



New Media, Old Media: How Blogs and Social Media Agendas Relate and Differ from the Traditional Press

News today is increasingly a shared, social experience. Half of Americans say they rely on the people around them to find out at least some of the news they need to know.¹ Some 44% of online news users get news at least a few times a week through emails, automatic updates or posts from social networking sites. In 2009, Twitter’s monthly audience increased by 200%.²

While most original reporting still comes from traditional journalists, technology makes it

News Topics Across Media Platforms				
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010*				
	Blogs (% of stories)	Twitter (% of stories)	YouTube (% of videos)	Traditional Press (% of newshole)
Politics/Government	17%	6%	21%	15%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	12	13	26	9
Economy	7	1	1	10
Technology	8	43	1	1
Health and Medicine	7	4	6	11

* Twitter was tracked from June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010

increasingly possible for the actions of citizens to influence a story’s total impact.

What types of news stories do consumers share and discuss the most? What issues do they have less interest in? What is the interplay of the various new media platforms? And how do their agendas compare with that of the mainstream press?

To answer these questions, the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism has gathered a year of data on the top news stories discussed and linked to on blogs and social media pages and seven months’ worth on Twitter. We also have analyzed a year of the most viewed news-related videos on YouTube. Several clear trends emerge.

Most broadly, the stories and issues that gain traction in social media differ substantially from those that lead in the mainstream press. But they also differ greatly from each other. Of the 29 weeks that we tracked all three social platforms, blogs, Twitter and YouTube shared the same top story just once. That was the week of June 15-19, when the protests that followed the Iranian elections led on all three.

¹ http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/understanding_participatory_news_consumer

² <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007271>

Each social media platform also seems to have its own personality and function. In the year studied, bloggers gravitated toward stories that elicited emotion, concerned individual or group rights or triggered ideological passion. Often these were stories that people could personalize and then share in the social forum – at times in highly partisan language. And unlike in some other types of media, the partisanship here does not lean strongly to one side or the other. Even on stories like the Tea Party protests, Sarah Palin and public support for Obama both conservative and liberal voices come through strongly.

On Twitter, by contrast, technology is a major focus – with a heavy prominence on Twitter itself – while politics plays a much smaller role. The mission is primarily about passing along important – often breaking – information in a way that unifies or assumes shared values within the Twitter community. And the breaking news that trumped all else across Twitter in 2009 focused on the protests following the Iranian election. It led as the top news story on Twitter for seven weeks in a row – a feat not reached by any other news story on any of the platforms studied.

YouTube has still other characteristics that set it apart. Here, users don't often add comments or additional insights but instead take part by selecting from millions of videos and sharing. Partly as a result, the most watched videos have a strong sense of serendipity. They pique interest and curiosity with a strong visual appeal. The “Hey you've got to see this,” mentality rings strong. Users also gravitate toward a much broader international mix here as videos transcend language barriers in a way that written text cannot.

Across all three social platforms, though, attention spans are brief. Just as news [consumers don't stay long](#) on any website, social media doesn't stay long on any one story. On blogs, 53% of the lead stories in a given week stay on the list no more than three days. On Twitter that is true of 72% of lead stories, and more than half (52%) are on the list for just 24 hours.

And most of those top weekly stories differ dramatically from what is receiving attention in the traditional press. Blogs overlap more than Twitter, but even there only about a quarter of the top stories in any given week were the same as in the “MSM.”

Instead, social media tend to hone in on stories that get much less attention in the mainstream press. And there is little evidence, at least at this point, of the traditional press then picking up on those stories in response. Across the entire year studied, just one particular story or event – the controversy over emails relating to global research that came to be known as “[Climate-gate](#)” – became a major item in the blogosphere and then, a [week later](#), gaining more traction in traditional media.

These are some conclusions drawn from one of the first comprehensive empirical assessments of the relationships between social media and the more traditional press.

The study examined the blogosphere and social media by tracking the news linked to on millions of blogs and social media pages tracked by Icerocket and Technorati from January 19, 2009, through January 15, 2010.³ It also tracked the videos on YouTube's **news channel** for the same period. It measured Twitter by tracking news stories linked to within tweets as monitored by Tweetmeme from June 15, 2009, through January 15, 2010.⁴

Among the specific findings:

- Social media and the mainstream press clearly embrace different agendas. Blogs shared the same lead story with traditional media in just 13 of the 49 weeks studied. Twitter was even less likely to share the traditional media agenda – the lead story matched that of the mainstream press in just four weeks of the 29 weeks studied. On YouTube, the top stories overlapped with traditional media eight out of 49 weeks.
- The stories that gain traction in social media do so quickly, often within hours of initial reports, and leave quickly as well. Just 5% of the top five stories on Twitter remained among the top stories the following week. This was true of 13% of the top stories on blogs and 9% on YouTube. In the mainstream press, on the other hand, fully 50% of the top five stories one week remained a top story a week later.
- Politics, so much a focus of cable and radio talk programming, has found a place in blogs and on YouTube. On blogs, 17% of the top five linked-to stories in a given week were about U.S. government or politics, often accompanied by emphatic personal analysis or evaluations. These topics were even more prevalent among news videos on YouTube, where they accounted for 21% of all top stories. On Twitter, however, technology stories were linked to far more than anything else, accounting for 43% of the top five stories in a given week and 41% of the lead items. By contrast, technology filled 1% of the newshole in the mainstream press during the same period.
- While social media players espouse a different agenda than the mainstream media, blogs still heavily rely on the traditional press – and primarily just a few outlets within that – for their information. More than 99% of the stories linked to in blogs came from legacy outlets such as newspapers and broadcast networks. And just four – the BBC, CNN, the New York Times and the Washington Post accounted for fully 80% of all links.

³ For the NMI, the priorities of bloggers and users of Twitter are measured in terms of percentage of links. Each time a news blog or social media Web page adds a link to its site directing its readers to a news story, it suggests that the author places at least some importance on the content of that article. The user may or may not agree with the contents of the article, but they feel it is important enough to draw the reader's attention to it.

⁴ There were three weeks in 2009 when no NMI was produced: March 2-6, November 16-20, and December 14-18.

- Twitter, by contrast, was less tied to traditional media. Here half (50%) of the links were to legacy outlets; 40% went to web-only news sources such as Mashable and CNET. The remaining 10% went to wire stories or non-news sources on the Web such as a blog known as “Green Briefs,” which summarized daily developments during the June protests in Iran.
- The most popular news videos on YouTube, meanwhile, stood out for having a broader international mix. A quarter, 26%, of the top watched news videos were of non-U.S. events, primarily those with a strong visual appeal such as raw footage of [Pope Benedict XVI](#) getting knocked over during Mass on Christmas Eve or a clip of a veteran [Brazilian news anchor](#) getting caught insulting some janitors without realizing his microphone was still live. Celebrity and media-focused videos were also given significant prominence.

In producing PEJ’s New Media Index, the basis for this study, there are some challenges posed by the breath of potential outlets. There are literally millions of blogs and tweets produced each day. To make that prospect manageable, the study observes the “news” interests of those people utilizing social media, as classified by the tracking websites. PEJ did not make a determination as to what constitutes a news story as opposed to some other topic, but generally, areas outside the traditional notion of news such as gardening, sports or other hobbies are not in the purview of content.

By focusing on this type of subject matter, the study creates a close comparison between the news agenda of users of social media and of the more traditional news media. This approach could tend to make the agendas of the mainstream and new media platforms appear even more similar than they would be if a wider array of subject matter were practicable to capture. Thus the divergent agendas found here, if anything, are even more striking.

The Blogosphere

Of the three social media platforms studied, news-oriented blogs share the most similarities with the mainstream press. Bloggers almost always link to legacy outlets for their information, and politics, government and foreign events garnered the greatest traction.

