

# If it catches my eye

An exploration of online news  
experiences of teenagers

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## Media Management Center

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## An Exploration of Online News Experiences of Teenagers

Media Management Center, Northwestern University  
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# IF IT CATCHES MY EYE

## An Exploration of Online News Experiences of Teenagers

### Executive summary

Teenagers aren't much into following serious news online, but news organizations can – and should – cultivate their interest by learning how to catch their eyes, diminish their angst, go where they are, enlist parents and teachers in the cause, and help teens develop a “news persona,” according to a new study released by the Media Management Center at Northwestern University.

MMC conducted a qualitative, in-depth study of a diverse group of 65 Chicago-area teens in 2007, seeking to identify what drives the online news consumption of teenagers.

The research found:

- **News isn't that important to teens right now.**  
Particularly news of politics, government, public affairs and other subjects that journalists might call “serious news.” Other things are more compelling. In addition, following the news is stressful for teens: it reminds them of the peril in the world.
- **Local news sites aren't much on their radar screens.**  
Teens are not interested enough to go out of their way for news. So whatever news pops up in front of them when they turn on their computers – usually the large Internet portals and news aggregators – is what they see.
- **Even so, teens are “interestable.”**  
Researchers repeatedly heard the phrase, “I will read it IF IT CATCHES MY EYE.” Hence, the name of this report. Teens will look at many different kinds of news online if it captures their attention – with subjects that interest them, video, pictures, the right topics, humorous and weird news and new things. Once interested, they often read on. And even though they don't usually enjoy reading or watching the news, talking about it can be fun.

The report recommends that news organizations:

- **Aggressively seek to “catch the eye” of teenagers.**  
They should listen to teens and actively develop new products, campaigns and initiatives aimed at attracting teens to the news, all based on the principle of “catching the eye.” Then they should work to deepen the attraction. This includes:
  - Excelling at the subjects teens are most interested in.
  - Providing the features and functionalities they like.
  - Building on their interest in humor.

- **Get their content where teens are.**  
If teens are not coming to news sites, it is impossible to catch them there, so news organizations should get their content on the sites where teens spend their time. This includes:
  - Developing and actively marketing free widgets and tailored news feeds for teens.
  - Striking deals with local high schools, news aggregators and social networks to get news content where teens spend time.
- **Enlist teachers and parents.**  
They should use the lessons learned in Newspapers in Education programs worldwide to effectively market to teens using proven, reliable networks, like teachers and parents.
- **Seek to decrease teens' angst about news.**  
They should actively experiment with ways to diminish the negative associations teens have with news and to lift their feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. This includes:
  - Making news a springboard for talk, action and change, not just hand wringing.
  - Writing about their feeling of peril.
  - Focusing on those trying to change things, and on how teens can help.
- **Help more teens develop a "news persona."**  
They should find ways to help teens develop a feeling that following the news is a positive part of who they are, part of what makes them different from others, part of what they're proud of in themselves. They should work to intensify that feeling in those who have it – and cultivate more teens who share it. This includes:
  - Cultivating the interested.
  - Building a sense of fun on news sites.
  - Get serious about teen consumer research.

Researchers found that the sites teens use most often for news share certain characteristics:

- **They are easy to use.**  
By that, teens mean a feast of information automatically pops up; everything is there in a veritable one-stop-shop, finding stuff and going elsewhere (on the site or on the Web) is a breeze; and it's quick to use. It's a complete and varied package, with plenty to catch their eyes, including things they didn't realize they were interested in. And they can easily choose what they want to pay attention to.
- **They give teens useful information.**  
The sites provide information that helps them with school, with understanding what others are talking about, with conversation, and with various big and little questions.

- **They're seen as trustworthy.**  
The bigger and more well-known the site, the more credible it seems to teens. They showed a surprising amount of trust of the “the news” and news organizations, but, at the same time, they see aggregators like Google, Yahoo, AOL and Comcast as just as credible as traditional news organizations. They particularly trust sites that “check out” and stories that can be checked out.
- **They provide things to talk about with friends or family.**  
For teens, online news serves as a versatile social lubricant that allows them to converse with others and perhaps be the point person on certain topics. It helps them form their own opinions. Some teens – particularly those who love to discuss and argue – find it exciting or even fun to talk about the news they got online. Others see keeping up with the news as an obligation.

Researchers also found that teens don't view their favorite news sites as being a “treat,” a “time-out,” an escape, a safe place, or a place to socialize, get involved, contribute or connect. And they don't feel very strongly about online ads, positively or negatively. News sites are for news; social sites are for social. They are two different things.

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# **IF IT CATCHES MY EYE**

## **An Exploration of Online News Experiences of Teenagers**

### **About the study**

The Media Management Center at Northwestern University conducted a qualitative study of 65 Chicago-area teenagers in 2007 to explore what drives their engagement with news online. The purpose was to help news organizations more effectively attract and serve teens.

The research looked for insights into teenagers' experiences with Web sites they use for news – that is, their thoughts, feelings and beliefs regarding these sites. Understanding how the news media fit in the lives of teens can help inform the creation and distribution of news to which teens might pay attention – and perhaps help build the interest of teenagers in following the news. Additionally, studying experiences provides a vocabulary, in the reader's or viewer's language, that's useful in both the development and marketing of news.

Please note that while care was taken to have a diverse group of teens, given the small sample, these results cannot be generalized to the general population. The value of this kind of research is in developing insights that news enterprises can use to create and test new approaches, products or means of distribution.

The Media Management Center is grateful to the McCormick Tribune Foundation, which partially funded the study.

This report is informed by data collected via focus groups, in-depth interviews and responses to a survey questionnaire. For more details on methodology see Appendix A.

### **Teen Internet usage patterns**

Using an online survey administered on site, researchers probed the online usage patterns of the 65 Chicago-area teenagers who participated in the study.

#### **General Internet usage**

As can be expected, these teens are digital natives. Almost everyone has been online for at least three years, and more than half have been for six or more. Most teens go online after 6 p.m. from home, where they report varying levels of restriction and supervision. Most say they go online as often as they would like. Few say these use handheld devices to access the Internet.

Their main activity online is communicating (63% use IM every day, 52% use e-mail every day), downloading (39% download music files every day) and reading / creating blogs (28% read blogs every day and 27% work on their own blogs / pages every day).

To communicate with friends, 28% use social networking sites (39% say they primarily use the phone, 33% use email / IM / text).

In the interviews and focus groups after the survey, few said they look purposefully for news. Rather, reading news is usually something they do if they happen upon it while doing something else. (In the same way, several reported that if a newspaper is in the house, they will pick it up and look through it. “I look at the newspaper if it’s on the table,” Jonathan, 15, told us.) For more on teens’ definition of news see the section, “Experiences teens have with news online”.

While their news-reading is not purposeful, they reported on the survey that they look at news online an average of two or three times a day on weekdays, with a bit less on weekend days. They said they generally spend about 30 minutes a day on weekdays looking at the news online, with a bit less on weekend days.

Seventy five percent said they get news online from five or fewer news sites.

In contrast to adult online news usage, which tends to occur during the day (see Pew report here: [www.online-publishers.org/media/198\\_W\\_naa\\_daypart\\_report\\_jan03.pdf](http://www.online-publishers.org/media/198_W_naa_daypart_report_jan03.pdf)), 60% of these teens said they go online for news from 6-10 pm, while about a third get news online from 2-6 pm.

### Where do teens get news and information online?

Teens tend to get news more from giant news aggregators and portals than from traditional destination products or news brands. Teens also consume news on video-sharing sites, such as YouTube (see also [Chart 1](#) on page 55).

News sites	% at least once a week	% every day
News aggregators (Google, Yahoo, etc.)	94	61
Video sharing sites (YouTube, etc.)	74	31
National television sites (CNN.com, MSNBC.com, etc.)	50	3
Other sites	45	16
Local newspaper sites (ChicagoTribune.com, DailyHerald.com, etc.)	43	2
Local television news sites (NBC5.com, MyFoxChicago.com, etc.)	27	2
Satirical news sites (TheOnion.com, etc.)	27	2
National newspaper sites (NewYorkTimes.com, USAToday.com, etc.)	25	2
Humor sites (CollegeHumor.com, Fark.com, etc.)	22	3
News magazine sites (Newsweek.com, Time.com, etc.)	19	2
International news sites (BBC.com, Reuters.com, etc.)	14	0
Free daily newspaper site (RedEye.com, etc.)	13	5
Local radio news sites (WBBM780.com, WBEZ.com, etc.)	13	2
Alternative publication sites (ChicagoReader.com, etc.)	8	0
Video news sites (Rocketboom.com, etc.)	6	2
Blogs (DrudgeReport.com, HuffingtonPost.com, DailyKos.com, etc.)	5	2
News rating sites (Digg.com, NewsVine.com, Reddit.com, etc.)	5	2
Ethnic news sites (ChicagoDefender.com, HoyInternet.com, etc.)	3	0

n=64



Teens pay little attention to sites of national newspapers, local television, satirical news, and humor news. They pay even less attention to the news sites of alternative weeklies, local radio, international news services, news magazines, free newspapers (e.g., RedEye), or to ethnic news sites, news rating sites, and news blogs.

### What are the most popular news topics for teens?

In general, teens seek news about entertainment and sports more than any other topic (see also [Chart 2](#) on page 56).

Topic	% at least once a week	% every day
Music	94	55
Entertainment	81	31
Specific sports or teams	75	34
Sports (general)	75	32
Your high school	69	25
College, university or other school you are thinking about attending	61	11
Shopping	53	17
Hobbies	52	23
Celebrity news and gossip	49	14
Online games	48	21
Fashion	45	20
Art	44	23
Health & fitness	41	8
Political causes & activism	39	11
Science & medicine	36	5
Food	34	5
Environment	30	6
Jobs	27	2
Cars	27	8
Religion & spirituality	14	0

n=64

### Other media use

As other studies have shown, teens’ heavy use of the Internet does not preclude them from using other media.

- 92% say they read print magazines.
- 84% read print newspapers (Reader Behavior Score = 2.64, see more on RBS at [www.readership.org/consumers/rbs/data/rbs.pdf](http://www.readership.org/consumers/rbs/data/rbs.pdf) )
- 98% watch television.

Time spent:

- Read magazine about 45 minutes “the last time it came out.”
- Read newspaper about 15-20 minutes on a typical week day.
- Watch TV about 4-5 hours on typical weekday.

Enjoyment:

- 69% enjoy reading magazines a lot or very much.
- 20% enjoy reading print newspapers a lot or very much.
- 48% enjoy watching television a lot or very much.

## **Teen attitudes toward the news**

Most teens interviewed didn't express much energy or excitement about getting news online. There are several reasons.

### **It's not that important to them.**

What most teens think of as news – public affairs, “big N” news or local news – is just not very interesting to them right now. Following news is something they do for school; it feels like work. And it doesn't seem particularly relevant to their lives.

*“It's good to know but I'm not that interested... [I would follow the news] if it actually directly affected my life – because, I mean, otherwise I don't really care that much... I mean it's not like it matters, like I'm going to die if I can't read the news...but I like to check it every few days.”* (John, 15)

*“The only thing that's actually important is some of the sports stuff and it's not like that's at the top of my priorities or anything.”* (Lisa, 17)

*“I'm not usually interested in that kind of thing...”* (Alexandria, 15)

### **They find the news stressful, not enjoyable.**

Reading or viewing serious news is definitely not an escape or a treat; it's just the opposite. News stresses teens out. News reminds them of the peril the world is in, which makes them feel unsafe and threatened. Worries about personal safety and distress at the condition of the world came up often in our conversations with them. Thus, when teens were asked whether their favorite Web sites for news are “safe” places, they often responded with answers having to do not with the safety of the site but with how unsafe the news itself makes them feel.

