

## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### Media Use Among Young People

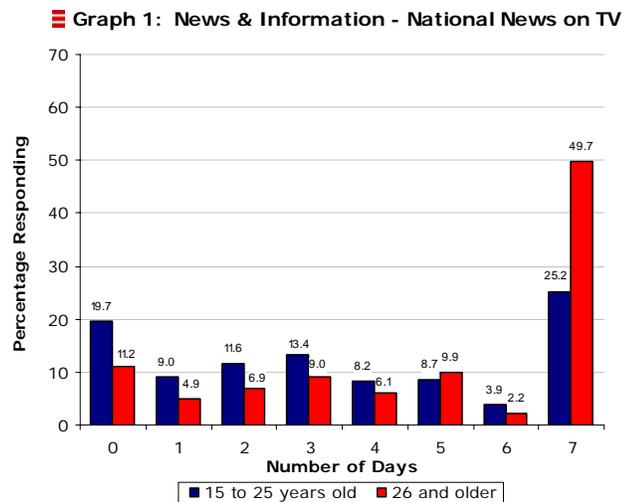
By Michael Olander, Research Assistant<sup>1</sup>  
July 2003

There appears to be no preferred medium among young Americans when it comes to the acquisition of news and information. Around one quarter of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25 use television, radio, or newspapers to obtain news on a daily basis (25.2 percent, 22.9 percent, and 21.5 percent, respectively). In contrast, only 9.5 percent of young people use the Internet for news seven days a week.

In September 2002 CIRCLE released a study entitled "*The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*."<sup>2</sup> This fact sheet uses data from a survey that informed that study and illustrates the different ways in which Americans gather news and information about politics.<sup>3</sup> For purposes of comparison, it also uses data from the General Social Survey series.<sup>4</sup>

#### American youth display no clear-cut preference, although TV remains the dominant source of news

Despite the popularity of the Internet in general among young people (30.9 percent of young Americans access the Internet seven days a week), television remains their preferred method of obtaining news and information. About one quarter of young Americans (25.2 percent) use television to obtain news seven days a week, and about half, 46 percent, watch TV news at least four days a week.



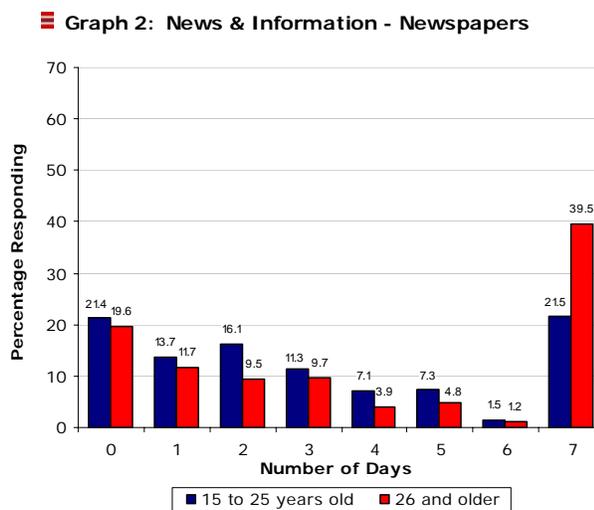
Source: *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, September 2002.

Despite the widely held view that young people are the most avid consumers of television programming, older Americans are actually more likely to turn to television for daily news. Almost half, 49.7 percent, of older Americans (aged 26 and above) say they watch television news every day of the week – almost twice the proportion of young Americans.

Older Americans are also more likely to be casual consumers of television news – 67.9 percent of those over 26 watch television news at least four days per week, while less than half of young Americans say the same.

### Print News Lags in Popularity

Considering the popularity of television as a news source and the popularity of the Internet among young people in particular, the fact that newspapers trail in popularity as a news source is not surprising. Only slightly more than one third of young Americans (37 percent) go to a paper for news more than three days a week, while close to half of older respondents (49.4 percent) do likewise. Similarly, young Americans are less likely to be avid readers of printed news than are their elders – only 21.5 percent of younger Americans claim to read a newspaper seven days a week, compared to 39.5 percent of older Americans.