There are, however, also some clear differences. While the biggest topic areas overlap, there was considerable divergence in the specific news events that garnered attention. In less than one third of the weeks did the blogosphere and traditional press share the same top story. Bloggers tend to gravitate toward events that affect personal rights and cultural norms – issues like same-sex marriage, the rationing of health care or privacy settings on Facebook, while traditional media news agendas are more event-driven and institutional.

And a strong sense of purpose often accompanies the links in blogs and social networking media. In many cases, it is voicing strongly held and often divisive opinions. After the [botched terror attack](#) on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day, for instance, a number of conservative bloggers immediately blamed Obama, while others claimed that the fear of terrorism had become larger and more irrational than it should be.

In others, the function was more to share personal connections to events or to take action.

“I’m not one to buy into mass hysteria, but I am AFRAID of this swine flu,” admitted blogger [mooneyshine](#) the [week](#) that the H1N1 virus threatened to become a global pandemic. “I ain’t landing in the hospital with no pig virus. Suddenly Piglet is not so cute anymore.”

Alongside these more heated discussions, bloggers also enjoy sharing and commenting on unusual or off-beat findings and events buried deep in other media coverage.

Topics

In the broadest sense, the top news agenda in the blogosphere coincides with that of the traditional press; politics and foreign events are the topic areas linked to most often. The next most popular subject areas, however, tend to differ; science stories – often off-beat findings – were the No. 3 subject area in blogs and social media pages, followed by technology related news. (Those topics are much less popular in the traditional press).

In 2009, bloggers, like the mainstream media, were caught up in assessing the first year of the Obama administration. Fully 17% of the top five stories each week related to **U.S. politics and government affairs**,

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Health and Medicine	7	11
Celebrity	7	2
Economy	7	10
Terrorism	6	4
Crime	6	6
Environment (including Global Warming)	4	2
Pop Culture	3	1
Oddball	3	< 1
Gay issues	2	< 1
Consumer News	2	< 1
Education	2	1
Media	2	2
Religion	1	< 1
Immigration	< 1	< 1
Race/Gender Relations	< 1	1
Disasters/Accidents	< 1	2

particularly the new president. This is similar to the level of attention in the mainstream press (15% of the newshole during that same period, according to PEJ's [News Coverage Index](#)).

The discussion accompanying the links in the blogosphere is quite different, however. Partisanship is strong, but unlike talk radio, the conversation here tends to draw a fairly even mix of conservative and liberal voices. The Tea Party protests, Sarah Palin and Obama's poll numbers, for example, all drew a wide mix of conservative and liberal commentary.

In [February](#), as Congress debated the economic stimulus package, for instance, bloggers clashed over the list of programs included in the bill.

Conservative bloggers scorched the bill as being full of wasteful programs that lacked any economic benefits. "Take a look at some of the absolute garbage the Democrats are filling this bill with," the conservative blog [East Coast Mark](#) charged.

"Everything on the Republican list of 'wasteful projects' is stimulative," countered Gregg Carlstrom on [Fedline](#). "\$88 million for a new Coast Guard icebreaker? Someone is getting paid to build the ship."

Often bloggers make the issues and events highly personal. Linking to an [interactive feature](#) on the New York Times website that compared every presidential inaugural address since 1789, [Elisha Blaha](#) shared, "This is what I will tell my kids...I will tell them that I clapped my hands and stood on the couch as President Obama walked out on to the stage to cheers. I will tell them that I was gitty with excitement and so proud of the confident man who now represents my country."⁵

The second-biggest subject on blogs in the year was **foreign events**. Fully 12% of the top stories in blogs dealt with international events ranging from the [protests](#) in Iran to a vote on the number one song on the Christmas British [pop charts](#). Access on the Web to overseas news outlets like to the BBC and the Guardian as well as prominent British bloggers buoys this tendency.

As with much of the domestic news agenda, many of the foreign event stories that inspired blogger interest received far less attention in the traditional American press, even if the stories linked to were originally found there.

A comment by a judge in Saudi Arabia that it was acceptable for husbands to slap wives who spend too lavishly, for example, was the second-biggest story one week in [May](#), drawing large amounts of criticism in the blogosphere. It received almost no attention in the mainstream press.

⁵ For the sake of authenticity, PEJ has a policy of not correcting misspellings or grammatical errors that appear in direct quotes from blog postings.

"Isn't it ironic that a woman can be punished for spending too much money on a garment that they are forced to wear to authenticate their status as secondary citizens in a patriarchal society," remarked [Womanist Musings](#).

Other popular topics often took on a less serious, or at least less divisive, tenor.

Science (at 10% of the top stories) was the third-largest topic on blogs and social media pages. That compares with just 1% of the newshole in the mainstream press, the No. 23 subject. Much of the interest here was in off-beat scientific findings, such as the research at the University of Sussex that showed [cats](#) have learned to manipulate their owners' emotions by emitting a specific kind of purr, the discovery of a new kind of [large rat](#) in Papa New Guinea, news that a chemical found in [blue M&Ms](#) might have therapeutic qualities, and the discovery of a [meat-eating plant](#) in the Philippines.

Technology (8%) was less of a draw in blogs and social media than on Twitter (where it accounted for 43% of all links), but it still outpaced the mainstream press (1%). The technology stories that attracted the most attention were often those about problems or dangers. News about an email phishing scam that compromised at least 30,000 email passwords around the world, for example, accounted for 45% of the links one week in [October](#) as bloggers spread warnings about how to prevent becoming a victim.

There was often a personal tone here, suggesting a sense of highly engaged citizens talking to each other. "It obviously bears repeating; NEVER give out your username and/or password to anyone. Ever. Not by phone, email, snail mail or in person," warned the [Enertiahost Blog](#). "Legitimate companies will never solicit you for your personal information . . ."

Sprinkled in were stories of general technical interest: The unveiling of new gadgets such as a new version of the [Kindle](#), an interview with the founders of [Twitter](#), and the experiences of a 13-year-old British boy who used an old-fashioned [Sony Walkman](#) for a week to help mark the 30th anniversary of portable music technology, for instance, are examples of the kind of stories that attracted significant attention.

Bloggers also showed a propensity to want to pay respect to **celebrity figures** that passed away, and in many cases these were lesser-known celebrities such as TV pitchman [Billy Mays](#) and comedian [Dom DeLuise](#). Most of the time, the attention to celebrity deaths was intense and fleeting.

Of the 17 times (7% of all stories) that a celebrity-focused story made the top five stories for blogs in a specific week, 12 of them (71%) involved a death. And that does not include the two additional [weeks](#) where new information following the death of pop icon Michael Jackson earned one of the top spots.

The environment (4%), and most specifically the issue of global warming, was also a topic of conversation more often in the blogosphere and in social media pages than in the

mainstream press (2%). The passion here was strong enough that stories about global warming made the roster of top five stories in eight different weeks.

Much of this attention was on the so-called “climate-gate” scandal that took the blogosphere by storm in [December](#) after hacked emails from a British research unit raised the possibility of climate data manipulation. This discussion was led by voices like that of Teófilo de Jesús at [Vivificat](#) who call the science behind global warming “a fallacy.”

Bloggers also demonstrated over the year a tendency to weigh in heavily on stories involving **changes in society**, ranging from the relatively trivial to hot-button cultural issues. These linked-to stories cut across topic areas with an emphasis on adding their voices to conversations that might otherwise be outside their purview.

Social media circles strongly rejected revised privacy settings on [Facebook](#), for instance, campaigned against changes to the design of Tropicana’s [orange juice](#) container and objected to content fees for [streaming music](#) online. On five separate occasions (2% of the top stories), bloggers repeatedly voiced strong support for the right to [gay marriage](#). Those conversations were often spurred by state legislation or proposals that received minimum attention in the national press.