*“Every time I hear about someone dying or getting hurt or something I cry...I talk to my sister a lot and my dad... We talk about what happened on the news and he tells me stuff about how to be careful and things like if you get kidnapped.”* (Angela, 14)

*“Sometimes...it gets kind of boring and a little depressing to hear about...the wars in the world... We're here in the U.S. so we don't really feel any effects of the war really but when you read about it, then you're, like, ‘Wow, these people can come over here and attack us.’”* (Laura, 17)

*“Not all the news is exactly good stuff to hear about, so it doesn't always make you feel warm and fuzzy inside.”* (Lisa, 17)

*“It makes me feel unsafe because it tells about all the environmental hazards that could kill me some day.” (Kevin, 17)*

That said, even if reading or viewing the news is stressful, talking about it can be fun, teens said. (See “Something to talk about,” below.)

### **Other online activities are more compelling.**

By contrast, teens express passion for the other things they do online – particularly MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Instant Messaging, and sites related to special interests.

Carissa, 17, spends at least an hour a day on MySpace: *“I change my page once a week and I change my music and my pictures. I always make writing on my pictures and make them all like decked out...I always make new friends on MySpace too. I make friends with friends of friends and I end up hanging out with them all the time because I met them on MySpace. So it’s fun. I don’t know, it’s addicting.”*

*“You can almost express yourself too...I’m sure you have music that’s what you enjoy listening to and by your...background and the colors and just like the font of it [you] can also tell the personality of a person too...It’s kind of fun because...you can be yourself. ...It’s your space basically that you can share with everyone...I guess that’s why it’s addicting, too, because you just want to go, like, make it, like, better.”*  
(Mary, 16)

Mark, 16, goes on YouTube every day – *“just trying to find some funny stuff. ...A bunch of my friends find funny stuff and we’ll watch it.”*

Jordan, 16, loves using blastfm.com, which tracks what music he listens to on his computer and then recommends other artists he didn’t know about.

### **They can be interested – “if it catches my eye.”**

While most teens interviewed don’t seek out news, they said they look at it if it “catches my eye.” Teens said they do click on news stories on the Internet – IF the stories appear in their field of vision, IF the subjects and/or presentation interest them. Once interested, they may keep reading and clicking to learn more.

The phrase, “catches my eye,” cropped up, spontaneously and frequently, with no prompting, as teens described their Internet news experiences and their favorite sites.

Things pop up on the screen. Something catches the eye – whether the subject, the headline, motion, video, color or odd twist. They click on it and look as long as it interests them and then click on something else that catches the eye. And on they’ll go, clicking away, sometimes staying on the same topic, but often not.

Consider this sampling of how various teens used this phrase:

*“I usually just come to check my e-mail and a little bit of headlines will **catch my eye**. Sometimes I just check my mail and get off. But if a story will **catch my eye** then I’ll*

*go and read it...Most of the time I just catch a story not meaning to and I'll go and read it by myself, wanting to know more about it.” (Janet, 15)*

*“I usually go on and I check entertainment first and if anything here **catches my eye**, you know, then I usually click on it and then usually something else will **catch my eye**. ...Obviously, if the Cubs, if they pop up, then they'll usually **catch my eye**.” (John, 15)*

*“Well, **if it catches my eye**, I'll be, ‘Oh that's awesome, cool,’ you know. Then I'd bring it up to my sister and I'd tell her about it.” (Donna, 16)*

*“I use this if something **catches my eye** – like Hillary Clinton in the presidential race, I'll definitely read that.” (Jordan, 16)*

*“I usually go to the science stuff, science-related; maybe art. ...Sometimes I check up on sports and stuff or I look in the Iraq stuff...to see what's going on. Or if something **catches my eye**, I'll go to that.” (Dale, 16)*

### **Once something catches the eye, they often read on.**

*“Since they have so many different articles, a lot of the times it leads to another one. ...So I click on things that look interesting that I wouldn't normally go to.” (Alexandria, 15)*

*“I get curious when I see something interesting in the news.” (Angela, 14)*

*“It makes me want to research it further. Like when I was reading something really general about AIDS in Africa then I went out and looked for more. I found out that we tripled our aid to Africa and I just kept going because I was, like, ‘What's going on?’” (Susan, 17)*

### **Videos, photos and motion catch the eye.**

They are an appealing entrée into the news for teens.

*Kirstie, 16, likes MSNBC's “The Week in Pictures” features because “They have short news clip videos. If there was an important address made by the President, then I'd have 30 seconds for that...I probably wouldn't sit down and watch the entire State of the Union, but I'd watch maybe a minute of it on the Web site.”*

*Kurt, 18, likes Comcast “Fan,” which displays a rotating series of video offerings to click on: “They have this little wheel that you can just click on and it'll jump from random story to random story...Like you see something that catches your eye, you can just click on it.”*

*Alexandria, 15, says AOL “has five different pictures that it switches all the time, so it catches your attention. ...I'll be ready to leave and then I'll see a picture that I wanted to know more about and then I'll click it and then I won't leave. ...A lot of*

*times the picture just draws me in, and the headline...Normally I wouldn't be interested in it, but seeing it right there makes me want to know more."*

And Mark, 16, praises Yahoo.com's "eye appealing" slide shows and videos: *"Say there's something about the news on there and I'll watch the video and it will give me a story and I'll kind of want to get involved. I just watched the video last week about the Saddam hanging and, I don't know, I was like thinking it over if it was right or wrong."*

**So does "little n" news.**

Certain topics – celebrities, sports, music, fashion, and entertainment – are often more appealing than harder news.

*"I like reading more on entertainment and all the celebrities; they got pretty interesting stories. ...I remember James Brown died on Christmas day and so that was big, that was like all over the thing. Glad I found that out right away."* (John, 15)

*"Celebrity gossip makes me happy; I think it's funny. Sports, that one makes me happy because the Bears are doing really good. But I don't know, a lot of times the news is sad."* (Susan, 17)

*"All sports teams are important to me. ...Like when the Cubs signed (Alfonso) Soriano, I was really excited; I was running around the house screaming. He's like the best free agent, so it gives you exciting news."* (Max, 15)

*"It's got sports and that's what I really like and enjoy."* (Jonathan, 15)

*"It has a lot of news on movies that are coming out and so, like, to read a lot of other people's opinions on what they think of these movies because I love movies."* (Jennie, 15)

**"News of the weird" is very compelling.**

Unusual stories, offbeat angles, stories that show how "screwed up" the world is are all good. So are stories, videos and shows that make them laugh about and make fun of the people and events in "Big N" news.

*"My favorite's just to have fun. I normally go to the offbeat section. They usually offer interesting pictures that people have sent them from around the world. You might see some pictures from a fair or a parade in China."* (Stephanie, 17)

*"I also see a lot of humor in the site (aintitcool.com, a movie site). That's probably like another big reason I come here because there's just a massive amount of humor that people put into their reviews. ...I just find it hilarious...If I'm having a bad day, I come here to just laugh...and it just makes me automatically cheer up."* (Jennie, 15)

*“I guess we tend to gravitate towards more...lighter things just because we get enough serious stuff and stress all the time and we don't really want any more.”*  
(Laura, 17)

*“I always love seeing weird news...Sometimes it's really interesting to see what they try and make laws. Like right now they are trying to outlaw spanking. ...I think that's really weird.”* (Susan, 17)

### **Teens value newness and currency.**

Sites that always have something new are exciting; sites that only have daily updates aren't.

*“Things come up right when they happen. I could be upstairs watching the news... and then miss a story. So I could come downstairs and check it and it'll be up almost immediately. ...It's really fast. ...They're really on top of it.”* (Kirstie, 16)

*“I was, like, ‘Oh, I didn't even know it happened until I went on there,’ and I was like, ‘Oh when did this happen?’ It'll be like, ‘Oh, I should go on YouTube just to see if anything happened.”* (Rick, 14)

Jill, 16, doesn't think AOL is current enough to be exciting. *“If you go on...an hour later, the same headline's still there, so it's not like right when you log on it's going to be exciting ...If it's a breaking news, sometimes they'll change it but normally it's just the same, so it's not as exciting as I want.”*

And Hunter, 16, likes CNN.com because *“most of the time there's new stories that I haven't heard about or haven't seen.”*

### **The big portals and aggregators satisfy their needs now.**

Given teens' relatively low interest in news, whatever screen appears when they connect to the Internet is what they use, such as the Internet service provider's page, their e-mail service's home page, or whatever someone else in the family has chosen. In the interviews, when researchers asked teens their favorite Web site for news, almost half chose Google, Yahoo, AOL, or Comcast. And when they said “Google,” some of them meant Google's search engine, not Google News (Google's aggregation of news headlines.)

*“Comcast is my home screen and my Internet provider, so really it's just the easiest thing because I don't have to go anywhere. It just comes up and just having those pictures run through, you'll see a familiar face or something that interests you and click on a link.”* (Rebecca, 17)

*“It's the easiest because I go check my e-mail so it's right there...I usually check the news section...I usually just try to go quick so that I can get all my homework done and everything; I don't really have that much time.”* (Lisa, 17)

*“It pops up on the computer and I stay there...That’s the only place I go to.”*  
(Angela, 14)

*“I just like it because I guess it is the first one I’ve ever seen, or the first one I was introduced to.”* (Jack, 15)

*“I don’t want to waste the time going to some other site just to see the same information.”* (John, 15)

**The Web sites of local news media aren’t usually high on the radar screen.**

Only five out of the 48 teens who were interviewed one-on-one chose their local newspaper site as their favorite place to get news online; only 9% of the 65 teens completing the survey chose local newspaper sites as among their top three sites for news; and only 4% chose a local television Web site.

**Some teens are different: they love to be among those who follow the news.**

Some teens didn’t fit the pattern outlined above: they were enthusiastic about keeping up with the news. Following news is not just something they feel obliged to do; they like it. It appeared that keeping up with the news and being able to talk about it is becoming an important part of who they are, of their emerging sense of self. It makes them different from other teens. It’s something they’re proud of.

*“I want to know about all the news at the right time and don’t want to be late on anything with what happened.”* (Bobby, 17)

*“I like to be up to date with things. It makes me feel better that I have some idea of what’s going on in the world. ...I make an effort to learn new things every day, to learn something I didn’t know before, whether it’s a word, whether it’s a particular news story, style of music (or) movie.”* (Jordan, 16)

*“For me, certain news stories excite me because I like politics and government and I know some people don’t so they wouldn’t. But I like reading about stories about presidential candidates and global warming and all that stuff and so that excites me.”*  
(Hunter, 16)

*“I’m curious about it to begin with and that’s why I end up reading the articles.”*  
(Mia, 16)

*“In my history class, we spent the first 15 minutes talking about current events and I just like to read up on stuff on the night before just so I sound smart in class. But then I find that like I’m seriously contributing to the conversation and it’s a one-on-one conversation with me and the teacher because no one else pays attention. So it gets me good grades and then I feel better that I know it and then I find myself actually becoming interested in that so I’ll still be going on and looking, so it’s good.”*  
(Carissa, 17)



## Experiences teens have with news online

In discussions with teens, we asked for their reaction to 26 statements describing thoughts, feelings or beliefs they might have regarding the sites from which they get news (see [Table 1](#) on page 54). These 26 statements originated from previous Media Management Center research on adults' experiences with online sites (see [www.mediamanagementcenter.org/opa/OPA\\_overview.pdf](http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/opa/OPA_overview.pdf)).

Researchers did not define news in the written survey. In the focus groups and interviews, teens were asked to pick the one site they use most often to get news online, with researchers clarifying that “By ‘getting news online,’ I mean going online and getting news and information about something that interests you. It could be about the news of the day in general, like what’s happening in the Iraq war, or to see the most talked about video clips. Or it could be going online to keep up with something specific you’re interested in, like sports, music, global warming, what’s happening to a celebrity you like, or whatever.” Even given this purposely vague and broad definition, in most of their comments and selections, most teens interpreted “news” pretty much the same way journalists might – as serious news about developments in the world, the nation, the region and the local community, with some sports, entertainment and other topics thrown in. Some, however, addressed their comments to special-purpose sites – like menshealth.com or ESPN.com.

