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## **A brave new (media) world**

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The way Americans get news has changed. More of us are using our social media feeds to keep up to date rather than logging onto multiple news websites. As a result, those organizations' profits are being squeezed as readership falls and advertisers shift their attention, and their dollars, to new media. The old world, which was dominated by newspapers, television networks and radio stations, is struggling to reinvent itself.

The Pew Research Center<sup>1</sup> estimates that two-thirds of American adults use Facebook and an astonishing 30% of this group uses the site for news. YouTube is used by half of all American adults, and 10% of them get their news there. Twitter is used by 16% of adults, and half of them use it for news. So, how do people use social media for news? Pew estimates that half of all site users share news stories, and about the same number discuss news or current events on the sites. There is also a rise in the number of citizen journalists; ordinary people who post videos of events they have witnessed on their favorite social media sites.

News-hungry Americans are also highly selective. The majority of millennials pick topics that interest them and receive news about them directly. Peripheral material is ignored. Social media sites, led by Facebook, have recognized this and use sophisticated algorithms to deliver news to their users by identifying and analyzing their browsing patterns.

Some news organizations are fighting back. This summer several large companies, including NBC and The New York Times, are starting to use Facebook's *Instant Article* program, which allows them to post their articles directly onto Facebook instead of providing links that take users back to their websites. It is experimental at this stage, and success will depend on whether the publishers make money from the advertising associated with their stories. Some observers think this could be the beginning of the end for traditional news organizations, but others think

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<sup>1</sup> How social media is reshaping news. Pew Research Center, September 24, 2014

it could be their salvation. Either way, the waiting period is likely to be a tense one for both camps.

The key to success is not just producing compelling content, but also having a thorough understanding of the most effective way to deliver it. In other words, understanding how readers receive their news and how social media algorithms are constructed will provide a significant competitive advantage in getting your messages heard.