Sources

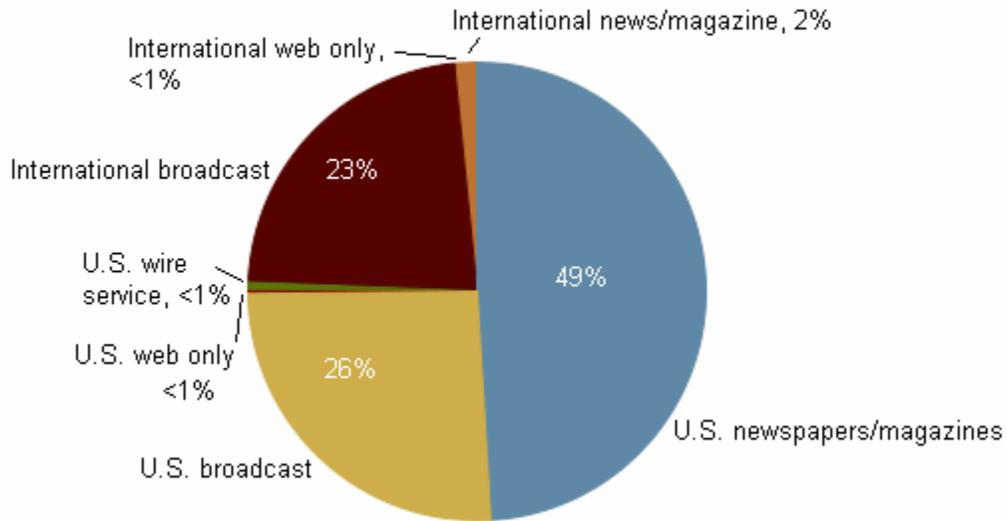
Despite the unconventional agenda of bloggers, traditional media still provides the vast majority of their information. More than 99% of the stories linked to came from legacy outlets like newspapers and broadcast networks. American legacy outlets made up 75% of all items.⁶

Web-only sites, on the other hand, made up less than 1% of the links in the blogosphere.

BBC News led the list of individual sources, constituting 23% of the links studied.

⁶ The data discussed in this section refers to all of the stories and links collected from blogs as part of the weekly NMI sample, regardless of whether that subject made the list of top stories in the given week.

Producers of Most Linked to Stories from Blogs

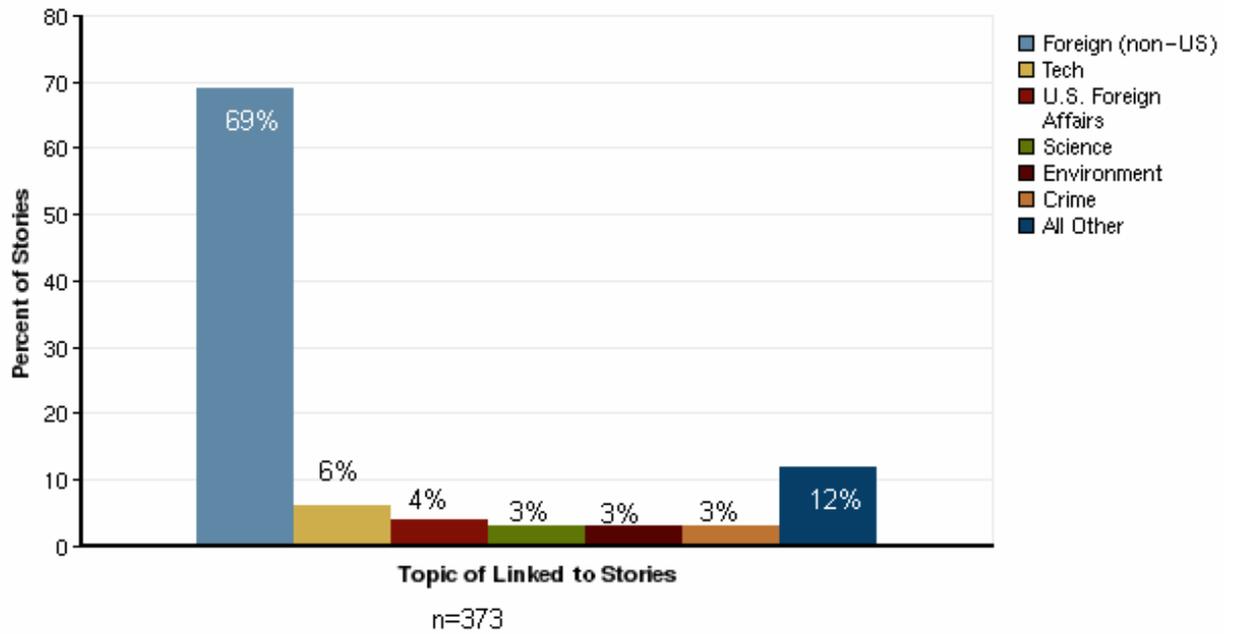


The next three largest sites were the traditional American media outlets of CNN.com (21%), the New York Times (20%), and the Washington Post (16%).

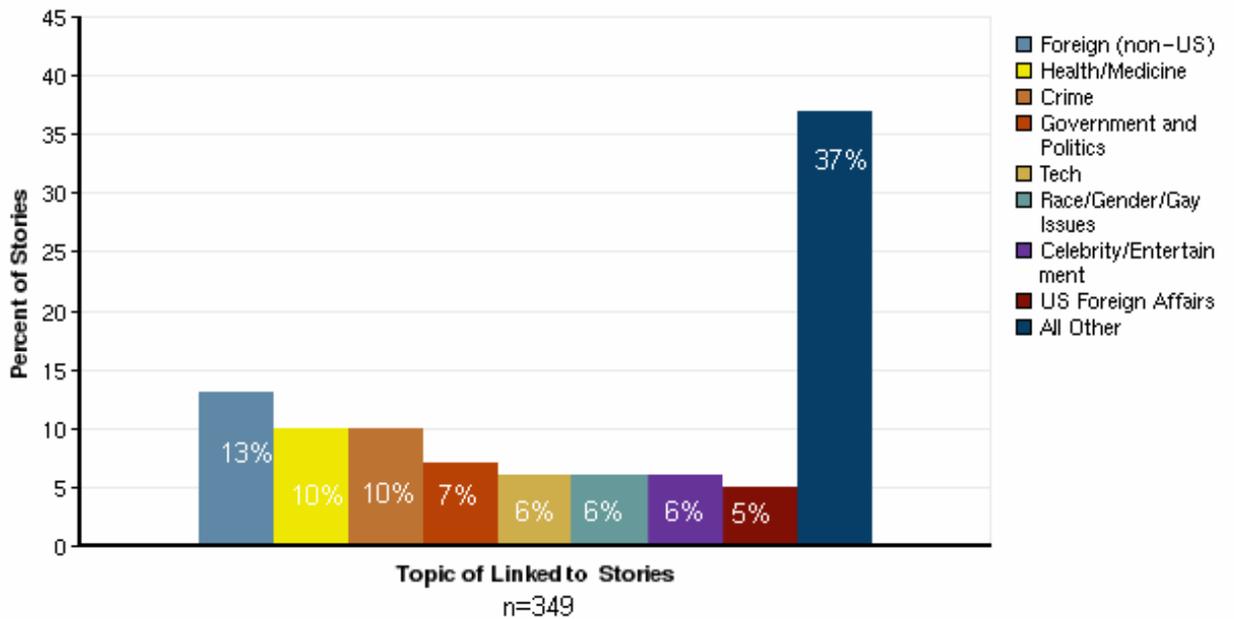
Just one other news site based outside of the U.S., The Guardian, received even 1% of the links.

Bloggers also tended to refer to different outlets for different topics. Newspapers were frequently the sources for stories about politics and government. Fully 44% of the stories linked to from USA Today were on those topics, 34% for the Los Angeles Times, 28% for the Washington Post and 19% for the New York Times.