Here were the four statements that resonated most with teens:

- This is easy to use.
- This gives me useful information.
- This gives me information I can trust.
- This often gives me things to talk about with my friends or family.

### EASY TO USE

Convenience is king. As noted above, whatever pops up on the screen is okay. This quality of being easy to use resonated most with teens and it has several flavors.

#### It’s automatic.

Things just appear; all they have to do is click and read or view.

*“When I come up here and read my e-mail, this is the first thing I see so I just, before I check my email, I just read it. I do this every day, so it’s always there.” (Josie, 15)*

*“It’s our main Internet. ...It (AOL) just has the major headlines of the day, so it’s right there; I don’t have to go searching for it. It’s just right when you open it there.” (Alexandria, 15)*

*“It’s just more convenient because I’m already there to check my mail, and all the news is right there in front of you...I just kind of stay right here and click on whatever headlines pop out.” (Susan, 17)*



### **It's a veritable one-stop-shop.**

The site provides a feast of information and amusement – all the subjects (celebrities, sports, news, health, and travel), features (search, video, music, e-mail, shopping, and games), and points of view, all conveniently selected and displayed there for them. No matter what mood they're in, they can find something here of interest.

*"I always go on here because it has everything."* (Susan, 17)

*"You can find everything here. I can find all my music. I can see all the videos that I want. I can look at anything like fashion, styles and I can look at some news, like these areas and popular things like Iraq and all the wars and everything. ...You don't even need another site."* (Jill, 16)

*"Especially their health and science articles, they're pretty comprehensive and they tend to give different view points and stuff, which is good."* (Kirstie, 16)

*"It shows me about news, sports, weather, TV listings, movie listings, music, videos; it's just like (a) broad, broad view of topics basically, so I get a lot out of it. Also you can check your mail. ...It's very convenient."* (Mark, 16)

### **Finding stuff is a breeze.**

The site's organization makes intuitive sense. There's good search. Well-thought-out categories, sections, tabs, bullets and other devices guide the user easily and clearly.

*"The search engine...narrows down your topics; you have advanced searches. I know others offer that, but I feel it's more easier on this Web site and that's what makes it useful."* (Lynette, 16)

*"It (AOL) is very easy. You don't have to find anything or search for anything."* (Alexandria, 15)

*"It's all there in front of you and everything is a click away and it's all laid out so simply."* (Rebecca, 17)

### **It's a great gateway.**

They can go anywhere on the Web from here.

*"It links to everything very quickly."* (Janet, 15)

*"It's good because a lot of the links take you to another site and so you get stories from a lot of different sources...and they're all reliable sources. Like this one's from Forbes so then you know you're getting good news."* (Laura, 17)

Mark, 16, spends a lot of time on Yahoo *"whether I'm checking my mail or doing any other stuff. I can use it as a browser too because you can type in the search bar and basically get anything that you need..."*

**It's very quick.**

It provides instant answers, quick glances, short articles, fast access to whatever type of content they want. It fits with their busy lives.

*"It will usually have what I'm looking for and to me I find that to be useful. And I don't have a ton of time to be spending with homework and other activities."* (Mia, 16)

*"It gives me the important stuff first."* (Kirstie, 16)

*"If you're in a rush or something, you can just read something really quickly instead of going through newspapers."* (Kristal, 15)

**It provides easy serendipity.**

Their favorite sites make it easy for something they didn't know they were interested in to "catch my eye." The word "random" crops up a lot in their discussion of sites, usually in a positive way connoting something unexpected.

*"For the most part some of the articles are random; that's why it keeps me going for a long time. ...They have the information that I'm looking for and it's not just targeted towards a specific audience. ...I'm not always interested in one thing. ...Sometimes it's just interesting to see all different kinds."* (Mia, 16)

*"It's a mix of fun stuff and serious stuff. I guess that's kind of me because at school I'm really serious and I work hard but then on the weekends I like to...just enjoy myself. ...And I'm interested in a lot of different things so then there's a lot of different things on this site."* (Laura, 17)

*"There are a lot of interesting things that come up and things that I wouldn't otherwise know about, so it's really interesting. ...I usually just scroll around. ...I'll click on something random just to see what they're talking about ...just out of curiosity, really."* (Kristal, 15)

**It enables them to choose.**

Having the headlines there when they check e-mail is handy; they will glance at them and might learn something. But they want to choose what they spend time with – to pick from an array. They don't want the package distilled down too far.

*"I don't mind long sites because then it's like topic, topic, topic and you can just pick anything, then always go back to it."* (Kristal, 15)

*"You choose what you get to read and it's really convenient. It's all just kind of laid out there for you. ...You want to click? You click on it or you can skim over it and make it go faster. You can change your news category. It's really easy."* (Susan, 17)

In our view, the attributes of “easy to use” are things that sites need to provide as bare minimums – necessary but not sufficient.

## **HELPS AND IMPROVES ME**

Teens also gave their favorite news Web sites high rankings for usefulness. But what do they mean when they agree that “This gives me useful information?”

### **It helps with school.**

Teens definitely found their favorite sites for news to be helpful in school – for completing homework assignments and special projects and for enabling them to participate in class discussions. Researchers were struck by how important class assignments were in the development of interest in news and in exposing teens to news sites that go deeper than a search engine or portal site. A number volunteered that they liked sites such as [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) and [newyorktimes.com](http://newyorktimes.com) that they discovered in the process.

*“I’ve had 100% both quarters so I didn’t have to take my final exam. ...This site helps me a lot.” (June, 17)*

*“Especially in my government class...it is really important to know what’s going on globally and nationally and politically...I’ve always been kind of outspoken about issues that I think are important to me and just being in this government class this year has taken it to a different level. ...So it’s definitely useful.” (Rebecca, 17)*

*“Sophomore year, during school, I had to get weekly articles and I’d usually just come here and click on a headline that interested me and then print out that article, read it and write a summary about it.” (Kurt, 18)*

*“I have an English class and a lot of times we discuss major topics in the news media so it helps having read that so that I’m more informed.” (Mack, 17)*

*“Last year, I used BBC a lot for my history class and so I kind of got in the habit of once in a while checking out there. ...It just made me more knowledgeable about what I was studying and also we had current event days in school where we discussed stuff.” (Laura, 17)*

*“I want to know more about it so I can discuss it with my teachers,” said Donna, 16, who likes being able to say, “Oh, yeah, I know about that.”*

*“Someone different has to bring in a current event every week and then we talk about it, discuss it. So I like to state my opinion if I know about it.” (Luke, 17)*

### **It helps them understand what others are talking about.**

It also helps them avoid looking clueless or out of touch.

*“It does help with letting you know what’s going on so you don’t look stupid. ... You can actually talk about things to other people. ... It just gives you a defense, that you know just as much as someone else...”* (Stephen, 15)

*“I like to be up to date with things. It makes me feel better that I have some idea of what’s going on in the world. ... I don’t want to be under a rock.”* (Jordan, 16)

*“A lot of my teachers will mention something that they saw on the news and half the class will get it, the other half won’t really know what’s going on. That way, I know.”* (Lisa, 17)

*“It’s good to know what people are talking about and if you get into a conversation with them to know what they’re talking about, too.”* (Donna, 16)

*“My parents ask me... ‘Oh, did you see what happened today?’ If I don’t know what they’re talking about, I can go read and then at dinner time we can talk about it...”* (Jonathan, 15)

*“My parents, I always hear them talking about something going on in the news. ... A lot of times I don’t understand what they’re talking about. So the site helps.”* (Laura, 17)

*“If I’m watching it (a Bears game) and I miss some of it and I don’t understand it, I just go to the Web site and look up what happened.”* (Luke, 17)

*“Sometimes the jokes (on Jon Stewart or the Colbert Report) like... if I don’t get the joke, I’ll look it up. My dad will be laughing and [I’ll think] like why are you laughing. I just look it up and find out what’s the story.”* (Patrick, 15)

### **It provides help with big and little questions.**

For many teens, “useful” meant that sites provided help with the big questions teens face – from “what to do in my life” and “who I should be” – to the more practical ones, about where to go on Saturday night, how to stay healthy, relationships and fashion.

*“If I read an article about... a rookie and his background, and how he got there... training hard, focusing a lot and... putting off some social life to get where he is, I’ll just want to... go in my back yard, start playing soccer, start running, training or something.”* (Paul, 16)

*“It was like a how-to list. It had a bunch of stuff on there... like how to walk your dog, or take care of your dog, or cook a meal. That helped me out.”* (Jack, 15)

*“They give lots of health tips, eating, fitness, weather. ...I go to weather all the time. ...My one friend, she’s obsessed with knowing weather so I’ll give her the week-long one.” (Janet, 15)*

*“There’s this part called scoreboard where I can see all the different games that were played either days before or are going to be played.” (Mark, 16)*

*“It has a lot to offer, like the White and Yellow Pages, if you need to find a business or phone number. ...What really comes in handy is maps and directions.” (Jordan, 16)*

*“It’s really good for me to get in the groove of what’s coming out, what should I see, save up to see that one, mark that on your calendar, don’t even bother seeing that. When people do voice their opinions, they’re really helpful by giving you a link to where you can view it.” (Jennie, 15)*

*“I might check the weather depending on whether I’m worried about if I should bundle up more or not or it’s going to be raining.” (Mack, 17)*

Laura, 15, likes AOL’s CityGuide: *“if I’m going somewhere I’ve never been or something, just to see what’s going on.”*

### **CREDIBLE PLACE**

The statement, “This gives me information I can trust,” also resonated with teens. Given all the discussion today about teen’s distrust of major institutions, this question uncovered a surprisingly positive reservoir of good will toward major sites and major brands – both traditional news brands (like CNN) and technology brands in the news space (like Google, Yahoo, AOL and Comcast).

#### **If a site or brand is big and well-known, it must be credible.**

The reasoning teens used goes something like this: The more people use a site, the more financially successful it is, the more well-known the brand, the more credible it must be – and the safer teens feel with it. Such sites simply couldn’t afford to lie; it would catch up with them, they said.

*“It (Yahoo) is a very well known site and for them to put false information or anything on there would be wrong and they probably would have gotten caught for it already and sued a billion times.” (Laura, 17)*

*“It (ESPN) is credible. ...Since they’re the biggest source for sports news, if it wasn’t credible, then they wouldn’t be able to be successful. They’d just get sued all the time, so I know it’s credible since they don’t get sued that often, that I know of.” (Max, 15)*

*“I feel that they (CNN.com) report the truth. I don’t think that they would have... many people using the Web site if they were just posting fallacies.” (Stephanie, 17)*

*“I know all the writers that write them; they’re all, like, high profile. They’re on TV all the time, so they really wouldn’t be lying about anything. ESPN is like the main, it’s like the CNN of news pretty much for sports, and they can’t really lie; they can’t afford to lie. ...It’s ESPN and I trust it. I don’t know; it’s such a big name.” (Paul, 16)*

*“It (Yahoo) is a major Web site, so I figure I can trust it.” (John, 15)*

*“I think it’s quite right because it comes from NBC, which is a National Broadcasting Company, which is one of the biggest broadcasting companies in the U.S., so if they go around mis-saying the news, I’ve never heard of NBC screwing up the news too bad. ...I just know the authority of NBC is a good company. (On television) it’s all very reliable so I figured the online has to be reliable too.” (Kirstie, 16)*

*“AOL is a very high profited site. If they gave out information that was wrong or something, I think they’d be in a lot of trouble. ...They can’t do that; they’d get shut down, probably.” (Laura, 15)*

### **Some teens give particular credibility to news organizations.**

*“I trust the information that is on here because I know it’s coming from a news source and I know the video news is tied into ABC and I trust that news...I trust it more than I would trust Google necessarily.” (Mia, 16)*

*“If they said, ‘Oh, this was said in the Tribune,’ I’d go with that because that’s a really good resource.” (Donna, 16)*

*“It has to be true if you’re going to put it in the paper. ...It can’t be false or else they can get in trouble for that...I’m thinking if it’s posted on here (Chicagotribune.com), it must be in the newspaper.” (Stephen, 15)*

*“Everything on here (Chicago Sun Times site) is true; it’s the news so it’s information...Always trustworthy... (Bobby, 17)*

*“I trust them (Chicagotribune.com). I don’t have a reason not to trust them right now.” (June, 17)*

*“Newspapers have to abide some sort of law of truth, but a Web site, you’re allowed to put on whatever you want even if it’s not true so.” (George, 16)*

### **Big aggregators seem as credible as big traditional news companies.**

Teens don’t seem to differentiate between sites that generate news stories and sites that aggregate them. The credibility of the organization that generated the news rubbed off on the aggregator that displayed the story. And, when asked how they determined which stories or sources to trust, several teens said they trusted most whatever came up first on the list in a Google search.

