 24-March 1, 2016.

"How Americans Encounter, Recall and Act Upon Digital News"

## The online news experience is a mix of deliberateness and serendipity

*% of the time, on average, consumers got online news by ...*



Note: Respondents were asked about the news they got on their main topic in each instance.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 24-March 1, 2016.

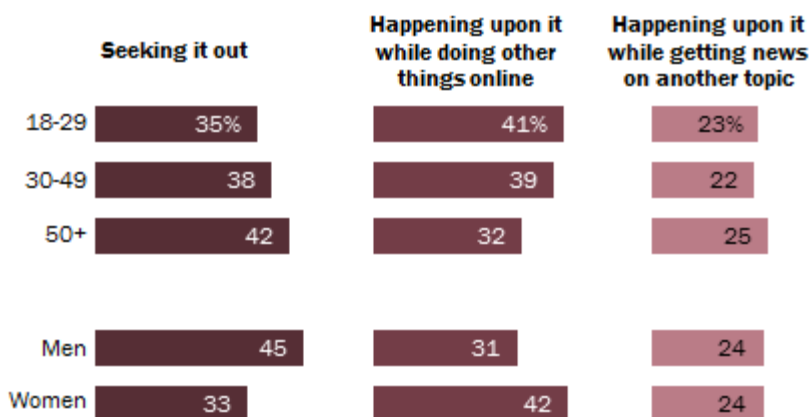
"How Americans Encounter, Recall and Act Upon Digital News"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

---

## Older and male online news consumers more likely to seek out their news

*% of the time, on average, consumers got online news by ...*



Note: Respondents were asked about the news they got on their main topic in each instance.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 24-March 1, 2016.

"How Americans Encounter, Recall and Act Upon Digital News"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

---