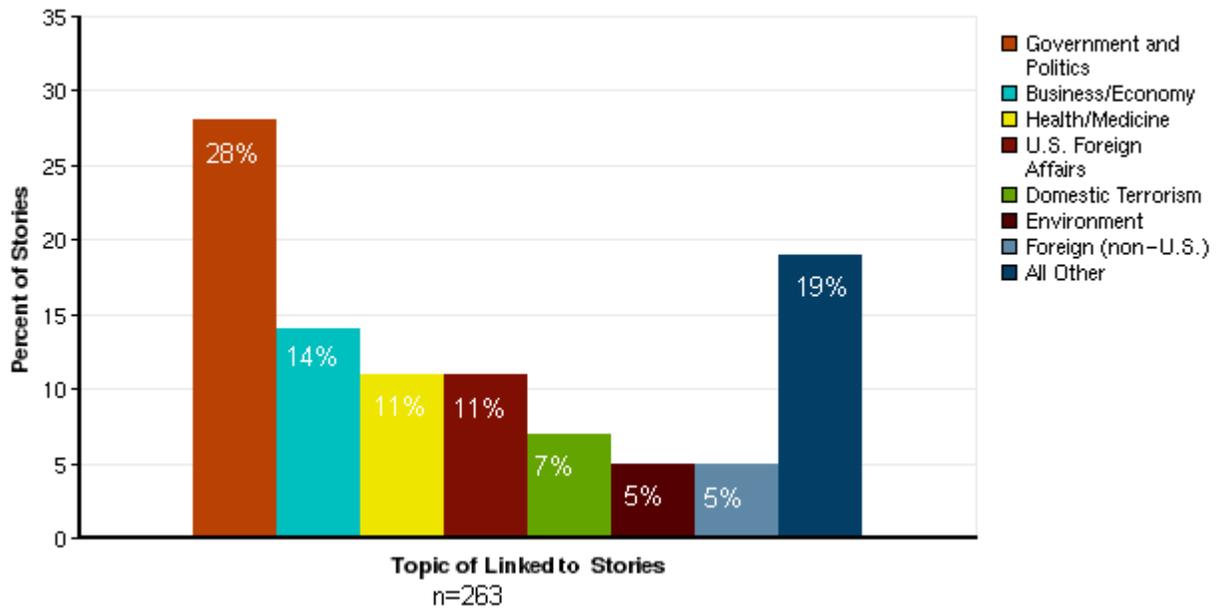
Topics of Linked to Stories from BBC



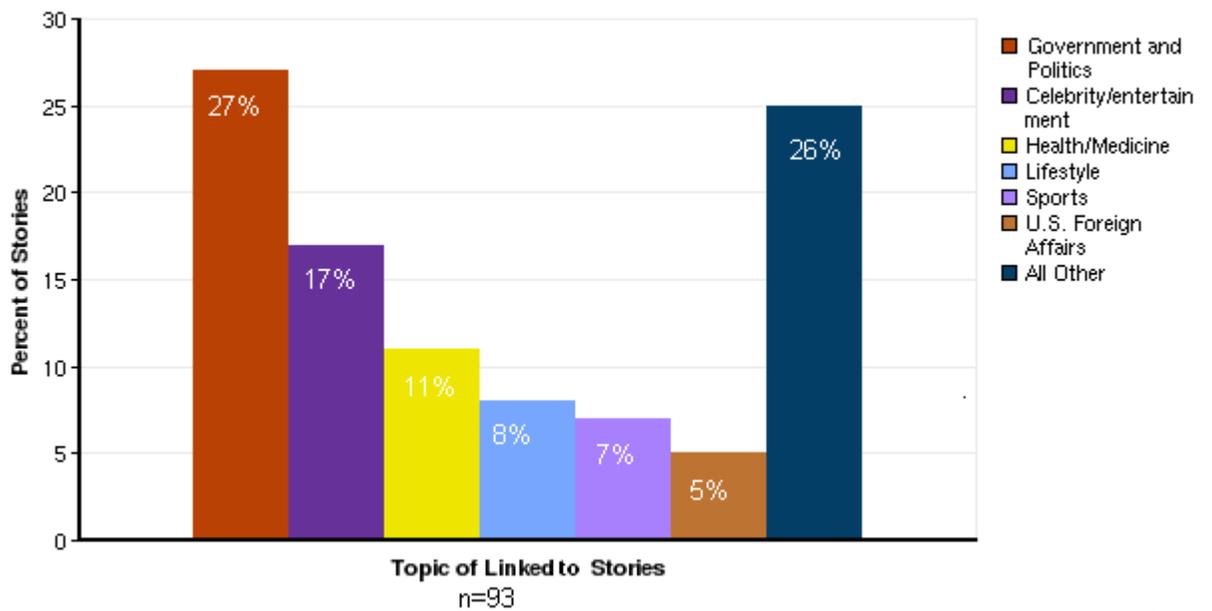
Topics of Linked to Stories from CNN



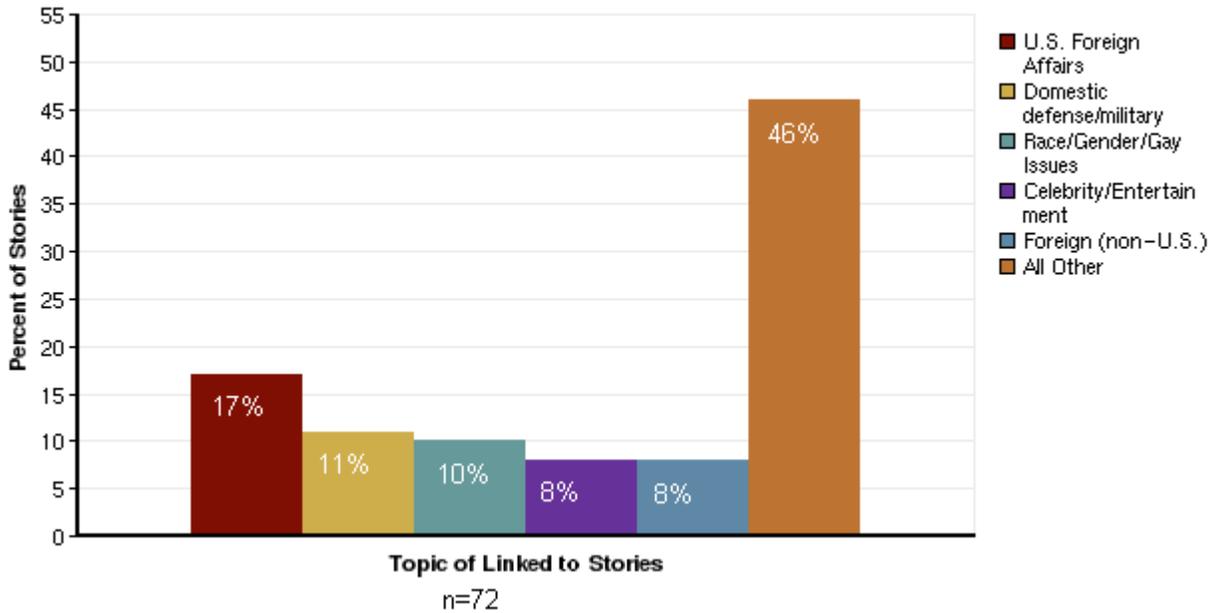
Topics of Linked to Stories from the Washington Post