*“It (AOL) is such a complete site that I trust it because it couldn’t be telling everyone the wrong information.” (Alexandria, 15)*

*“The news isn’t too biased. It’s from good sources.” (Janet, 15) (Yahoo)*

*“Yahoo is pretty reliable...Just the fact that it has to go through editing and stuff before it gets on there so I am pretty sure it is reliable. It’s got to go through the process of how true it is, if anything is exaggerated. ...I assume that it has to.” (Luke, 17)*

*“Most of the time it (Yahoo) basically, they’re reliable sources from big newspapers. ...There’s not any just like Joe Schmo’s writing on it, so most of the time you can trust the source.” (Janet, 15)*

*“It (AOL) is not like tabloid. It’s not like it’s some random page; it’s stuff you find in the newspaper; it’s not stuff they’re making up. It’s trustworthy. It’s not like The Onion.” (Susan, 17)*

#### **“The news” itself carries a certain credibility.**

*“I don’t know if you can trust everything on the Internet. ...Like MySpace: people say they’re 26...and it’s not true obviously. But I guess if you’re going to the news, you can totally trust that because it has to be true; it’s the news. And entertainment, I guess that has to be true. So all the news stuff would be true, but people commenting on stuff, maybe that’s not true, and you just can’t trust everything online.” (Jill, 16) (on AOL)*

*“Everything on here (suntimes.com) is true. It’s the news. So it’s information...Really, it’s just good news. It’s interesting stuff to read and everything that happens, everything that’s put up on here is true.” (Bobby, 17)*

#### **They trust sites that “check out” and stories that can be checked out.**

That means they notice if something on one site isn’t corroborated by reports from other sources. They trust stories about things they or others could see (like a plane crash) more than stories that are so personal they can’t be verified (like celebrity gossip.) And many of them say they trust what they perceive as “fact” more than opinion.

*“A lot of times you’ll see it on other places or even on TV and then the paper.” (Mack, 17)*

*“When I study information I find on the site, it’s been true. Nobody’s like, ‘No, that didn’t happen.’ So I trust it.” (Hunter, 16)*

*“I’ll read something that’s...actual news and I’ll be, like, this isn’t true, so I have to look it up...15 different places before I actually believe it. ...Like I heard about...the*



*terrorist attack from all the planes flying from Britain to here. I looked it up a couple of months ago, and I had to look it up in...20 places before I actually believed it and then I finally saw it on the news. When I see something on the news, I'm more likely to believe it than I am when I see it online because like they said, on Wikipedia, you can change it."* (Carissa, 17)

*"I never really...was interested or believe those (celebrity stories) anyway because who knows? Those are people's personal lives and people talking about it really don't have the right to."* (Kurt, 18)

*"I could probably believe more in...world stories and national stories because they can't really make up a plane crashing into the Sears Tower when people can see it outside their window. For stuff that's kind of private and not too many people would know about it, you probably can't trust that too much."* (Samantha, 16)

*"Apart from celebrity gossip, because you don't really know if that's true or not, everything else (on Yahoo) is pretty accurate."* (Mark, 16)

## **SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT**

As with adults, "This often gives me things to talk about with my friends or family" is a strong experience for teens.

### **Being able to talk about things serves as a versatile social lubricant.**

The news helps them connect with and relate to others – friends, teachers, siblings, parents.

*"Usually with my brothers, I talk about music. I know one brother, he's a music freak, so we just talk about music and if it's a new rock band or something that I can relate to him with, we talk about all these new things from music. And with my friends, I talk about all the new styles...and like with my parents, I talk about the news. ...I don't like going into a conversation with people maybe I don't know – or maybe just they're not that close to me – unless I have something really important to say or something that I know they'll talk with me (about)..."* (Jill, 16)

*"If my neighbor has a health issue and I read about it on CNN.com, I can always feel connected. I can always ask them something, a specific question. They'll be happy...to know that I know something related to their issue."* (Stephanie, 17)

*"I talk about current events and current stuff a lot. ...Usually there isn't anything else to talk about. Like my friends, we don't talk about a lot of things, but we talk about some stuff that's going on – the war and lately the Bears."* (Luke, 17)

*"If I can keep up with any current events and be able to say anything if somebody talks about it, it's good for me. I like that. ...We'll be at lunch...at school and I'll*



*often bring up a new...story that I had read that I thought was interesting. So most of the time it's just casual conversation.” (Janet, 15)*

*“A lot of times my parents will bring something up and I'll talk with them or sometimes my friends and I will just discuss things like that.” (Mack, 17)*

Donna, 16, likes talking about presidential candidates with her mom and dad. *“I just think it's really interesting what they think and what I think, or my view because I'm, like, a teenager.”*

**Being the knowledgeable one, the first to know or the “go-to” person feels good.**

Conversely, as noted above in “Helps and Improves Me,” it's embarrassing not to know what people are talking about.

*“If I see something interesting, I want to talk about it with somebody else too, tell them about it, be the first one to tell them.” (Bobby, 17)*

*“I'm a little unusual, I like music stuff...(My friends) don't all want to research it so they'll be like, 'Lena, you know this band; is this band coming here?' ...I know Red Hot Chili Peppers is coming. That was like a big thing and everybody's asking me about it. ...It's not like I'm the go-to girl...It's just, I know what I know and I'm interested in what I'm interested in, and other people come to me for that stuff. ...If somebody asks you a question, you don't want to be like, 'Uh, I have no clue,' and people stop asking you stuff.” (Lena, 17)*

Mugglenet.com, about Harry Potter, is the favorite site of Marilyn, 15. *“I get to know about what's going on in the Harry Potter world so that people will come to me with questions about what's going on.”*

*“I'm one of the smartest about sports, well, knowledgeable. I like to keep up and to have that role with my friends.” (Paul, 16)*

**Talking about it helps them form their own opinions.**

*“If I read something (on Yahoo news) that made me think, then I like to talk it out with everybody else and see what they think about it too.” (Josie, 15)*

*“It gets the news to me and gets me thinking about it and discussing with other people and making evaluations about it.” (Rebecca, 17)*

**They feel they *should* be able to talk knowledgeably about news.**

*“Everyone should know what's going on. We shouldn't be oblivious.” (Laura, 15)*

*“I feel like it’s necessary to know. Not even if they’re interesting...but just your job is to understand that, over just to recreationally read it. You feel obligated to read it because it’s such a pressing event.” (David, 16)*

**Talking about the news can be exciting or even fun.**

It’s particularly exciting for teens who love to discuss, to argue – and to win.

Donna, 16, likes to talk with her sister about stories. *“Sometimes about, like, probably sports related, something happened with that, that I’d probably bring it up to her, because me and her are both in love with sports, so I think that’d be exciting for both of us to talk about.”*

David, 16, likes the feeling he gets when *“someone I’m talking to states their opinion about something and I know something from this Web site (The Drudge Report) that would definitely change their opinion...and it actually does.”*

*“I like to know what’s going on. ...Me and my friends sometimes, actually, will sit in the car after school and talk about what’s going on. ...My two best friends are right-winged conservatives and I’m more liberal and all the time we’ll get into it...I like to win so I like to know what’s happening.” (Susan, 17)*

June, 17, a Muslim girl in a Catholic school, always brings Chicagotribune.com articles to religion class, where students are encouraged to state their opinions. *“That’s probably one of my favorite classes because of that. ...There’s one (story) specifically that I brought up in class and it started a huge argument. ...I love this site because I can do that. ...Everyone disagreed with me...besides...two people and by the end of my speech everyone agreed with me! ...I love bringing up topics...because I like to see what other people think even though we don’t always agree...I like to see the different views and I like to persuade people to see my point of view...I noticed some other people started using it too after I said it because I’m always the one talking in class. I’m always the one that’s got my hand raised and I’ve got to say something. ...I feel that if I know what’s going on around me then I can talk to people. ...I know that people will actually come in to me and ask me and get information from me.”*

## **Experiences teens don't have with news online**

Several of the 26 statements, which were developed in MMC's research with adults, didn't resonate with the teens interviewed (see [www.mediamanagementcenter.org/opa/OPA\\_overview.pdf](http://www.mediamanagementcenter.org/opa/OPA_overview.pdf)). Teens said their favorite sites for news are not places for escaping to, getting involved or feeling connected. And they were relatively indifferent to ads.

### **MY PERSONAL TIME OUT**

While the Web generally is a treat, a place to escape and relax, news sites are not. Teens did not react favorably to these statements: "This is where I go to forget about everything else," "This makes me feel safe" and "This is a treat for me."

News is generally not a "treat" because it is stressful and reminds them of the peril the world is in, which makes them feel unsafe and threatened. They also say reading about it makes them think – which feels like school or work. By contrast, the other things they like to do online are lighter and more fun – listening to music, watching funny videos, keeping up with sports, chatting with friends, laughing about celebrities.

(For more see "They find the news stressful, not enjoyable" and "Other online activities are more compelling," above at pages 9 and 10.

### **A PLACE TO SOCIALIZE, CONNECT OR CONTRIBUTE**

Teens greatly enjoy the social aspects of the Web but they just don't see conventional news sites as places for meeting any of their social media needs.

Many of them got quite animated when they talked about the considerable time they spend connecting with others, expressing their opinions, seeing what others are saying and doing – on MySpace or Facebook, music or sports sites, or through instant messaging.

But when it came to the sites they use for news, they gave low to lukewarm ratings to almost all the statements having to do with connectedness and involvement:

- This makes me feel more connected to my community or neighbors.
- This makes me want to contribute to the conversation online.
- I feel personally involved in this site.
- This makes me feel guilty about the amount of time I spend on this site socializing.

### **To these teens, news sites are for news; social sites are for social.**

They're two different things. The whole notion that they might want to connect to other people about the news through a news site seems vaguely odd and confusing to them.

**Teens don't expect to or particularly want to express their opinions or relate to other people on news sites.**

*"I don't really associate with anybody on the site. I just read the news."* (Mack, 17)

*"I just really don't think that my opinion will make a difference on this Web site. There are so many people that visit this Web site that one person is insignificant when it comes to it."* (David, 16)

*"I usually start arguments with people I know. I don't like to start things with people I don't know unless we're in a casual group...I'm not going to do that online."* (June, 17)

*"I'm not really interested in talking with strangers about the news. ...I'd rather know how the people around me feel. Those are the people that are important to me."* (Susan, 17)

*"I don't really contribute to any input on what people are saying."* (Samantha, 16)

**Sites of news organizations seem more like they're for adults, not teens.**

*"It is not really geared toward teens; I think it's more for the young adults or 20s to 30s, I guess."* (Alexandria, 15)

*"Everyone who's discussing these topics, they seem intelligent and, really, I don't think my opinion matters"* (Why?) *"I'm so young. ...I prefer to talk with somebody my own age."* (Josie, 15)

**Even if they wanted to contribute, it wasn't obvious to them that their views were welcome.**

*"What conversation online? I'm confused."* (John, 15)

*"It's not one of those sites that you can put your own input in. It's more about you read the articles that they've written for you and you can go and search your own sites, but for the most part you don't really have any input in it, so I don't really feel like I have a real connection to the site."* (Mia, 16)

*"I don't really know where you can talk to people. ... You read it but there's really no where to post anything."* (Susan, 17)

**"Community" on the Web seems more national or global than local to them.**

Most of the teens interviewed don't frequent local news Web sites (except perhaps for school projects) and they don't seek them out. When asked whether their favorite sites connected them to their neighbors or communities, they were puzzled; they think of

neighbors and communities as local, but the community they see online is not. Besides, they didn't seem very connected to community or neighbors at all.

