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Traditional or Tik Tok News?

How Americans Get Their News Is Changing

By

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I've been saying (and writing) for years that Americans were moving from *traditional* methods of news and information to *new media* methods. I also said that Americans were becoming more interested in entertainment and lifestyle information than hard news. Pew Research just supported that a couple of months ago —

A new Pew Research Center analysis of the accounts Americans follow on TikTok highlights the centrality of internet-native content creators, prominent influencers and traditional celebrities on the popular short-form video platform. It also finds that users choose to follow far more accounts that post about pop culture and entertainment than those posting about news or politics.

[Pew Research](#)

As a communications specialist and journalist for almost 60 years, I've watched the slow move away from 'fact-based' news and information coverage to the 'feeling-based' news and information coverage that came during the era of 'social media' growth.

The rules for journalists when I started covering news in the 1960s were stringent. News coverage had to be accurate and objective. Journalists had to be curious, skeptical, and unbiased in their coverage. They had to carefully gather, confirm, then report the news — with proper followup.

I began noticing a ‘shift in the force’ in the 1990s. It gained steam with the growth of the Internet and social media. I noticed that the young mass comm and journalism students I met on university campuses were asking different questions about working in the media. Many seemed more interested in what media professions could do for them than what they could do for the media and ‘the public’ the media was supposed to serve.

That was 30 years ago, which makes this information from Pew Research more understandable given that many Millennials and all of Gen Z have come along since then —

What types of accounts do U.S. adults follow on TikTok?

Broadly, they follow lots of creators and influencers who have risen to their current level of prominence via social media, as well as traditional celebrities. Together, these groups are around half of all the accounts followed by U.S. adults on the platform and the vast majority of the 100 accounts followed by the largest share of U.S. adults.

But they follow very few politicians, civic actors or traditional media outlets and journalists. Each of these groups makes up less than half of 1% of all the accounts we examined. And the typical U.S. adult on TikTok follows *no* accounts in each of these categories.

[Pew Research](#)

Axios has an interesting take on Pew's research -

Between the lines: Creators often reference mainstream media coverage or news stories in their content, so traditional news does reach TikTok users even if they aren't following specific journalist or publication.

What they're saying: "To the extent that people are getting news about politics or current events on TikTok, it is coming from people who don't necessarily look like traditional journalists, and it's probably interspersed with a lot of very non-traditional content — like skits, funny dances or promotional content, " says Aaron Smith, managing director of Pew Research Center's data labs.

- "It speaks to this broader notion that people's world news or politics comes as a side dish to their main course of gossipy entertainment news and the content of the creator that they happen to be interested in."

[Axios](#)

The Future of News?

As much as I might wish for a return to the ‘good old days’ of journalism, I understand that time keeps moving — and things keep changing. Journalists and other communicators of ‘information’ will need to find ways to help younger generations develop a stronger interest in ‘real news.’

I don’t think we have to bend the rules of good journalism to accomplish that. I think we need to be smart about what we do and how we do it. We need to learn as much as we can about how to communicate truthful information on the platforms where people are going for news and information.

My hope is that I can help in some small way toward that goal in the coming months and years.



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