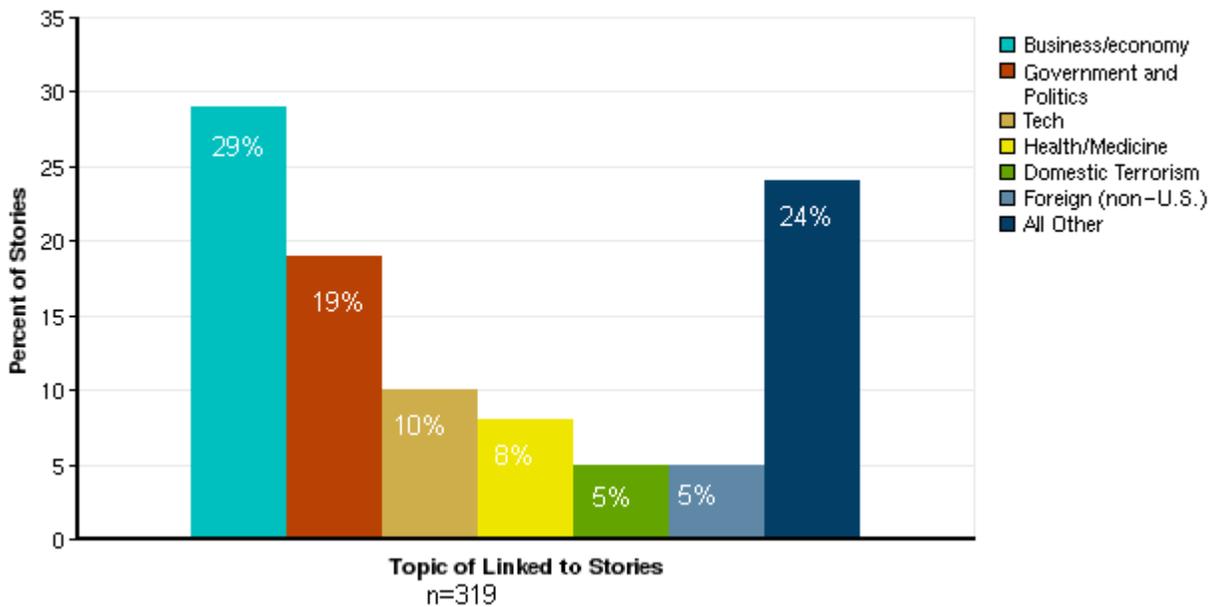
Topics of Linked to Stories from the New York Post



Topics of Linked to Stories from Fox News



Topics of Linked to Stories from The New York Times



The New York Times was more often linked to for business and economics news (28% of its links). Another 10% related to technology, while two other popular newspapers, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times, had no technology-focused stories in their mix.

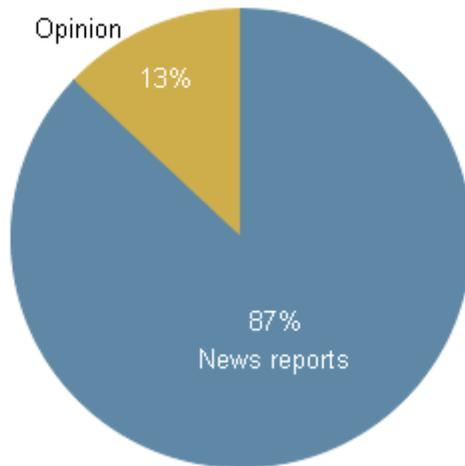
CNN.com was a source for international news (13%), health news (10%) and crime news (10%), while only 7% of CNN's stories were focused on politics or government.

For celebrity news, the New York Post, the tabloid owned by Rupert Murdoch, was a major source, as 17% of the links directed toward its stories were on that subject – more than any other outlet.

And Fox News was the sole source for domestic defense and military news links, accounting 11% of all Fox News links and 100% of all U.S. defense stories.

For the most part, bloggers linked to news accounts rather than editorials or op-eds. Fully 87% of the stories linked to were straight news accounts, compared with only 13% that were opinion columns.

Format of Linked to Stories from Blogs



Most of the opinion columns came from the Washington Post (28% of all Washington Post linked to stories) and the New York Times (26%). Those two papers accounted for 73% of all of the opinion columns that bloggers linked to.

For example, the No. 1 story the first week of [September](#) was a Washington Post op-ed where columnist [George Will](#) advocated for a pullout from Afghanistan. It was an opinion by a prominent conservative that sparked conversation in the blogosphere rather than reporting on new events or facts.

Other sites, however, were linked to primarily as sources for straight news accounts. Almost all (97%) of the stories linked to on CNN and the BBC (96%) were news reporting.

The majority of links bloggers examined were also text-based stories as opposed to interactive pages with multimedia components such as video, slide shows or interactive charts. Fully 83% of the links were to stories that were text-based stories compared with 17% of stories that were multimedia based.

Twitter

The social networking site Twitter, which allows its users to share messages of up to 140 characters, has a very different feel and function than blogs, the study found. First, the subject matter was different. Consumers using Twitter focused far more on technology and Web issues than anything else. There were some instances of using the medium to promote activism and involvement, but they tended to be episodic and to some extent, special circumstances. Two cases involved the [protests in Iran](#) and the [earthquake in Haiti](#), both instances where Web infrastructure was blocked or damaged. Far more often, tweets served a more immediate need: sharing breaking information. The traffic about news on Twitter also tended to stray more from traditional media for its content, relying more than blogs on online-only specialty sites.

Topics of News Coverage on Twitter	
June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010	
	Twitter (% of Stories)
Technology	43%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	13
Politics/Government	6
Crime	5
Celebrity	5
Science	5
Health and Medicine	4
Environment (including Global Warming)	4
Pop Culture	3
Oddball	3
Race/Gender Relations	2
Disasters/Accidents	2
Terrorism	1
Consumer News	1
Economy	1
Media	1
Sports	1
Weather	1
Other	1

The environment on Twitter was less overtly political than blogs. Instead, it tended to espouse a more inclusive tone of community, a sense of its users being advocates for one another other and for the Twitter platform itself. Twitters came down hard, for example, on a [Scottish psychologist](#) who suggested that the use of Twitter actually made people dumber, and they celebrated the posting of the [five billionth tweet](#).

"Woo hoo! I account for 4.0×10^{-7} percent of all tweets in the world!" exclaimed user Giorgianni.

Topics

More so than any other subject area, Twitter users were consumed with stories about technology. Fully 43% of the stories that made the list of top five in a given week were technology-based, more than three times as many as the next largest topic.

Most of the tech stories focused on web-related topics, with a heavy emphasis on Twitter, Apple and Facebook. On 13 occasions (making up 9% of the stories and 21% of the technology stories), Twitter made the list of top stories, more than any other specific subject matter.

Whether it was a new tool for tracking recent posts or the problems associated with Twitter's new "retweet" feature offered in [November](#), Twitter users clearly saw a shared mission in advancing this social media platform.

Other technological developments to spark interest and sharing on Twitter were [Apple](#) products like the iPhone and the iPad, which made up 7% of all top stories. Stories about Facebook, such as the addition of [new functions](#), accounted for another 7%; Developments involving Microsoft, such as the release of [Windows 7](#), constituted another 4%; news about Google, including an [outage](#) of their email service, gmail, filled 4%.

Some areas earned less attention on Twitter than on blogs, such as politics (6% on Twitter versus 17% on blogs) and science (5% versus 10%). The two platforms devoted about the same degree of interest to environment (4% for both Twitter and blogs).

Whatever the topic, the vast majority of tweets that linked to news stories were not using Twitter to report or opine as much as to alert people to other content. Most tweets simply repeated the headline of the story (perhaps with a few words describing its contents) and provided a link. For example, following a [two-hour outage](#) of the site in August due to a denial-of-service attack, many Twitterers repeated the tweet first provided by actress Alyssa Milano, who linked to a CNN story explaining the cause. The message used by hundreds was simply, "CNN full story of DDoS attack and what DDoS means: <http://bit.ly/StWZB>."

In short, most of the time, Twitter was about sharing information rather than providing opinion or advocacy.