*"My neighbors...we don't talk that much ...I feel more connected to the world than community."* (Hunter, 16)

*"I don't really talk to any of my neighbors. Most of them are like 75."* (Max, 15)

*"Not really community. I think it's more of the world, what's going on in the world."* (Josie, 15)

### **TURNED ON OR ANNOYED BY ADS**

Teens seem largely indifferent to online advertising. They did not identify with the statements "This gives me a lot of gift ideas" and "It upsets me when they are trying to sell me things on this site."

#### **While the ads may annoy them, teens say they know why they're there so they accept them as long as they're not too intrusive.**

They are bothered if ads are too much in their face. They say ads have no influence on them – and yet some teens admit they get gift ideas from the ads and that online ads can come in handy when they are looking for something or the ads have relevant information.

*"I just ignore it because they've got to make money too. ...They don't charge me to go on the site."* (Jordan, 16)

*"It doesn't bother me because maybe I don't even notice it half the time. So many people are trying to sell you things constantly. You just kind of overlook it."* (Kristal, 15)

*"It upsets me that they're trying to sell me something, but when I realize that that's the only way they can thrive as a Web site is to put advertisements on there, I understand a little bit."* (Jack, 15)

*"I just really don't pay any attention to that."* (Mack, 17)

*"I'm either...not aware of it or I just kind of ignore it. ...They try to sell you stuff everywhere, like on billboards and on TV and on spam for e-mail...so it's just kind of like I'm used to it."* (Laura, 17)

Paul, 16, isn't upset "because sometime I like what they're trying to sell me ... because sometimes I'll want to buy it and I haven't seen it before."

## Implications and recommendations

We believe the picture the research paints is far from hopeless – that there is a world of meaning and opportunity for news companies implicit in that oft-heard phrase, “If it catches my eye.”

Implicit in that phrase is that when it comes to news, most teens are grazers. Most are not particularly interested in nor do they seek out serious news about the world, the country and their community; usually, learning a little about such subjects seems to be enough. But also apparent is that things can and do catch teens’ eyes; they are “interestable.”

The teenage years are the time when teens form their identities, define their passions and interests, and make choices that mold them into the adults they become. It’s an all-important, all-consuming job for all teens.

The Web is their ally in this pursuit. It enables them to easily explore a world of things they could be interested in – sometimes privately, in the security of their own rooms, without anyone judging or censoring their choices, and sometimes very publicly, on their Facebook pages, where they can get reaction from and quickly adjust their “identity” to the views of their peers. In the process, they are defining who they are – a very compelling pursuit.

*If you’re on a site, you can kind of look up whatever you want and not have to worry about what anybody else thinks. Like you could be in a library at school and if you’re reading a book about something that’s maybe a controversial subject or you aren’t in the majority of people who think that way, you might be a little embarrassed to pick up a magazine or do that or even talk to your friends about it or watch TV or your family or your friends can be seeing you do it or if you’re in your room on the computer, you can just search unbiasedly without any boundaries even if you just want to look up one or two things. You don’t have to worry about what other people think. It’s more of a safe place for you to find the information because there aren’t really any restrictions, which can be bad because maybe you’ll find some stuff you don’t want. But in the long run I think it’s a safe place to find a lot of information and stuff you might not be able to do outside of it. (Derek, 17)*

What if news enterprises thought of the status quo – the current habits and preferences of teens – not as an unchangeable verdict on the news but as an opportunity and a challenge? What if they decided to:

- Aggressively court teens where they are now and then work over time to fan whatever sparks of interest they may have in news into a more robust flame of interest in various kinds of news?
- Make a special effort to encourage – and even increase the number of – teens who consider it part of their identity to follow and talk about the news?

We recommend that news organizations work to:

### **CATCH THEIR EYES**

News organizations should actively try to catch teens' eyes with content and presentation designed to appeal to teens' *current* news needs, preferences and habits. This will require listening to teens, conducting research and then actively trying to develop new products, new campaigns and new initiatives aimed at attracting them to news products, and then working to deepen the attraction. Fortunately, with the Internet, that kind of targeting, tailoring and product development is easier than ever. To do this, news organizations should:

#### **Excel at the subjects teens say they're most interested in.**

Offer great music, sports, celebrity and fashion. Then make it easy for them to follow these stories into more serious stuff. For example, celebrity stories that talk about the celebrity's favorite cause should have easy links to other stories about the issue.

#### **Provide lots of the features and functionalities they like and use.**

Include video, links to related topics of interest, ways to share information and find others in the area of like mind – plus any new features that come along.

#### **Work with their interest in humor.**

Offer numerous humorous windows into the news – funny stories and angles, whimsical headlines, and “news of the weird” features. But what about also trying to help those teens who don't know enough about the news to get the jokes? For example, what about offering them a regular Daily Show feature that highlights last night's funniest riff and explains the news story upon which it was based? Or what about a regular feature of political jokes, which have links to the original news stories behind the jokes?

### **GO WHERE THEY ARE**

If teens are not coming to news sites, it is impossible to catch their eyes there. So news organizations need to go where teens are. That means getting news organization content on the sites that teen use in a way that will encourage them to click – and then having enough interesting content for teens on the news organization's site so teens will want to linger.

#### **Develop and actively market free widgets for teens.**

Make it easy for them to see what news organizations offer by developing widgets that deliver the organization's headlines, videos, “news of the weird” features, offbeat headlines or other content to the websites they use. Encourage teens to show they're “in the know” by putting news widgets on their Facebook and MySpace pages and sharing news articles with others through Digg or other social media devices.



**Get local high schools to include news widgets on school-related sites.**

Have them put news organization widgets on the school's official sites as well as the school paper, club and team sites. After all, it's part of their mission to encourage an involved citizenry too.

**Strike deals with places they go.**

Negotiate with news aggregators, Internet service providers, portals, social networking and other popular sites for teens to include news organization content on their pages.

**Develop tailored news feeds for teens.**

Use RSS feeds, text messaging, cell-phone and e-mail alerts to deliver news content wherever they are on whatever subject they want as often as they want.

**DIMINISH THEIR ANGST**

News organizations should actively experiment with ways to diminish the negative associations teens have with news and to lift their feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness. This does not mean failing to report distressing news or churning out happy-talk stories. But it might mean:

**Make news a better springboard for talk, action and change.**

Use techniques such as the Readership Institute's "debatables" concept to encourage discussion (see [www.readership.org/brand/relevance.htm](http://www.readership.org/brand/relevance.htm)). Host special teen forums, on and offline, where they can discuss issues of concern. And provide more action boxes, links and information to enable – and encourage – teen readers/viewers to act to improve the situation.

**Write about it – and write in new ways.**

Show them news organizations take their feeling of peril seriously by writing about it. Or experiment with alternative storytelling techniques that might tell the news of the day in ways that lessen the feeling of tension and peril they feel.

**Couple "bad" news with stories about action.**

Show not only the problem but what is being done – or might be done – to make things better. Report more on those who are trying to solve problems.

**ENLIST TEACHERS AND PARENTS**

Teachers and parents can be incredibly powerful allies in helping develop teens' news interests and news habits, and in steering teens to worthwhile and engaging news sources. News organizations should redouble their efforts to market to teens through these highly reliable and proven networks. News organizations need look no farther than all the award-winning Newspapers in Education programs that have developed effective and innovative tactics for papers around the world.



## **HELP TEENS DEVELOP A “NEWS PERSONA”**

News organizations should actively work to find ways to help teens develop what we might call a “news persona” – a perception of oneself as someone who follows the news, who sees keeping up with the news as a positive part of who he or she is, a part of what makes one different from others, a part to be proud of. News organizations should work to intensify that perception in those who have it – and cultivate more teens who share it.

### **Cultivate the interested.**

News organizations should cultivate teens who have already shown an interest in following the news – by rewarding their interest and helping it flower and grow in ways that also inspire other teens.

They need to intensify the positive feeling these teens already have about themselves for following the news – to build up the strokes that teens get for knowing things and being able to talk about them.

This could involve providing them recognition, opportunities and special treatment – inviting them to special events and inviting them to contribute, advise and participate with the news organization. News organizations could ask teachers for help in identifying both teens who are more interested than their peers in following “Big N” news and those teens who like being “in the know” about special topics, like sports, science or music.

### **Build a sense of fun.**

To enhance the idea that following the news can be fun and rewarding, news organizations should use both tried-and-true methods of building engagement (from prizes to contests to awards programs) as well as newer social media tools (such as opportunities to rank, rate and share.) And, since the news already provides teens “something to talk about,” they might develop ways to accelerate that talk – such as new story forms specifically designed to promote conversation (like the Readership Institute’s “debatables” format; see [www.readership.org/brand/relevance.htm](http://www.readership.org/brand/relevance.htm)), new online forums just for teens or just about issues teens care about, or even in-person events that bring teens together to talk about the news.

### **Get serious about teen consumer research.**

News organizations should work with consumer researchers to better understand teens and how news can fit in and positively enhance their lives. They might explore various concepts – from being “in the know,” a “go-to” person, someone who always has “something to talk about,” or someone who keeps up – to see which resonates most with teens. Then they should build content, marketing and outreach activities around these insights.

## Appendix A: Methodology

Teens, ages 14-18, from the Chicago metropolitan area were recruited to participate in the study in 2007, complying with university requirements for consent and confidentiality. To qualify, the teens had to be regular users of news online (at least once a week). The recruiting company screened for gender and race / ethnicity to ensure diversity. Sixty-five teens participated in the study and had the following characteristics: 44% male, 56% female; 71% White / Caucasian; 7% African-American, 9% Hispanic, 14% mixed-race or multi-racial; average age 16.5 years old (two-thirds were 16 or 17, about 10% were 15, and about one quarter were 18 or 19).

MMC researchers asked the teens, in focus groups or interviews, to pick and discuss one Web site that they go to most often to get news – “to keep up with what’s happening and perhaps get more information about things that interest you.”

The study consisted of focus groups, individual in-depth interviews and a survey.

- **FOCUS GROUPS:** Prior to the individual interviews, MMC researchers conducted two two-hour focus groups with 17 teens to elicit information about usage patterns of news online and to better understand teen experiences with news online (see Appendix B). These focus groups were audio- and video-taped and transcribed and then used to inform the individual interviews and improve the interview guide. Before each focus group began, participants completed a survey (see below).
- **INTERVIEWS:** Five interviewers, trained for this project, conducted a series of 48 semi-structured interviews with the teens (see Appendix C). Each session started with a survey (see below). Teens were then instructed to choose one Web site they used most regularly to access news online. That site became the focus of the remainder of the interview.

The interviews, conducted in the offices of the Media Management Center on the Northwestern campus, took place in front of the computer, allowing teens to show interviewers the site they were discussing and the ways in which they used the site. Two of the five interview rooms had video cameras installed. Screen shots of what teens showed the interviewers were captured and filed. All 48 interviews were recorded using audio recording equipment and 17 were videotaped. All interviews were professionally transcribed.

- **SURVEY:** All focus group participants and interviewees also completed a brief online survey assessing their overall media use (see Appendix D).

## Appendix B: Focus group protocol

(TAKE STILL PHOTOS AS THEY FILE IN.)

Good evening. I am X, the moderator of today's focus group. Thank you for coming. I am with Northwestern University. I also have XX here with me today and she will be participating in our discussion.

We would like to talk about your thoughts and feelings about news online. This discussion is part of a larger study we are conducting with other people your age to try to better understand where you get news from online, and what sort of reactions you have to different Web sites. We hope to get some ideas from you that we can then bring to people who make decisions about these Web sites so they can improve them.