Source: *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, September 2002.

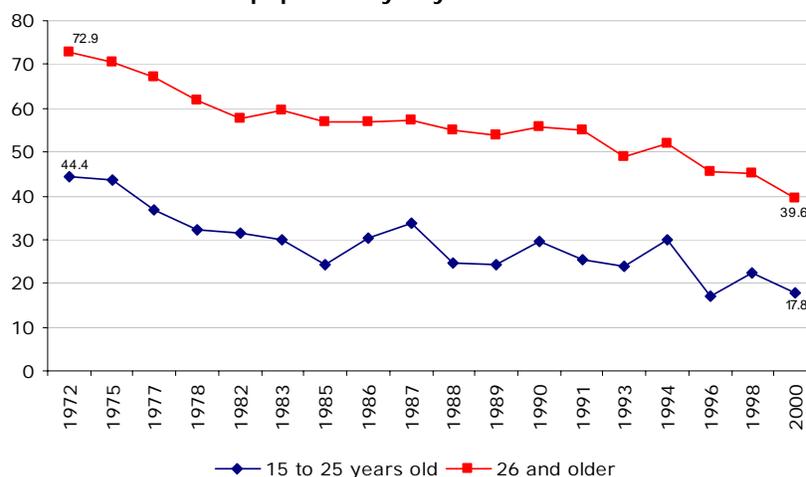
While newspapers are less popular among young Americans than among those over 25, the popularity of papers as a daily news source has been steadily declining among all Americans over the past two decades. In the early 1970s almost three quarters (72.9 percent) of those over 25 said they read a newspaper every day; by the end of the century that figure had fallen to under forty percent. Young Americans display a similar trend. In 1972 44.4 percent of those between 18 and 25 read the paper every day, by the year 2000 that figure had fallen to 17.8 percent. (See Graph 3.)

Surprisingly, it appears that television is not directly responsible for this decline, either among youth or adults. Instead, the level of television viewership has remained fairly steady since the early 1970s. In fact, the average amount of television watched by Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 declined slightly in this period – from an average of 3.27 hours per day in 1972 to 2.93 hours per day in 2000.

Television consumption among those over the age of 25 remained more or less unchanged during this period, starting at 3.0 hours per day in 1972 and dipping slightly to 2.98 hours per day in 2000. (See Graph 4.)

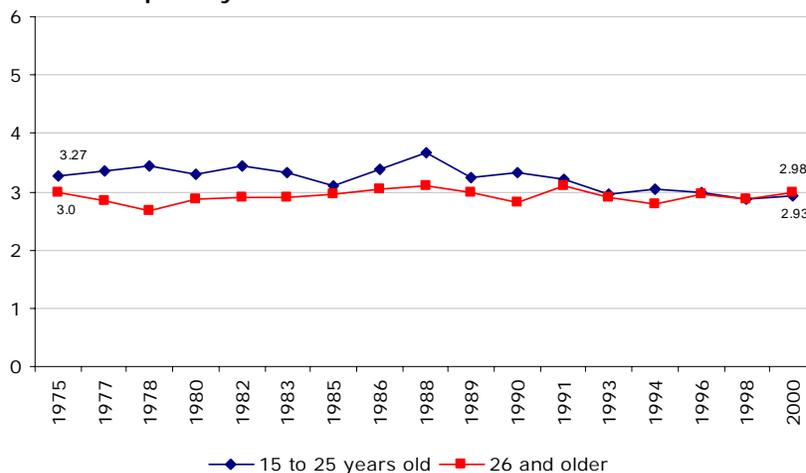
Americans are even less likely to get their news from other print sources. Almost two thirds of both groups never read news magazines and less than ten percent of each read news magazines more than three times a week. Even when one considers that most magazines are published weekly, they still lag far behind TV and newspapers – only about one third of both groups (37 percent of young Americans and 31.6 percent of older Americans) read news magazines at all during a typical week.

