



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 27, 2011

Internet News Hits New Height of Popularity

For the so-called “old media,” it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Last week the Pew Research Center for The People and The Press released a survey whose results indicate that 43 percent of Americans now claim to get most of their news from Internet sources.

This figure represents a record number of respondents citing the web as their primary provider of information on issues of national and international importance.

Television news is declining as Internet news is rising. The number of Americans polled by the Pew group that identified television as their first choice for news is at a record low. Sixty-six percent still claimed to look to TV for their news.



For 20 years the Pew organization has been asking Americans: “How do you get most of your news about national and international issues?”

According to a [synopsis](#) of the survey:

Respondents are allowed to give up to two answers. (So, a person can cite both television and the Internet, or television and radio, or newspapers and television, etc., as the places where they get most of their news — and the combined percentages for the various sources can add up to more than 100 percent).

There have been a few instances in the past two decades when Americans have apparently turned to television for the latest news on current events. First, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, 90 percent of those surveyed cited television as their primary news source. Then again after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, nearly that number said TV was their choice for news. During the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe nearly 90 percent tuned in for the story of the storm of the century.

Such results are aberrations, however, as one [article](#) noted:

During normal news times — when there was not a major act of war or natural disaster — TV hit its apex in January 1996, when 88 percent said it was the place they got most of their national and international news.

When Americans do actually turn on the TV looking for the latest news on top national and international affairs, the networks reported to be most often watched are as follows:

MSNBC: 6 percent

CBS: 7



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ABC: 8

NBC: 10

CNN: 15

Fox News: 19

Fox News Channel has remained atop this list since dethroning CNN in the Pew poll taken in late July of 2009. MSNBC has consistently ranked lowest among television network news providers picked by respondents as their preferred programming.

Of course, the expansion of the Internet and the proliferation of web-based journalism may be cited as the cause of the crescendo in preference for Internet news sources.

In fact, it was not until early in 1999 that the Internet made its debut on the Pew research group's list of news sources. In January of that year, six percent pointed to the web as the preeminent provider of news and information regarding national and international events.

While the results were not tabulated to indicate their use for dissemination of news, 44 percent of respondents reported "regularly" using the social network sites Facebook and Twitter. As has been widely reported, both of these services have begun to play integral roles in the reporting of "on the ground" conditions by amateur reporters and eyewitnesses to worldwide disasters and conflicts.

By contrast, however, when it comes to matters of local concern, a majority of respondents still turn to television news stations for their information. Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed identified local television channels as their source for "most of [their] local news."

Television isn't the only segment of the traditional media dropping in popularity. When it comes to issues of national and international importance, only 31 percent of respondents identified newspapers as their primary source of information. Newspapers have seen their appeal plummet since reaching a nadir of popularity in September 1995. Not even big stories with broad interest are enough to compel Americans to read the paper.

The breakdown of websites cited by those claiming to use the Internet for their news and information is provided by the Pew poll and is listed as follows:

Yahoo: 30 percent

CNN: 19

Local TV/radio/news sites: 12

Google: 12

MSN: 10

Fox: 9

New York Times: 6

AOL: 6

MSNBC: 5

Facebook: 4

Drudge Report: 4



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Wall Street Journal: 3

BBC: 2

Washington Post: 2

ABC: 2

Huffington Post: 2

Internet service provider: 1

USA Today: 1

Atlanta Journal-Constitution: 1

CBS: 1

AP/Reuters: 1

Politico: 1

Newsmax: 1

Comcast: 1

NPR: 1

The Guardian: 1

Other: 30

Evidently, although there is a large plurality of Americans for whom the Internet is becoming the go-to source for critical news and information of national and international import, there is no such consensus as to the site they look to for that data. In fact, if the results of this Pew Research poll are reliable, then Internet journalism is wide open and a host of organizations can improve upon their numbers and become premier providers of news to the majority of Americans yet to log on to the net before they turn on the TV.

For the survey released yesterday, the Pew Research Center for The People and The Press interviewed 1,501 adults from July 20-24. The survey's margin of error is reported to be +/- 3.5 points.



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