Before we begin the discussion, I would like to take the first 10 minutes or so to have you fill out a questionnaire. Filling out this questionnaire will help you to start thinking about the issues we are here to discuss and will help us to identify and fix any questions that are difficult to answer before we give out the questionnaire to other people.

I want to mention some things regarding protection of your privacy. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire, only your ID number which you were given when you checked in. Please use only your first name in the discussion today. And when the discussion is over, please respect the privacy of your fellow group members by not repeating comments that others make during our discussion to anyone outside of this group. This will help guard the privacy of all of you.

As for our part, here's how we will guard your privacy.

- First of all, only the people involved in the research will know your name and we will not in any way ever publicly link your name with anything you say.
- However, we have gathered you here today because people who develop, provide and study news online want to know what you think and why you do whatever you do online.
- Therefore, we are making an audio tape and a video tape of this session so we can share your views and insights with them in publications, presentations and other educational forums.
- When we share your thoughts, we will not link anything you say with your name.
- And if we end up using a direct quote or a video clip of some of your remarks, we'll give you a fake name to preserve your privacy.
- Thus you should feel free to say whatever is on your mind.
- Now, you and your parents have all signed that you agree to being audio- and video-taped as a condition of participating in this research.
- At this time, does anyone have any objection to this taping?
  - (If so, you are not eligible to participate in this research. Please see XXX on your way out.)

OK, then, we'll start with the questionnaire. Please use the pencils we have provided to fill it out. If you finish early, please put it and your pencil down so we know that you are done and refrain from talking so others may finish. We'll stop in ten minutes.

(TAKE SURVEY.)

(At ten minute point): Our ten minutes are up. If you haven't finished, don't worry. You are welcome to stay after the discussion and answer the remaining questions, but you don't have to. Whether you've finished or not, please hold on to your questionnaires; you will need to turn them in when you leave tonight.

Before we begin I want to emphasize:

- You are the experts here today. The reason we are here today is to better understand your views and experiences with getting news online.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We want to hear what you think and what you do.
- During the discussion, I'm not planning on talking much. But I do want to make sure that we cover a number of topics in a limited amount of time, so I'll try to keep things moving.
- There is no need to raise hands. Speak right up. But please respect others when they are talking and try not to talk over each other; that will make it very hard to hear and capture your thoughts.

Our time together may last up to about 90 minutes. Is there anyone who can't stay? (If so, I'll have to ask that you leave now. Please see XXX on your way out.)

Before we begin, are there any questions about how we will be conducting this discussion?

Now let's begin our discussion. (TRY TO GET AT LEAST ONE COMMENT FROM EACH PARTICIPANT IN THIS WARM UP SECTION.)

- Have you guys done one of these focus groups before?
- Please introduce yourselves to each other and to us and say...
  - Your first name.
  - Your age.
  - What interests you have.
- From where do you usually go on the Internet (home, school, etc.)?
- On a typical day, how do you use the Internet?
  - What sites do you go to and Why?
  - How does getting news on the Internet fit into your day?
  - Are there particular sites you look at for news?
  - Is there any particular time of day when you usually look at news online?
  - Are there particular sites you look at for news from different places?
  - Do you do different things online when you're not at home?
  - Are there things on your favorite sites you always look at?

- What makes you want to go back to a site regularly?
- How interested are you in the news in general?
  - Why is that?
  - What would it take for you to start paying more attention to the news?
  - Are you interested in specific kinds of news – like sports news, entertainment news, political news, news about your school or your town, etc.?
- Pizza pie: How much of the news you get is from the Internet and how much from other sources? (They should all mention online to some extent: if they don't use news online very much ask :)
- Why do you rely most on your number one source? (Internet, TV, radio, etc.?)
- Why is it better than other ways you could get news?
- Do you have to look at news for school? Where do you go?

I want to focus on news on the Internet. As you could see by the list on the survey, you can get news from lots of places – from newspaper Web sites, like the Chicago Tribune, or from watching a clip of the Daily Show online, or from your friend's home page, or your school's Web site, to name a few. And you can get news about a lot of different subjects.

- What do you think about online news?
- What's your home page?
  - Do you have news on your home page?
  - Where do you usually run into news on the Internet?
- Are there sites that you make a point of going to for news?
  - Do you visit this site as an end in itself, for its own sake? Or as a means to an end?
  - Do you set time aside for checking out this site or do you just do it when you have a few minutes?
- Which sites (that have news) do you go to the most?
- Why do you make time for these particular sites? What do you like about the sites where you usually get news?
- Are there any sites that you used to go to for news that you don't go to any more?
  - What made you stop?
  - What makes you like the ones you're using now better?

### **Experiences:**

We're interested in how you feel when you go to different sites for news. I'm going say some things that people have told us they feel about the sites they visit for news. I want you to think about the sites that came up in our discussion today, the sites that you use most often for news and tell me whether you usually have that feeling or not when you visit your favorite sites and why you have that feeling. (PROBE WHY, WHAT IS IT ABOUT OR IN THE SITE?)

- This gives me useful information
- This makes it hard to leave once you start surfing around
- This is exciting

- This gives me information I can trust
- This shows me how I could approach problems
- This makes me curious
- This makes me feel safe
- This is how I get the news every day
- This is where I always go to when I surf the Web
- This is a treat for me
- This is where I go to forget about everything else
- People on this site get me interested in things I didn't know about before
- I want to tell someone else about this site
- This often gives me things to talk about with my friends or family
- This makes me feel more connected to my community or neighbors
- This relates to issues or topics of special importance to me
- This stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics
- This inspires me in my own life
- This makes me feel comfortable contributing to the conversation
- This makes me feel guilty about the amount of time I spend on this site socializing
- It upsets me when they are trying to sell me things on this site
- This really seems to look out for people like me
- I recognize myself in this site
- I feel personally involved in this site
- This gives me a lot of gift ideas
- This is easy to use

A lot of people your age care a lot about (or several of you have mentioned) global warming. That is an important topic for everyone. If you wanted to find out more about this subject, how would you go about doing it? Walk us through the process you'd use, where you'd go and why you would make the choices you make in getting information about the subject.

- Why would you go to these sites? What is it about them that makes them particularly interesting or valuable to you?
- How would you tell which sites to trust?
- What would make you think one site was better than another one as you search for information on this topic?
- Would you rather go to one site that either had everything or had links to everything, or would you rather find the places to get information yourself?

AT THE END OF THE FOCUS GROUP:

- BRIEFLY SUMMARIZE THE MAIN POINTS OF THE DISCUSSION.
- ENCOURAGE SOME GENERAL AGREEMENT BY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE: "WHAT I HAVE HEARD YOU SAYING THIS EVENING WAS ..... DID I SUMMARIZE YOUR THOUGHTS CORRECTLY?"

- IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD OR AMEND?
- THANK EVERYONE FOR ATTENDING.
- Tell them to be sure to hand XXX their survey as they leave and she will have an envelope for each of you.

## Appendix C: Interview protocol and questions

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee (first name and ID)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Northwestern University: Youth Online Experience Study

AFTER THEY TAKE THE ONLINE SURVEY, START TAPE

Thank you for joining us today. We're really interested in learning what you have to say. This study is about your reactions to getting news online. For right now, we want you to pick one site that you use most often to get news online. By "getting news online" I mean going online and getting news and information about something that interests you.

(TYPE OF SITE) It could be a site you go to just to get news and information, or a site you go to for something else and while you're there you usually glance at the headlines, or a site you find yourself going to frequently for news because you've linked there from another site.

(TYPE OF NEWS) It could be about the news of the day in general – like what's happening in the Iraq war, or to see the most talked about video clips. Or it could be going online to keep up with something specific you're interested in, like sports, music, global warming, what's happening to a celebrity you like, or whatever.

The important thing is that we want you to pick the one site that you think you use most often to get news – to keep up with what's happening and perhaps get more information about things that interest you.

Which site would that be? Is that the same one you picked as your top news site on the survey? (IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE) (IF THEY ARE UNCERTAIN WHICH SITE TO PICK, ASK WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE AND HAVE THEM PICK THE ONE THEY SPEND MOST TIME WITH).

#### Part 1:

(PULL UP THE SITE THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT AND RECORD THE ADDRESS AND ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS BELOW ON YOUR INTERVIEW SHEET.)

- How often would you go to this site in a typical week?
- Why do you use this site?
- Where you usually go on the site – what parts of it do you use? Why?
- Once you get on the site, do you always use it in the same way, or do you do different things?
- Why do you like this site better than others you've seen?
- What do you get from it?



**Part 2:**

OK. That's very interesting. Now we would like you to focus on your experience getting news and information from this Web site – about your thoughts, feelings and reactions while you're using it, about how it makes you feel when you go there. It's very important that you stick to your own experiences and feelings about this site.

To get at your experience with the site, I'm going to read you some thoughts that you might or might not have had when getting news online from this site. Then I want you to tell me how well each statement I read describes the experience you have had with this site.

Let's use a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 meaning that the statement does not describe your experience with this site at all, and 10 meaning that it describes your experience very well. So just give me the number between 1 and 10 that best describes how well the thought fits your experience with the site. Again, remember that this refers to the one Web site we are focusing on and not any other site.

For some experiences, I may ask you to rephrase some of these thoughts in your own words so that they fit your experience even better.

(DO FOR ALL THOUGHTS RATED 5 OR HIGHER)

(RECORD ONE NUMBER, MAKE SURE SCALE IS UNDERSTOOD)

(DO NOT READ STATEMENT IN PARENTHESIS; ONLY STATEMENT IN **BOLD**)

So, here we go. The first statement is....

- This is exciting. (entertains and absorbs me)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (How well does this describe your experience? RECORD ONE NUMBER:  
MAKE SURE SCALE IS UNDERSTOOD)

IF 5 or OVER, Try to rephrase this in your own words so that it describes your experience even better. (RECORD BELOW)

(REPEAT THE SAME PROCEDURE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:)

- This makes it hard to leave once you start surfing around. (entertains and absorbs me)
- This makes me curious. (entertains and absorbs me)
- This gives me useful information. (helps and improves)
- This shows me how I could approach problems. (helps and improves me)
- This gives me information I can trust. (credible place)
- This makes me feel safe. (credible place)
- This is how I get the news every day. (part of my routine)
- This is where I always go to when I surf the Web. (part of my routine)
- This is a treat for me. (my personal time out)
- This is where I go to forget about everything else. (my personal time out)

- People on this site get me interested in things I didn't know about before. (connects me with others)
- I want to tell someone else about this site. (gives me something to talk about)
- This often gives me things to talk about with my friends or family. (gives me something to talk about)
- This makes me feel more connected to my community or neighbors. (makes me feel I belong)
- This relates to issues or topics of special importance to me. (makes me feel I belong)
- This stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics. (touches me, expands my views)
- This inspires me in my own life. (touches me, expands my views)
- This makes me want to contribute to the conversation online. (my guilty pleasure; connect me with others)
- This makes me feel guilty about the amount of time I spend on this site socializing. (my guilty pleasure)
- It upsets me when they are trying to sell me things on this site. (annoyed by ads).
- This really seems to look out for people like me. (looks out for my interest)
- I recognize myself in this site.
- I feel personally involved in this site.
- This gives me a lot of gift ideas. (turned on by ads).
- This is easy to use.

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY OTHER THINGS LIKE THIS THAT WOULD DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS WEB SITE. (RECORD)

ARE THERE ANY OTHER THINGS THAT YOU LIKE TO DO ON THIS WEB SITE BESIDE THE NEWS? (RECORD)

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THIS SITE FOR A MOMENT SO I CAN SEE SOME OF THE MAIN THINGS YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT (SAY OUT LOUD THE URLS, TAKE SCREEN SHOTS, AND POST THEM TO THE WORD DOCUMENT).