There was one major storyline, though, where the role of Twitter went much farther.

The Election and Protest in Iran

The role Twitter played in the post-election political protests in Iran in June amounted to something of a milestone in new technology in 2009 – so much so that some dubbed the event the "[Twitter Revolution](#)."

While Twitter was used widely within Iran to get out information about unfolding events, it also was used heavily by people outside the country to build support for the protestors and to highlight events. Much of what was captured in this index came from this second category and alone accounted for nearly half of all foreign event storylines. Overall, foreign events were the second-biggest topic on Twitter, with 13% of the links.

Iran proved to be the top story seven weeks in a row, raising the profile and reputation of Twitter. As the Iranian government tried to crack down on the popular uprising, Twitter posts served as a critical information source for people directly involved, enabling participation and activism in much the way satellite dishes and video tapes once did in the former satellite countries of the Soviet Union.

Among the most popular links in Iranian-related posts was a page entitled “[cyberwar guide for beginners](#).” It explained how users could help, or accidentally harm, the protest efforts online by spreading the word about those tweeting from within the country without revealing too much information about their identities. Others posted links to a [Flickr page](#) that scrolled through images of the protests and encouraged people to change their avatars to the color green as a show of solidarity with the protestors.

Twitter’s own research also spoke to the dominance of Iran on the social networking site in 2009. According to [Twitter’s own blog](#), a review of all keywords, hashtags and phrases that proliferated on the site (not just those associated with news stories) showed that Iran was the “most engaging topic of the year.” Three related terms, “#iranelection,” “Iran” and “Tehran” were all in the top 21 trending topics.

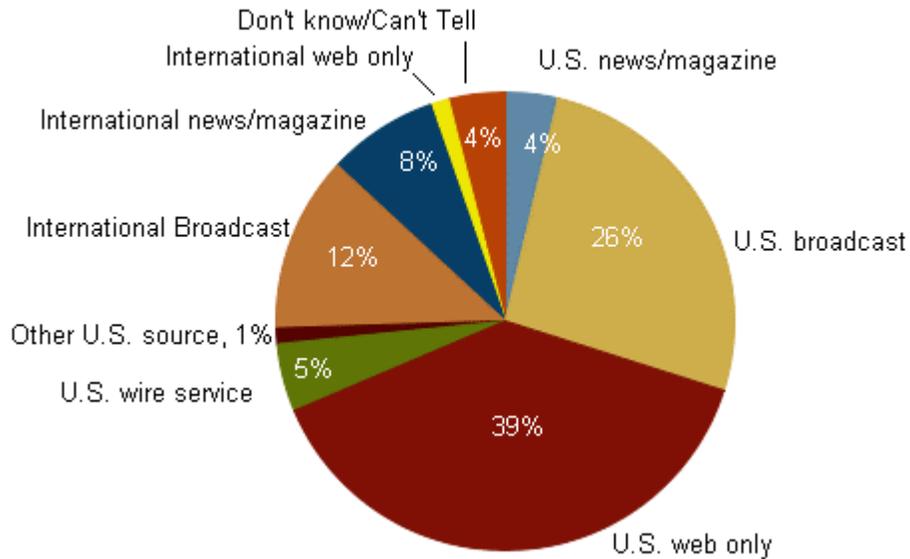
In early 2010, Twitter emerged as a vehicle for online activism in another major foreign event – the [earthquake in Haiti](#). Thousands of Twitterers used their 140 characters to promote the option to text the word “Haiti” to 90999 in order to donate \$10 to the Red Cross relief effort. With the added endorsements of the White House blog and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the Red Cross reported that the phone messaging campaign raised \$8 million within three days.

Sources

Contrary to blogs, Twitter users linked much less to traditional news sources and were more likely to use web-only news sources. Half (50%) of stories linked to from Twitter were to legacy outlets (30% to American legacy media), while 40% went to web-only sites such as Mashable and CNET. Part of this had to do with the subject matter, as these web-only sites are often leading sources for news about social media and other Internet topics.⁷

⁷ The data discussed in this section refers to all of the stories and links collected from Twitter as part of the weekly NMI sample, regardless of whether that subject made the list of top stories in the given week.

Producers of Most Linked to Stories on Twitter



Non-U.S. sites accounted for a similar degree of the content here as on blogs (22%), though less dominated by the BBC, which received only 12% of the overall links.

Instead, the news outlet that received the most links from Twitter (19%) was CNET, an online portal that focuses on technology news and product reviews. The majority of CNET stories (61%) were technology-focused, while 23% were about business issues.

The second most linked to site was CNN.com at 17%. That site was the source of a diverse range of issues, as 18% of CNN's articles were about foreign events, 12% were about crime, and 10% each were about health issues and U.S. foreign relations.

The next two most linked to sites were also legacy media sites. BBC News received 12% of the links from Tweets, and Fox News received 7%. Wired, a technology-focused magazine was fifth with 6%.

Tweets primarily linked to straight news accounts instead of opinion pieces, although to a slightly lesser extent than on blogs. On Twitter, 82% of the links went to news reporting, while 18% went to opinionated columns or stories.

The higher tech orientation of Twitter users also came through in the stories they linked to, with a greater tendency toward multimedia stories (almost one-fifth of the links). For example, on June 23, more than 500 tweets linked to a page that was primarily a photo collection produced by Boston.com of vivid images from the Iranian protests.

YouTube

On the video sharing site YouTube, the priorities are not as much the most important or pressing topic of the week, but rather what image or video was the most interesting to view. Often these came in the form of political gaffes or humorous acts captured on camera. And the geographic mix here was strongest with many videos from foreign lands.

The style of citizen participation differs as well. While there is a place for people to comment on a clip they are viewing, most do not. Instead, their involvement comes in selecting among all the millions of videos available and then sometimes sharing that choice with others. There does not need to be as much personal attachment to activities here. Partly as a result, clicks do not convey the same sense of public endorsement as in other types of social media.

This less personal quality may be part of YouTube's appeal. The total number of people viewing popular clips is far greater than the number of people who tend to link to and comment on news stories. Top news videos are often viewed millions of times in one week. For example, the October [CNN interview](#) with the "balloon boy" family was viewed more than 2.5 million times that week.⁸ Popular stories in the blogosphere, on the other hand, garner somewhere around 300 to 500 links in a week. But they do not tend to stay popular any longer. Just 9% of these videos remained at the top for more than one week, versus 5% of top stories on Twitter and 13% on blogs.⁹

Topics

Like both Twitter and blogs, the news agenda on YouTube rarely coincided with that of the mainstream press. In only eight of the 49 weeks studied was the top video about the same subject that also led the traditional media. Of those eight occasions, three of them involved footage of discussing the health care reform bill (often with contentious opposition), and two of them were videos about the protests in Iran.

So if the most watched videos of the day are not similar to what is in the mainstream press, what news events are people choosing to view?

The answer is that most of the top videos have a visual and dynamic quality that makes people want to share them with other people.

⁸ This does not mean that 2.5 million people watched the clip because it is likely that a number of people viewed it multiple times.

⁹ PEJ's method of tracking the most popular topics on YouTube is different than the method for tracking blogs and Twitter. For YouTube, PEJ simply captures the top-five most frequently viewed news videos each week.

In some instances, that quality can be of a politician's or celebrity's gaffe. For example, the [week of August 10](#), during the heat of the town hall protests involving health care reform, the most viewed video was of Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee appearing rather callous by answering her cell phone while a constituent was sharing a personal story.

A number of the most popular videos are of a humorous nature. In [March](#), for instance, the top video was of an unidentified city council meeting that was interrupted by the sounds of flatulence.

And many of the most watched videos are of things that are too good, or too bad, to be believed. The performance of British singing sensation Susan Boyle on the television show Britain's Got Talent was the most popular video one week in [June](#) and was estimated to have been viewed more than 100 million times in less than one month.