**Graph 3: Trends in media Consumption, Percentage who read a newspaper every day**



Source: General Social Survey, 1972 to 2000.

**Graph 4: Trends in media Consumption, Hours of TV watched per day**



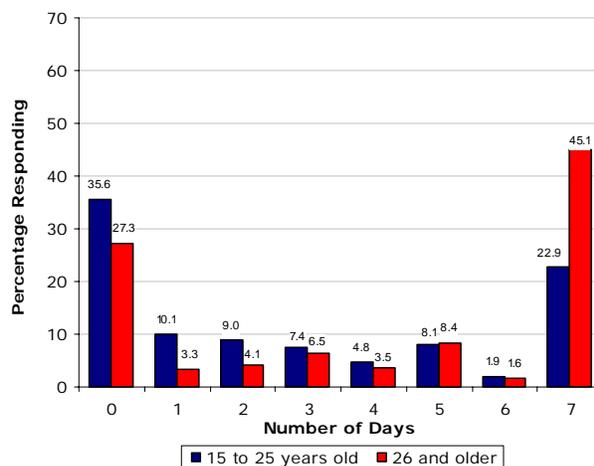
Source: General Social Survey, 1972 to 2000.

## Radio More Popular than Print or the Internet

Radio eclipses print as Americans' second-favorite way to get news and information. Over one third of young Americans (37.7 percent) get news from radio four or more days a week, and a little less than one quarter, 22.9 percent, listen to radio news on a daily basis. Radio news is even more popular among older Americans. Almost sixty percent (58.6) of older Americans get news from radio at least four days a week, and almost half of the population over 25 (45.1 percent) says it listens to radio news every day of the week.<sup>5</sup>

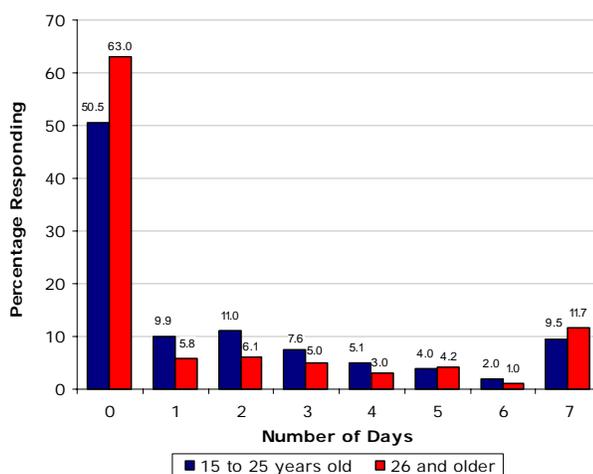
Interestingly, the Internet does not appear to be a more popular source for news and information among young people. While 20.6 of young Americans say they go to the Internet for news at least four days a week, a comparable number of older Americans, 19.9 percent, say the same. Similarly, while 9.5 percent of young Americans use the Internet for news every day, an even greater percentage of older Americans, 11.7 percent, are daily Internet news consumers.

■ Graph 5: News & Information - News on the Radio



Source: *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, September 2002.

■ Graph 6: News & Information - News on the Internet



Source: *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, September 2002.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Dwayne Wright of CIRCLE for the excellent research into the topic of media usage among American youth. I also thank Professor Mark Hugo Lopez, Carrie Donovan, and Emily Hoban Kirby for helpful comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The survey and report was authored by Scott Keeter of the Pew Center for the People & the Press and George Mason University, Cliff Zukin of Rutgers University, Molly Andolina of DePaul University, and Krista Jenkins of Rutgers University.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were read the following question: "I'm going to read you some ways that people get news and information. Thinking about the past week, please just tell me how many days you have done each over the past seven days."

<sup>4</sup> General Social Survey (GSS) data is made available by the Computer-assisted Survey Methods Program (CSM) at the University of California, Berkeley. It can be accessed at <http://sda.berkeley.edu>.

<sup>5</sup> Although the survey did not delve into the topic of transportation, the popularity of radio news among older Americans may be due to the importance of commuting and prevalence of car ownership among Americans over 25.