DESCRIBE THE PERSON INTERVIEWED BELOW

SEX

AGE

OVERALL LEVEL OF ONLINE NEWS INTEREST

SPECIAL NEWS INTERESTS

OTHER

## Appendix D: Survey instrument

### Northwestern University Research Study



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY

We need your help for a study about how young people use different media. We think you will find it very interesting. Most of the questions can be easily answered by simply clicking on the appropriate box or boxes. The questionnaire is made up of 2 sections and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Thank you for your help with this important study. Your responses will remain strictly confidential and will not be tied to you personally.

#### Section 1 – Media use

##### ONLINE

1. How long have you been using the Internet? (**X ONE Box**)

- 1 Less than 1 year
- 2 1 year to 2 years
- 3 3 years to 5 years
- 4 6 years to 10 years
- 5 More than 10 years

2. Where do you go online MOST often?

- 1 From home
- 2 From school
- 3 From someone else's house, like a friend or relative's house
- 4 From a library
- 5 From a community center of some kind, like a Boys' or Girls' Club or a church youth center
- 6 From work
- 7 From someplace else

For all of the following questions, please think only of the time you spend online visiting Web sites to get news, either at home, school, work, or other places. Do not include time spent checking email or instant messaging (IM).

3. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

What time(s) of day are you most likely to get news online from any Web site? (**X ALL That Apply**)

- |                       |                      |                       |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Before 9am          | 3 11am to before 2pm | 5 6 pm to before 10pm |
| 2 9 am to before 11am | 4 2 pm to before 6pm | 6 After 10pm          |

4. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

Approximately how many Web sites do you get news from? (**X ONE Box**)

- |   |                      |   |                       |   |                    |
|---|----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | 5 or fewer sites     | 3 | 11-20 different sites | 5 | More than 50 sites |
| 2 | 6-10 different sites | 4 | 20-50 different sites |   |                    |

5. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

In a typical weekday, how much total time do you spend looking at news online (from any location)?

- |   |                        |    |                         |    |                        |
|---|------------------------|----|-------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1 | None                   | 6  | 1 to less than 1½ hours | 11 | 4 to less than 5 hours |
| 2 | 1 to 15 minutes        | 7  | 1½ to less than 2 hours | 12 | 5 to less than 6 hours |
| 3 | 16 to 30 minutes       | 8  | 2 to less than 2½ hours | 13 | 7 to less than 9 hours |
| 4 | 31 to 45 minutes       | 9  | 2½ to less than 3 hours | 14 | 10+ hours              |
| 5 | 46 to less than 1 hour | 10 | 3 to less than 4 hours  |    |                        |

6. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

In a typical Saturday or Sunday, how much total time do you spend looking at news online (from any location)?

- |   |                        |    |                         |    |                        |
|---|------------------------|----|-------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1 | None                   | 6  | 1 to less than 1½ hours | 11 | 4 to less than 5 hours |
| 2 | 1 to 15 minutes        | 7  | 1½ to less than 2 hours | 12 | 5 to less than 6 hours |
| 3 | 16 to 30 minutes       | 8  | 2 to less than 2½ hours | 13 | 7 to less than 9 hours |
| 4 | 31 to 45 minutes       | 9  | 2½ to less than 3 hours | 14 | 10+ hours              |
| 5 | 46 to less than 1 hour | 10 | 3 to less than 4 hours  |    |                        |

7. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

In a typical weekday, how many different times do you look at news online?

- |   |              |   |                |   |                    |
|---|--------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | None         | 4 | 4 to 6 times   | 7 | 16-20 times        |
| 2 | 1 time       | 5 | 7 to 10 times  | 8 | 20 to 25 times     |
| 3 | 2 to 3 times | 6 | 11 to 15 times | 9 | More than 25 times |

8. (Not counting time spent checking email or IM)

In a typical Saturday or Sunday, how many different times do you look at news online?

- |   |              |   |                |   |                    |
|---|--------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | None         | 4 | 4 to 6 times   | 7 | 16-20 times        |
| 2 | 1 time       | 5 | 7 to 10 times  | 8 | 20 to 25 times     |
| 3 | 2 to 3 times | 6 | 11 to 15 times | 9 | More than 25 times |

9. Would you like to use the internet even more often than you do now, or do you already go online as often as you want to?

- 1 Would like to use the Internet more (skip to question 11)
- 2 Already go online as often as I like to

10. Is there a particular reason you don't go online more often?

- 1 Have too many other responsibilities / Don't have time to go online more
- 2 Don't always have access
- 3 Not allowed/My parents don't let me go online as much as I want
- 4 Don't know
- 5 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**11.** Do you ever go online using any hand-held devices like a PDA (such as a Blackberry) or cell phone?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Don't know

**12.** Overall, how do you MOST OFTEN communicate with your friends, do you...

- 1 Call them on the phone
- 2 Write them messages through email, IM or text messaging
- 3 Communicate through social networking sites such as FaceBook or MySpace
- 4 Don't communicate with my friends in any of these ways

**13.** How often do you use the Internet to...

	Every day	At least once a week	A few times a month	Rarely	I don't use the Internet for this
Send and receive email					
Send or receive instant messages					
Send or receive text messages using a cell phone					
Buy things online, such as books, clothing or music					
Play online games					

14. How often do you use the Internet to...

	Every day	At least once a week	A few times a month	Rarely	I don't use the Internet for this
Create or work on your own online journal or Weblog					
Create or work on Webpages or blogs for others, including friends, groups you belong to, or for school assignments					
Read the online journals or Weblogs of others					
Download MUSIC files so you can play them any time you want					
Download VIDEO files so you can play them any time you want					
SHARE files – such as music, video or picture files, or computer games – with others online					
SHARE something online that you created yourself, such as your own artwork, photos, stories or videos					
Take material you find online—like songs, text or images—and remix it into your own artistic creation					

15. The following are different types of sites that include general news.

For each of these sites, please tell us how often you go to it to get news and information.

	Every day	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Rarely	Not familiar / I don't use this for news
Google, Yahoo, AOL or other similar sites						
CNN.com, MSNBC.com or other general television news sites						
NBC5.com, MyFoxChicago.com or other local television news sites						
NewYorkTimes.com, USA Today.com or other national newspaper sites						
ChicagoTribune.com, SunTimes.com, DailyHerald.com or other local newspaper sites						
BBC.com, Reuters.com or similar international news sites						
WBBM780.com, WBEZ.com or other local radio news sites						
Newsweek.com, Time.com or other news magazine sites						
RedEye.com or other free daily newspaper site						
ChicagoReader.com, InTheseTimes.com or other alternative publication sites						
ChicagoDefender.com, HoyInternet.com, ChicagoJewishNews.com or other ethnic news sites						
Digg.com, NewsVine.com, Reddit.com or other news rating sites						
DrudgeReport.com, HuffingtonPost.com, DailyKos.com or other blogs						
The Daily Show, the Colbert Report, TheOnion.com or other satirical news sites						
CollegeHumor.com, Fark.com or other humor sites						
YouTube or other video sharing sites						
Rocketboom or other						
Other						



16. The following is a list of specific topics. Please tell us how often you go online to get news and information about each of these topics.

	Every day	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Rarely	I don't go online for news about this topic
Your high school						
Entertainment						
Celebrity news and gossip						
Sports (general)						
Specific sports or teams						
Religion & spirituality						
Fashion						
Shopping						
Health & fitness						
Cars						
Political causes & activism						
Environment						
Online games						
Music						
Art						
Science & medicine						
Food						
Hobbies						
Jobs						
College, university or other school you are thinking about attending						

17. Which are your three favorite sites for news? Please indicate your favorite site first.

- Favorite news site            1    \_\_\_\_\_
- 2<sup>nd</sup> favorite news site        2    \_\_\_\_\_
- 3<sup>rd</sup> favorite news site        3    \_\_\_\_\_

18. Thinking about your favorite site for news, please tell us how much you agree with the statements below. Please rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree
A big reason I like this site is what I get from other users.					
This site often gives me something to talk about.					
I've gotten interested in things I otherwise wouldn't have because of others on this site.					
This site makes me a more interesting person.					
Overall, the visitors to this site are pretty knowledgeable about the topics it covers so you can learn from them.					
I bring up things I have seen on this site in conversations with many other people.					
I do quite a bit of socializing on this site.					
This site stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics.					
I contribute to the conversation on this site.					
Some stories on this site touch me deep down.					

Briefly, we also want to ask a few questions about your use of other media:

### **TELEVISION**

**19.** On a typical day **Monday-Friday** how many hours do you spend watching television (including videos and DVDs)? **(X ONE Box)**

- |   |                            |   |             |   |                 |
|---|----------------------------|---|-------------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | None (skip to question 22) | 4 | 3 - 4 Hours | 6 | 7 - 8 Hours     |
| 2 | An hour or less            | 5 | 5 - 6 Hours | 7 | 9 Hours or more |
| 3 | 1 - 2 Hours                |   |             |   |                 |

**20.** Over a typical **Saturday-Sunday weekend** how many hours do you spend watching television? **(X ONE Box)**

- |   |                 |   |             |   |                    |
|---|-----------------|---|-------------|---|--------------------|
| 1 | None            | 4 | 3 - 4 Hours | 7 | 9 - 10 hours       |
| 2 | An hour or less | 5 | 5 - 6 Hours | 8 | More than 10 hours |
| 3 | 1 - 2 Hours     | 6 | 7 - 8 Hours |   |                    |

**21.** How much do you enjoy watching television? **(X ONE Box)**

- 1 Do not enjoy
- 2 Enjoy slightly
- 3 Enjoy
- 4 Enjoy a lot
- 5 Enjoy very much

### **MAGAZINE**

**22.** Do you read any magazines in print (that is, not online)?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No (skip to question 28)

Please think of the one magazine you consider **your primary or favorite magazine**. Please answer the following questions about that magazine. Please consider only print magazines – not an online version of a magazine.

**23.** How much time in total did you spend reading or looking into a copy of this magazine the last time it came out? **(X ONE Box)**

- |    |                            |    |                   |    |                   |
|----|----------------------------|----|-------------------|----|-------------------|
| 01 | None (skip to question 28) | 06 | 1 hour - 1½ hours | 11 | 3½ - 4 hours      |
| 02 | 1 - 15 minutes             | 07 | 1½ - 2 hours      | 12 | 4 - 5 hours       |
| 03 | 16 - 30 minutes            | 08 | 2 - 2½ hours      | 13 | 5 - 6 hours       |
| 04 | 31 - 45 minutes            | 09 | 2½ - 3 hours      | 14 | More than 6 hours |
| 05 | 46 minutes - 1 hour        | 10 | 3 - 3½ hours      |    |                   |

**24.** On how many different days did you read or look into a copy of this magazine the last time it came out? **(X ONE Box)**

- |   |      |   |   |   |           |
|---|------|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1 | None | 4 | 3 | 7 | 6         |
| 2 | 1    | 5 | 4 | 8 | 7         |
| 3 | 2    | 6 | 5 | 9 | 8 or more |

25. How many different times do you read or look into any of the issues of this magazine in a typical month? (X ONE Box)

- |   |     |   |      |   |            |
|---|-----|---|------|---|------------|
| 1 | 1   | 3 | 4-6  | 5 | 11-15      |
| 2 | 2-3 | 4 | 7-10 | 6 | 16 or more |

26. In a typical month how much time in total do you spend reading or looking into any of the issues of this magazine? (X ONE Box)

- |    |                      |    |              |    |                   |
|----|----------------------|----|--------------|----|-------------------|
| 01 | Less than 15 minutes | 05 | 1½ - 2 hours | 08 | 4 - 5 hours       |
| 02 | 16 minutes to ½ hour | 06 | 2 - 3 hours  | 09 | 5 - 6 hours       |
| 03 | ½ - 1 hour           | 07 | 3 - 4 hours  | 10 | More than 6 hours |
| 04 | 1-1½ hours           |    |              |    |                   |

27. How much do you enjoy reading this magazine? (X ONE Box)

- 1 Do not enjoy
- 2 Enjoy slightly
- 3 Enjoy
- 4 Enjoy a lot
- 5 Enjoy very much

## **NEWSPAPER**

28. Do you read any newspapers in print (that is, not online)?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No (skip to question 35)

Please think of the one newspaper you consider **your primary or favorite newspaper**. Please answer the following questions about that newspaper. Please consider only the newspaper – not an online version of the newspaper. If you do not read any newspaper, click here to skip this section.