On the flip side, a surveillance tape of a drunk New York State bus driver endangering students was the most viewed in [January 2010](#).

Other times, the leading videos were related to the popular subjects of the week. In [January 2009](#), the most viewed clip was Obama's inaugural address while the second video was raw footage of the US Airlines plane that safely landed in the Hudson River without incurring any significant injuries.

Overseas issues gained the most attention among YouTube videos, something that reflects the international reach of the site. The second most viewed subject was President Obama.

More than a quarter (26%) of the top five most watched news videos in a given week were about things that happened overseas. Many of them were in foreign languages and were about issues that received virtually no attention in the American press or elsewhere in English-language social media.

For the week of [May 4-8](#), for example, the four most viewed

Topics of the Most Viewed News Videos on YouTube	
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010	
	<u>% of videos</u>
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	26%
Government	20
Entertainment	8
Media	7
Health and Medicine	6
Accidents/Disasters	5
Other Domestic Affairs	4
U.S. Miscellaneous	4
Lifestyle	3
Crime	3
U.S. Foreign Affairs	2
Education	2
Sports	2
Race/Gender/Gay Issues	2
Politics and Campaigns	1
Economy	1
Environment	1
Science and Technology	1
Domestic Terrorism	< 1
Business	< 1
Transportation	< 1

videos were of a crash at a Queen's Day parade in the Netherlands. The videos were all in Dutch and showed dramatic footage of the crash that occurred when a man tried to attack the Dutch royal family with his car and instead struck a crowd watching the parade.

Other non-U.S. events also gained viewers because they made for great video more than any other reason. For instance, the top video the week of [November 2-6](#) was from a British news station and showed a video of a drunk fork lift driver in Russia who drove into a warehouse and the shelves that came crashing down on him.

After international events, the next largest subject on YouTube was government with 20%. More than half of those (11%) involved President Obama or his administration in some capacity, such as in [early December](#) when the top video was of White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs getting into a feisty exchange with a reporter whom he compared to his young son. In a week in [late January](#), two of the top videos featured Obama himself. The first clip was his weekly video address, and the fourth most watched clip was of his first interview with the Arab television station Al-Arabiya.

Videos featuring celebrities also made frequent appearances on the YouTube list, with 8%. For the week of [July 6-10](#), for instance, all five of the top videos involved the death of music icon Michael Jackson. Two of those videos came from the eulogy service held in Jackson's honor. Even though Jackson was not on a major subject that week elsewhere on social media, the dramatic moments broadcast originally on television and archived online made it a dominating YouTube subject.

Sources

One of the unique aspects of YouTube is the ability of users to view raw footage that is not edited or posted by a news organization. Many of the most viewed news videos on YouTube are of this nature.

For example, for two consecutive weeks in [September](#), the most viewed video was a first-person clip from a demonstration in Pittsburgh surrounding the G20 summit where an unidentified protestor is forced into a car by three men dressed in camouflage.

Clips such as these provide an open forum for anyone to post newsworthy videos, but there is often little verifiable information to accompany the video to provide context for the viewer.

Other popular YouTube videos are segments from news television programs. A [July 25](#) interview from Fox News in which the guest was clearly flirting with the woman interviewing him was the most viewed one week.

Finally, a fair number of popular YouTube videos come from news organizations based overseas – often in languages other than English. In late [August](#), a Brazilian news report about a teacher who was fired after a video of her dancing provocatively at a nightclub surfaced was the most viewed.

Social media's agenda versus the MSM, week to week

Differences between the social media and mainstream press come into clearer relief when we look at specific stories that get attention week to week. This level of analysis reveals first and foremost how infrequently social media and the traditional press share the same agenda. Blogs, as seen in other measures, match up most often but still only rarely.

It is also illuminating to examine the nature of the stories that *do* dominate both social and traditional media in a given week. They tend to be blockbuster events, and they cut across a wide variety of topic areas – the economy, health pandemics, the deaths of well-known figures. And many major national news events don't make it to the top of the social media agenda. The week of [August 3-9](#), for example, while health care and the town hall protests led the mainstream press, [blogs led](#) with a story about a woman suing her college because they didn't do enough to help her find a job, and Twitter led with an outage of Twitter itself.

In the 49 weeks studied, blogs and the mainstream press shared the top story just 13 times. The storyline shared most was the U.S. economic crisis (five weeks in all). Other storylines that drove attention on both platforms included the initial H1N1 flu outbreak in late spring, the June protests in Iran, the death of Senator Edward Kennedy in late August, and the shootings at Fort Hood in early November.

On Twitter, the top story was even less likely to be the same as in the mainstream press – just four of the 29 weeks studied, or less than one seventh of the time. (Iran, Fort Hood and the NWA terror attempt, which closed out the year.) All but one of those was also a top story among the blogs that week.

Most weeks, however, blogs and Twitter led with different stories than the mainstream press.

The week of August 17-23, for example, the [traditional press](#) led with the health care debate for the fifth week in a row as the Obama administration appeared poised to pull back its support for the so-called “public option” to be included in a final bill. That story was not among those followed closely in social media [that week](#). There, two scientific studies that received almost no mainstream media attention led the list. For bloggers, the top story was about Canadian researchers who conducted a mathematical exercise to see if a zombie attack would lead to the collapse of civilization. And Twitterers led with a story about research by a professor at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth who discovered that 90% of U.S. paper money contained small traces of cocaine.

In another example, the week of [November 30-December 6](#), more than a quarter (27%) of the traditional press' newshole was occupied with the war in Afghanistan as Obama delivered a major speech outlining his plans for the U.S. role there. In the [blogosphere](#), Afghanistan was the third largest subject of the week, following two very different

subjects. First was a vote in Switzerland to ban the building of minarets, which are distinctive structures associated with Islamic mosques. And second was the subject of global warming surrounding the “climate-gate” controversy. On Twitter, Afghanistan was not among the top five stories at all. Instead, an unfortunate error on a [billboard](#) in Mobile, Alabama, led the way as a television news station created a sign featuring pictures of three news anchors and a real-time Twitter feed of breaking events. Unfortunately, that created an embarrassing juxtaposition as one passerby took a photo of the billboard at a time when the text read, "3 Accused of Gang Rape in Monroeville."

Conclusion

As social media sites and tools evolve, so too will their impact on news information and citizens’ relationship to the news. The interplay among new and traditional media will also almost certainly evolve. Even now, new partnerships and content sharing are being developed across platforms and outlets. The Project will continue to follow and study these emerging tools and trends for producing, consuming and sharing news information in our society. And the flow will be tracked weekly in PEJ’s [NMI](#).

NMI – YEAR END REPORT

Methodology

Overview

New Media, Old Media is based off the data collected from PEJ's [New Media Index](#) and [News Coverage Index](#). The NMI is a weekly report that captures the leading commentary of blogs and social media sites focused on news and compares those subjects to coverage in the mainstream press.

This study aggregates the weekly data collected for the News Media Index from January 19, 2009, through January 15, 2010. It then compares that to data collected for the NCI.

Universe

To study new and social media, PEJ wanted to be able to include as wide a range of outlets as possible. For unlike the traditional press, blogs and social media pages reach into the millions and change daily as new ones emerge and other dissolve. In exploring various options, we saw value combining the work of some sites that specialize in tracking these outlets continuously with our own coding scheme and analytics.

Two prominent Web tracking sites, [Technorati](#) and [Icerocket](#), monitor millions of blogs and pieces of social media, using the links to articles embedded on these sites as a proxy for determining what these subjects are. The website [Tweetmeme](#) uses a similar method to monitor the popular links on the social networking site [Twitter](#).