29. In a typical 7-day week, which days do you read or look into this newspaper? (X ALL That Apply)

- |   |                            |   |           |   |          |
|---|----------------------------|---|-----------|---|----------|
| 1 | None (skip to question 35) | 4 | Wednesday | 7 | Saturday |
| 2 | Monday                     | 5 | Thursday  | 8 | Sunday   |
| 3 | Tuesday                    | 6 | Friday    |   |          |

30. How much time do you spend on a typical day Monday through Saturday reading or looking into this newspaper? (X ONE Box)

- |   |                |   |                 |   |                      |
|---|----------------|---|-----------------|---|----------------------|
| 1 | None           | 3 | 16 - 30 minutes | 5 | 46 - 60 minutes      |
| 2 | 1 - 15 minutes | 4 | 31 - 45 minutes | 6 | More than 60 minutes |

31. How much of this newspaper do you read or look into on a typical day Monday through Saturday? (X ONE Box)

- |   |                    |   |                      |   |                   |
|---|--------------------|---|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | None / almost none | 3 | About one half       | 5 | Almost all or all |
| 2 | About one quarter  | 4 | About three quarters |   |                   |

**32. How much time on a typical Sunday do you spend reading or looking into this newspaper? (X ONE Box)**

- |   |                              |   |                               |
|---|------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | None                         | 5 | 1½ hours to less than 2 hours |
| 2 | Less than ½ hour             | 6 | 2 hours to less than 2½ hours |
| 3 | ½ hour to less than 1 hour   | 7 | 2½ hours to less than 3 hours |
| 4 | 1 hour to less than 1½ hours | 8 | 3 hours or more               |

**33. How much of this newspaper do you read or look into on a typical Sunday? (X ONE Box)**

- |   |                    |   |                      |   |                   |
|---|--------------------|---|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | None / almost none | 3 | About one half       | 5 | Almost all or all |
| 2 | About one quarter  | 4 | About three quarters |   |                   |

**34. How much do you enjoy reading this newspaper? (X ONE Box)**

- 1 Do not enjoy
- 2 Enjoy slightly
- 3 Enjoy
- 4 Enjoy a lot
- 5 Enjoy very much

<b>Section 2 - Demographics</b>
---------------------------------

**35. What year were you born? (X ONE Box)**

- |   |      |   |      |   |             |
|---|------|---|------|---|-------------|
| 1 | 1993 | 4 | 1990 | 7 | 1987        |
| 2 | 1992 | 5 | 1989 | 8 | Other _____ |
| 3 | 1991 | 6 | 1988 |   |             |

**36. Gender: 1 Male 2 Female (X ONE Box)**

**37. Which best describes your education? (X ONE Box)**

- 1 Grade school (8th grade or less)
- 2 High school (did not graduate)
- 3 High school graduate (12th grade)
- 4 Special or technical training (not college)
- 5 Some college (1-3 years)
- 6 College graduate
- 7 Post college graduate

**38. Including yourself, how many people live in your current household? (X ONE Box)**

- |   |     |   |       |   |                     |
|---|-----|---|-------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | One | 3 | Three | 5 | Five                |
| 2 | Two | 4 | Four  | 6 | Between six and ten |
|   |     |   |       | 7 | More than 10        |

**39. What race do you consider yourself to be? (X ONE Box)**

- 1 White / Caucasian
- 2 Asian
- 3 African-American or Black
- 4 Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
- 5 Mixed / Multi-Racial
- 6 Other

**40. Where were you born? (X ONE Box)**

- 1 In one of the 50 United States
- 2 Outside of the 50 United States

**41. Which of the following describes where your parents were born? (X ONE Box)**

- 1 One or both parents born outside the 50 United States
- 2 Both parents born in the United States

**42. In casual conversation with friends or family, in which language do you prefer to speak? (X ONE Box)**

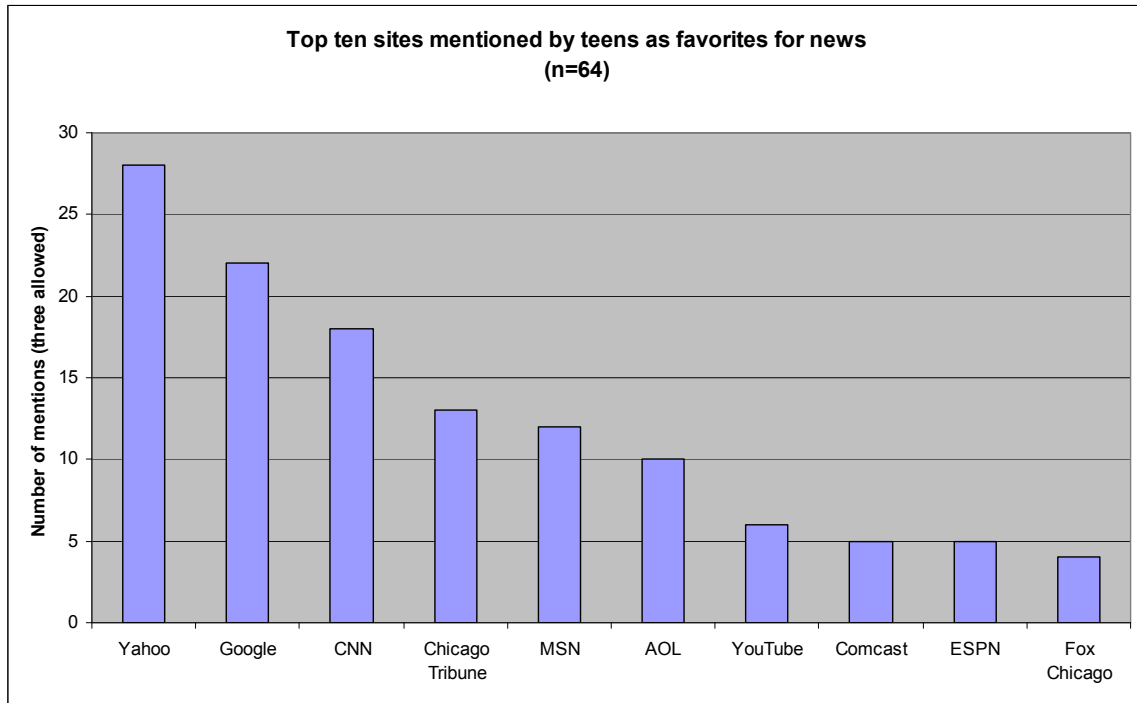
- 1 English
- 2 Language other than English

**Table 1: Average rating per statement (from one-on-one interviews)**

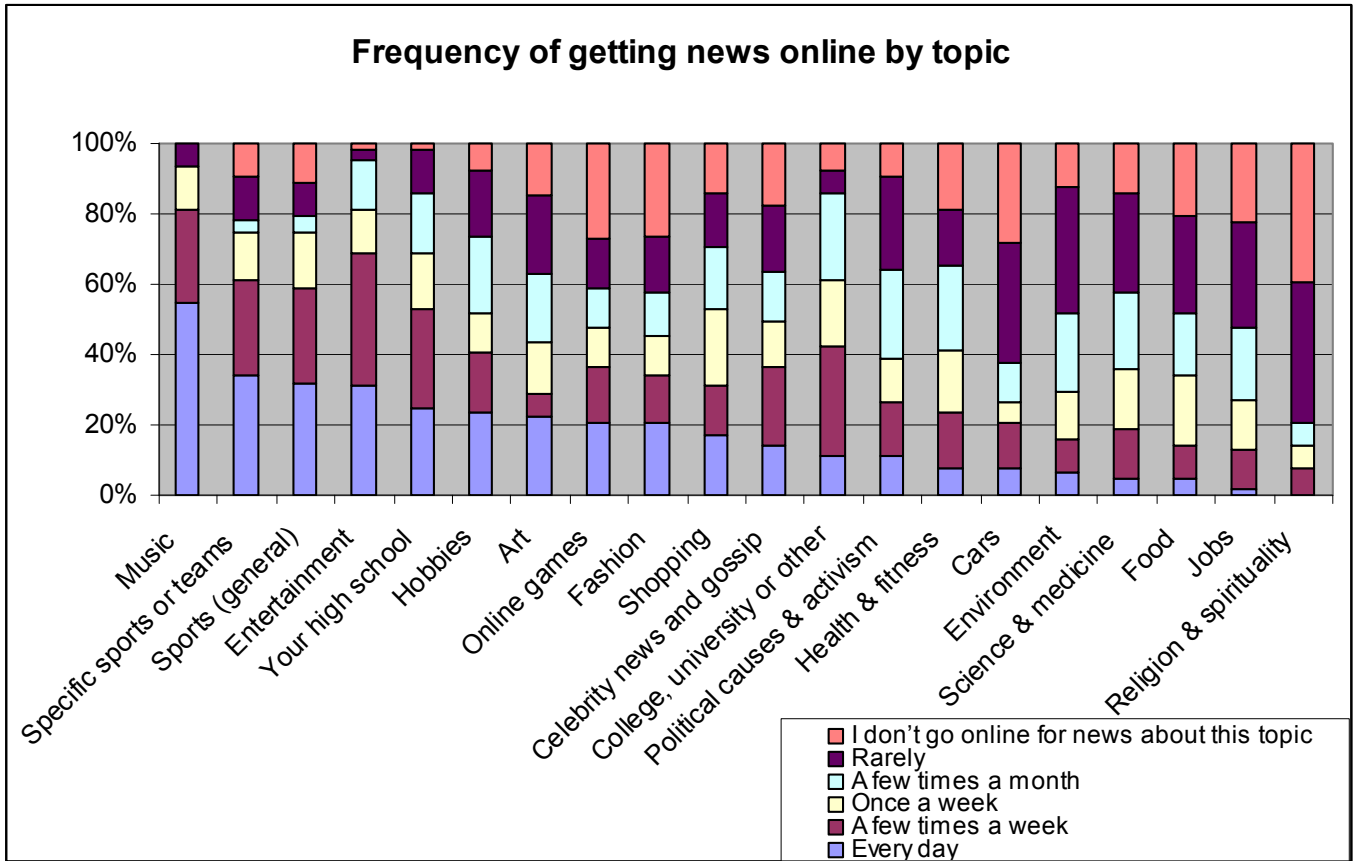
<b>Experience statements</b>	<b>Average rating (1-10)</b>
This is easy to use	9.31
This gives me useful information	8.58
This gives me information I can trust	7.90
This often gives me things to talk about with my family or friends	7.83
This is exciting	7.23
This stimulates my thinking about lots of different topics	7.21
This relates to issues or topics of special importance to me	7.19
This makes me curious	6.81
I want to tell someone else about site	6.69
This is how I get the news every day	6.67
This is where I go when I surf the Web	6.63
People on this site get me interested in things I didn't know about before	6.52
This really seems to look out for people like me	6.17
This makes me feel safe	6.04
This is a treat for me	5.88
This inspires me in my own life	5.79
This makes it hard to leave once you start surfing around	5.56
I recognize myself in this site	5.51
This makes me feel more connected to community or neighbors	4.89
This shows me how I could approach problems	4.38
This makes me feel comfortable contributing to the conversation	4.38
It upsets me when they are trying to sell me things on this site	4.21
I feel personally involved in this site	3.88
This gives me a lot of gift ideas	3.83
This is where I go to forget about everything else	3.08
This makes me feel guilty about the amount of time I spend on this site socializing	2.17



**Chart 1: Favorite sites for news**



**Chart 2: Frequency of getting news online by topic**



Base=64.