Each of these sites offers lists of the most linked-to news stories based on the number of blogs, tweets, or other pages that link to them. PEJ does not determine what constitutes a “news” story (as opposed to some other topic), but rather relies on the classifications used by each of the tracking sites.

A PEJ staff member manually captured the lists from each site every weekday between 9 and 10 am ET. From those lists, the top five linked to articles were captured for further analysis by PEJ staff (SEE BELOW).

Through July 3, 2009, PEJ captured information about blogs from both Technorati and Icerocket. However, the relevant component of Technorati's site stopped working in early July and has been down ever since. Therefore, the 26 NMI reports beginning the week of July 6-10 only included blog data from Icerocket.

Time Period

From January 19, 2009 through January 15, 2010 PEJ produced 49 weekly reports. Blogs and YouTube were included in all 49 reports.

Twitter was added beginning the week of June 15-19, and therefore there were 29 weeks that included both blogs and Twitter.

There were three weeks in 2009 when no report was issued (March 2-6, November 16-20, and December 14-18).

Coding Procedures

Once the lists of articles were compiled, PEJ staff conducted a content analysis of the subject matter of these linked-to news articles in a similar manner to the [News Coverage Index](#).

Almost all of the codes and rules are the same as with the NCI. The variables coded in both projects include story date, source, story word count, story format, story describer, big story and broad story topic.

The source variable includes the tracking websites we code. The variable for story word count designates the word count of each individual news story. Story format measures the type and origin of the stories, which designates, at a basic level, whether the news story is a product of original reporting, or drawn from another news source. Story describer is a short description of the content of each story. Big stories are particular topics that occurred often in news media during the time period under study. The variable for the broad story topic identifies which of the type of broad topic categories is addressed by a story.

In order to meet high standards of reliability, these variables are all included as part of PEJ's continuing intercoder testing involving 15 coders and reached levels of agreement above 80%.

For more details about PEJ's intercoder testing procedures for these codes, refer to the detailed methodology about the [News Coverage Index](#).

The only additional variables used in the NMI were identifying the original outlet of the news story and tracking the number of links aimed at each story included in the sample. Technorati, Icerocket, and Tweetmeme each provided the number of links within their lists.

Calculations

The priorities of the bloggers are measured in terms of percentage of links. Each time a blog or social media page adds a link to its site directing its readers to a news story it suggests that the author places at least some importance on the content of that article. The user may or may not agree with the contents of the article, but they feel it is important enough to draw the reader's attention to it.

The calculations for the NCI have a different base. That Index measures the time (in seconds) or space (in words) of each story. That is then used to calculate the percent of newshole devoted to each topic.

The reason that the New Media Index uses a different measure, links rather than newshole, is because the nature of online media is different from other traditional forms of media. First, there is no limit to the amount of space that can be devoted to a specific story. In a newspaper, there is a limited amount of space on a front page, for example, and a television newscast is limited by its allotted amount of time. Web sites have no such limits.

Second, PEJ determined that in this procedure, the number of blogs that link to a news article are a far greater measure of the significance of that article online than the length of the story. A particular article might be quite long in terms of number of words, but if only a few blogs link to it, that article would have only a small influence in the new media environment. A short story that gets linked to many times has a far greater influence.

The percent of links for each big story is determined by taking the total number of links in the sample and then dividing that number by the number of links devoted to each specific big story. The percentages are then ranked in order to discover the five storylines that were most present in online commentary.

A Note about the Data

Most of this analysis for this report is based on the top five stories within each particular week. In other words, PEJ compiled the specific big stories that made up the top five within each of the 49 weekly reports in order to arrive at most of the topic data.

However, in a few sections, the data discussed refers to *all* of the stories and links collected each week, regardless of whether that subject made the list of top stories in the given week. The reason for this difference is because during many weeks, the top big stories were made up of several news articles from different sources. Each of those articles has their own unique qualities, such as format and origination. In order to accurately reflect the format and origination of the all stories that users are linking to, the data must measure all story links and not just the top weekly subjects.

The sections that use this different form of data are acknowledged with footnotes and include the section on sources of blog links and the section on sources of Twitter links.

Differences from the NCI

In addition to the base calculation, there are three differences between the NMI and the NCI to note:

1. The capture times for the Web sites included in the News Coverage Index rotate each day. In the New Media Index the times are the same each day. Since these lists compile

the number of links to stories over a 48-hour window, rotating the time of capture would result in different increments of times between each capture. Through testing, PEJ has discovered that the stories on the lists change significantly more over a 24-hour period than they do over a 12 or 16-hour period. Thus it is more methodologically sound to capture at the same time each day.

2. The News Coverage Index is comprised of primarily U.S.-based media outlets, but the aggregators of blogs and social media include both U.S. and non-U.S. blogs. In addition, stories that are linked-to can be from non-U.S. sources.

3. PEJ's weekly [News Coverage Index](#) includes Sunday newspapers while the New Media Index is Monday through Friday.

YouTube Videos

The New Media Index also includes a section of the most popular news videos on YouTube each week.

Each Friday at noon ET, a PEJ staff member captured the list of most viewed [news and politics videos](#) on YouTube over the previous week. These videos are categorized as such on the YouTube site and are often a mix of mainstream news reports, raw footage relating to breaking events, or other types of public affairs clips. PEJ determined the top five most viewed videos as they are listed on YouTube's page at the time of capture.

Note: After consulting various reference guides and outside consultants on usage, the Project has chosen to refer to its several weekly content analysis reports as “indexes”—the version largely accepted in journalism—instead of “indices”—a term used more frequently in scientific or academic writing.

Topline

New Media, Old Media: How Blogs and Social Media Agendas Relate and Differ from the Traditional Press The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Topics of News Coverage: Social Media vs. the Traditional Press				
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010*				
Topic	Blogs (% of Stories)	Twitter (% of Stories)	YouTube (% of Videos)	Traditional Press (% of Newshole)
Politics/Government	17%	6%	21%	15%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	12	13	26	9
Science	10	5	0	1
Technology	8	43	1	1
Health and Medicine	7	4	6	11
Celebrity	7	5	1	2
Economy	7	1	1	10
Terrorism	6	1	<1	4
Crime	6	5	3	6
Environment (including Global Warming)	4	4	1	2
Pop Culture	3	3	3	1
Oddball	3	3	2	< 1
Gay issues	2	0	0	< 1
Consumer News	2	1	0	< 1
Education	2	0	2	1
Media	2	1	7	2
Religion	1	0	0	< 1
Immigration	< 1	0	0	< 1
Race/Gender Relations	< 1	2	2	1
Disasters/Accidents	< 1	2	5	2
Weather	1	0	0	1
Sports	1	0	2	2
Other Entertainment	0	0	4	<1
Defense	0	0	0	2
Court System	0	0	0	2
Business	0	0	0	7
U.S. Foreign Affairs	0	0	2	11
Additional Domestic Affairs	0	0	4	3
Other	1	0	5	5

*Twitter was tracked from June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010
Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

Producers of Most Linked to Stories Percent of Stories		
Category	Blogs	Twitter
Date Range	January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010	June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010
U.S. Newspaper/Magazine	49%	4%
U.S. Broadcast	26	26
U.S. Wire Service	<1	5
U.S. Web Only	<1	39
Other U.S. Source	0	1
International Newspaper/Magazine	2	8
International Broadcast	23	12
International Web Only	<1	1
Can't Tell	0	4

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

News vs. Opinion of Most Linked to Stories Percent of Stories		
Category	Blogs	Twitter
Date Range	January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010	June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010
News Report	87%	82%
Opinion	13%	18
Other	<1	<1

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

Format of Most Linked to Stories Percent of Stories		
Category	Blogs	Twitter
Date Range	January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010	June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010
Mostly Text	83%	81%
Mostly Photographs	2	2
Multimedia/Interactive	14	17
Other	<1	<1

Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding