



## READING PACKET FOR SEPT. 14<sup>TH</sup>: PINS, LIKES AND SWIPES: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA HAS AFFECTED POLITICAL RHETORIC

**READING:** Anastaplo, George. "The Pentagon Papers and the Abolition of Television." *The American Moralists: On Law, Ethics and Government*. (Athens, GA: Ohio University Press, 1992).

I have referred to "the character of our regime" and to the necessary "ability of citizens to discuss freely and fully all matters necessary for making political judgments." What is required to create and preserve a public that is fit for the conduct of a republican form of government?

Some means of general communication among us is, of course, required. The size of the Country has never permitted exclusive reliance upon speeches promulgated only by natural means. Artificial means of communication are indispensable, and this the press has traditionally provided the American people.

The right of the people to know, of which we hear much today, includes the duty to think. This has as a precondition the opportunity to learn as well as the ability to discern what it is necessary to learn. Information and opinions about vital matters of public concern are needed among us on a day-to-day basis.

Even more important than day-to-day concerns, however, and indeed central to this essay, are several perennial questions: What kind of people is presupposed by institutions that include the absolute prohibition, at least in practice, of previous restraints on the press? What produces and preserves such a people? Is not a people of a certain character, rather than merely a people with certain information, political opinions, and morale, presupposed by our institutions? Of course there could be the prior question of whether we want the institutions we do happen to have. Are there better ones available? On this occasion we must set aside this somewhat theoretical question, however engaging it might be, and proceed on the patriotic assumption that our traditional institutions are to be preserved and utilized.

Serving our traditional institutions, and indeed shaped by and shaping them, has been the press. Whatever its faults, the press has been something to which we have accommodated ourselves and upon which we have relied for generations. It is essentially old-fashioned, having developed in this Country along with our other institutions and with the character of our people. For the most part, the possible mistakes in editorial judgment to which I have referred in this essay affect national security interests; they do not threaten directly the character of the regime itself. I now propose to argue that in considering what we should do about the mass media, our primary concern should not be with the unauthorized revelation of secrets (that is, information about military weapons or strategic policy or



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diplomatic negotiations), but rather with the promulgation among us of images and other influences that shape and reshape the character of our people.

I have argued that for most practical purposes there has been since at least 1791 no effective legal limitation upon the information made available to the public about the performance of its governments, once the press has managed to secure such information. It seems to me too late in the constitutional day to change this dispensation: too much depends upon it; we are accustomed to it; well-intentioned men, both in the press and in the government, have learned how to deal with this considerable freedom from previous restraint of the press.

Vital to a people's self-governance are its experience and ability in forming, choosing, and assessing its leaders and policies. This means that the character of our people cannot be left only to chance, private influences, or the vagaries of a "free trade in ideas." We should be concerned to preserve in our people a character that permits it to use responsibly the extensive freedom of speech and of the press traditionally and constitutionally available to it.

Before we turn to a consideration of what the mass media do to the character of a people such as ours, we should note one immediate effect that television has on our political institutions. The modern mass media tend more toward centralization of power, while the old-fashioned press tended to be more localizing in its efforts and effects. The local is apt to be both more provincial and healthier; certainly, it is to be encouraged in this day and age. When we "go national" today, whether in the media or in politics, everything tends to become somewhat more gross and less discriminating. A facile simplification is rewarded and hence promoted. Is there then a tendency toward homogeneity of tastes and opinions as well as a general lowering of effective moral, political, and intellectual standards?

Industrialization with its marvels-laden technology can be said to be in large part responsible for such developments. With these developments comes also that sense of helplessness and rootlessness to which modern man is peculiarly subject: one has less the impression of being "one's own man," of being able to do things for oneself. One is forced into a passive role: not the role of the alert observer, but that of the pampered slave.

Since television is distinctively dependent on the technology of modern industrialization, it is so new that there has not yet developed, and one must wonder whether there can develop, the carefully-thought-out system of checks and balances there is among us in practice with respect to the press. Do we not all recognize that television has had profound effects upon our way of life? Should we not ask, then: What are the effects of tele-vision? Have those effects been good? What is the nature of the medium? What is there about television that is different from everything previously relied upon or accounted for by our institutions? What, if anything, can now be done about television?

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I have suggested that the press, despite its efforts to imitate television and to modernize itself, is still essentially old-fashioned. Partly because of things intrinsic to it, it is still moved somewhat by a sense of natural justice, as is the public opinion that it serves.

The press continues to provide us with the serious searching out and recording of the news of the day, whereas television is in this respect for the most part parasitic. I believe it significant that the newscaster on television is rarely the man who has investigated the story being broadcast. Rather, he is usually part of a "show" that draws primarily upon what newspapermen have gathered and put on the wire. Thus there is no necessary connection between the influence or "image" of television "personalities" and their competence. These television personalities wield tremendous influence, but such influence is both ephemeral and beyond their comprehension and hence their control.

Television may help keep the press "honest" by presenting events that will be subsequently described on the printed page. But, one must wonder, at what level is such honesty promoted? What level suffices to satisfy the television viewer? What can be adequately described by television?

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To speak as I have of "public opinion" is to recognize in public a body that acts and is somehow keyed to political concerns; it is also to recognize in opinion something that does depend ultimately on notions of right and wrong and hence on reason. This is quite different from the passive audiences on which television depends and which it creates.

The television industry, in its distinctive modernity, is representative of the mass media and their infatuation with appearances. The term mass media aptly records what happens when modern electronic technology is applied to communications. The decisive factor becomes the necessarily "mass" character of passive and pacified audiences made up of countless private or isolated parties. The emphasis in the term media is upon the industry as little more than a conduit. Does not a people lose its moral and hence political sense when it becomes the "masses"? One may even be obliged to consider whether some previous restraint of the press might not become necessary if the people should, because of the debilitating effects of the mass media, remain or become so childish as to be unable to govern itself.

Both the massive character of the audience and the conduit character of the media very much affect the content and the effect of broadcasts, even though the principal concern of broadcasters may not be with either content or effect, but with the constant compulsion upon them to attract large audiences and with the pressing need to keep supplying something to ever-changing audiences. To regard a people as a "mass" is to say and perhaps make likely that it will become something that is moved primarily by what Federalist No. 1 called "force and accident," by arousals of passion rather than by appeals to reason.

We should not be surprised to hear the effect of television upon audiences spoken of as an "impact" that can be "surveyed" and "marketed." The intrinsic quality of particular programs becomes irrelevant



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if the surveys do not "measure up," as television executives will sometimes admit and their conduct almost always exhibits.

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The effects of television are pervasive and felt both directly and indirectly: directly through what almost six hours a day of exposure (not necessarily of viewing) do to the souls of our people; indirectly through the adjustments the press and others consider themselves obliged to make to compete with the television industry in capturing people's attention and thus being able to stay in business. It should be noticed that much of the time devoted to television must be taken from other activities, such as reading, writing, conversation, courting, or playing. What had been the effect heretofore of such activities? What is the effect of their radical curtailment? It is unrealistic to assume that such revolutionary changes as we have undergone have no significant effect on the souls of people.

Commercial considerations are obviously much more important for television than for the press, whatever may be said about the influence of advertisers upon publishers. Television was invented during a more commercial age than was printing; the press developed more naturally as an extension of thinking and writing rather than as a tool for advertising and selling. The commercial aspects of the press simply cannot assert themselves as much as the commercial aspects of television do. For example, one can easily ignore the advertisements in a newspaper. No one doubts the considerable effect that sponsors have in the United States upon the content of television programs and upon audiences.

The commercial aspects of television, however important they may be in so many critiques of the industry, are not our primary concern. Nor need the specific content of television broadcasting concern us here, insofar as this can be corrected by a people determined to do so, but rather the very form of it and the consequent effects of the displacement by television of the other means by which souls have been engaged heretofore. The remarkable success of television since the Second World War in sweeping all before it should make us wonder what there is that makes it so attractive. What is the effect of having such a window to the world? What comes through and what is held back by the filter of the television camera?

It need not be denied that there are good programs from time to time on television, genuinely good things in addition to the many apparently good things to which large audiences are attracted. or need it be denied that television can seem a blessing to old people, the ill, and harassed mothers with young children. Other salutary effects can be catalogued: the promotion of an acceptance among us of racial justice because of the displays before national television audiences of attractive athletes, politicians, and actors who happen to be Negroes; the sometimes cathartic dramatization of national ceremonies, such as the inauguration or funeral of a President; the presentation of intelligent men and women attempting to discuss serious problems of national concern. It has also been noticed that television does reveal the



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personalities of public figures, that it "takes the clothes off a man." The audience may well get an impression it might not otherwise have been able to get of what some public figures are like.

And yet, are not the good things on television always an incidental part of the whole? Are not even the good uses to which television has been put due in large part to chance? The issues that capture public attention and get considerable "play" are all too often contrived or accidental. However adept television may be at exposing some public figures, the professional television personalities are themselves little more than animated masks so far as the viewing audience is concerned. Why this should be so depends on the very nature of the medium.

Distortion and superficiality are among the inevitable effects of television, including effects of the technology itself that are accentuated by the expense of television and its consequent need for huge audiences. Television cannot help but cater to the worst in us, even when it is trying to do its best. Certain things are made to appear easier than they really are. Shallow illusions are promoted, including the illusion that the viewer can learn enough from capsule presentations (a kind of discourse by headline) to get a serious notion of what is going on in the world and to be able to make sensible judgments and responsible choices. Television seems to liberate even while it really cripples, and it does this in so enticing a manner as to drive its competitors either out of the "market" or into suicidal imitation.

Thus television helps create the illusion that it has informed us and that we have "participated" in something we have witnessed "close up." It emphasizes that one must "get it" at once; one can't tarry to look at what has been broadcast, to take one's time studying what one may not understand. One must get it all now, for something else is coming soon. One is discouraged from looking back: everything is before us; recollection and reflection are discouraged or at least made difficult. Is not all this more appropriate for entertainment than for serious discourse?

With an emphasis upon the immediate, appearance becomes crucial; it is hard to pin things down. Is not almost everything about television ephemeral? If so, are not ephemeral qualities in the soul appealed to and legitimated? The unreality of it all is intensified by television's reduction of the visible world to a box that is smaller than the size of the human being; this can be both immediately enticing and eventually unpersuasive, if not even psychologically disturbing. The illusion of immediacy is fostered (an illusion that the press finds it more difficult to sustain), and then with the click of a switch the "real world" is gone. Reality is thus distorted, as it is as well with the unnaturalness in the amount and variety of things shown on television, and with the apparent intimate access to things that human beings are used to having and keeping at a distance.

The electronic media are voracious and insatiable. Consequently, they promote novelty, which seems to fit in better with youthfulness, with those who are by nature always changing and experimenting. A "culture" keyed to or shaped by the mass media is bound to be youth-oriented, an unnatural state of affairs for a community. There is constant change, with a consequent profound



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dissatisfaction and rootlessness. Fashions become more important and character less. Since the visual is necessarily emphasized, the length of discourse that can be presented on television is much shorter than serious issues require, much less than what would be possible in a meeting hall. Yet most viewers are given the impression that television presents enough.

The addictive effect of television is revealing; one turns it on and it stays on for hours. It is much less likely that this sort of thing can happen routinely with reading. Even if one moves through a prosperous American suburb—that is, among those who have the material resources and the education to be able to do whatever they choose—one can see through almost every living room window the dominating television set turned on all evening as well as much of the day. Are our lives so empty as to be in need of such narcotics? Television reinforces, even as it tries to minister to, whatever sense of emptiness there may be in modern life.

We also can see the effects of television upon the faces of our children. Observe them watching even the commercials with vacuous avidity. It is no wonder that many teenagers become jaded and even psychically disturbed with nothing to challenge them, nothing to excite them but the most bizarre and the most violent things. Broadcasters hardly do all this deliberately; in fact, just as they are really unknown to their audiences, so their audiences are unknown to them. Contact between broadcaster and audience is not human, but rather mechanical, artificial, and fleeting. It is remarkable that broadcasters can stand the life they lead. Are they sustained by what is said about them face-to-face or now and then on the printed page?

It is sometimes said that the young, and some of the old, know today much more about the world—how big and diverse it is, for example, than people did a generation ago. The mass media no doubt contribute to this sense of liberation: they do "open up" the world. But because of the inefficiency of television (consider the amount of material that can be spoken as against what can be read in a given time) one simply cannot get much detail beyond the immediately visible. Even the "educated" young probably know less than any generation heretofore about what has gone before or about the serious questions to which human beings have always addressed themselves. The young spread themselves over much more than did their predecessors, but much more thinly. Hence they cannot begin to know themselves. Yet they readily believe themselves to be more enlightened than their predecessors.

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Television means that it is even more difficult than heretofore for reason to contribute to assimilating and ordering the information that comes to people every day. The pictures and sounds that dominate contemporary "culture" are not speeches; the stimuli of television may go from the passions of the televiser to the passions of the audience without lingering in the reason of either.

Once the need to speak well is reduced by a general addiction to moving pictures, the common language is likely to degenerate. The politician who once made weekly radio reports to his constituents





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finds, upon being obliged to switch to television because of what is happening around him, that he cannot continue to be as idea-oriented as he had been on radio: he must move from dealing somewhat in ideas to "plugging" almost exclusively his name and picture (that is, his "image"). The practical politician conforms to the demands and limits of the dominant communications medium of the moment, and the next generation is trained accordingly.

Children, as well as adults, are discouraged by television from becoming practiced in reading. Once television becomes available, reading appears to most people laborious and less attractive; the attention span is likely to be shortened for activities requiring deliberate effort; discipline is not encouraged for serious work, and this suggests that everyday passions are even more likely to make themselves felt than they have always been. The general deterioration of serious reading ability will eventually lead to deterioration of the ability to write. Does not this entail for us the impairment of the ability to think seriously?

Despite what is said about television's ability to "take the clothes off a man," his television "image" is likely to be quite different from what he is truly like. In fact, it may be virtually impossible for anyone to be more than an image before the camera. But one's written statements may be very much what one is. In fact, they may be essentially what one is, in-sofar as one is a thinking being.

It can be said of the mass media that they promote an "education at once universal and superficial." We inexorably move, as Winston Churchill noticed, "toward goals which are ill-defined and yet magnetic." We sometimes seem oblivious of "the enormous processes of collectivization which are at work among us."

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It should immediately be added, however, that collectivization is not the same as community, just as ill-defined goals may not truly be goals at all. I turn now from considering primarily the effects of television on human beings to saying something more about the effects of television on a community and on the possibility of community.

Serious association with one another, whether for purposes of entertainment, education, worship, politics, or sports, is undermined by television, especially since viewers and performers (or, as they once were, people and leaders) can make no serious contact with one another. For example, politicians tailor what they say and eventually believe to what can be "put across" on the television screen. The screen depends on and encourages the wrong kind of simplification. No matter how complicated the subject presented may be, it is all too often pretended if not sincerely believed that it can be adequately dealt with, as if magically, in a few minutes.

May not the frequent public protests in this Country against the partisanship of the mass media be crude reflections of a deeper and perhaps instinctive concern among us about what is being done to the human soul by the mass media? Yet it is also felt that something like television is needed for an aggregate



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as large as the United States has become. It is, some might even say, a necessary evil to cure an even worse one, the divisiveness of bigness.

Television does bring us all together, in a way, but too many at a time and at too low a level. In the process it breaks down smaller communities that until its coming had still been viable despite the onslaughts of the automobile and of the Second World War. The isolation of people, whether the elderly or the infirm or the housewife, that is intensified if not induced by the disruption of our towns and urban neighborhoods, seems to lead to a "need" for television.

Some, however, see the American people, in tens of millions, elevated politically and culturally by the mass media. Such elevation, others reply, is not good for these millions: they cannot become truly enlightened; they are much more likely to become frustrated. Most people, it seems to me, have not been elevated; rather, their cultural life, as well as their politics, has become inferior to what it had been, and their thinking less disciplined and more sentimental than it need be. If people are frustrated, it is perhaps because they have acquired a sophistication that their circumstances cannot permit them to enjoy; the old loyalties and consequent simple pleasures have been undermined. All the while their precious linguistic inheritance is being cheapened.

It is my impression that television fits better with an emphasis upon Presidential rather than Congressional or State politics. Rule by television plebiscite seems to be developing among us, a kind of rule that is peculiarly responsive to the volatile mass tastes that television promotes and serves. The constitutional tendency of television-of the way of life that permits and is in turn shaped by television-is to unleash desires and arouse expectations that undermine among us the moderation of tradition, the restraints both of a healthy diversity and of a genuine respect for quality, and the requirements and advantages of federalism.

This social indictment of television can be summed up thus: Each of us is constantly addressed by television apart from the others, and yet none of us is ever really spoken to. The ability to read, and hence to think and to join in serious common discourse, suffers. Every kind of association is filtered through the camera and stripped of its humanity. The community is depreciated while a hollow privacy is emphasized; communal tastes are reduced to the lowest common denominator and then shamelessly catered to. Spectacle replaces theater; feeling replaces thought; image replaces character. The world shaped by television is an empty one, starved and frenetic, dreamlike and debilitating. It can be expected to culminate eventually in a crippling mediocrity and perhaps even in tyranny. . . .

Unless we are prepared to curtail the mass media and to restore the local press to its rightful place as the principal forum for general discourse among our citizens, we should expect to have hereafter only the masses rather than a community of citizens to reckon with. Indeed, there would then not even be any "we" to make judgments and to act. For "we," as in "We the People," presupposes a public, not mere spectators, as fundamental to community and to the body politic.





## READING : Trump's Tweets and Diversion of the Media

**SOURCE:** Ullrich Ecker, Michael Jetter & Stephan Lewandowsky. "Trump's tweets and diversion of the media." Springer Nature Research Communities. Nov. 10, 2020. <https://go.nature.com/3e9noGT>

*Note this blog post relates to: Lewandowsky, S., Jetter, M. & Ecker, U. K. H. (2020). The president's tweets and understanding political diversion in the age of social media. Nature Communications. [www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-19644-6](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-19644-6)*

Social media has allowed political leaders direct and immediate access to their constituents at a scale not seen before.

This can be a positive thing: Leaders can explain their actions and policy proposals, and engage in meaningful ways with the public. For example, in 2020, many leaders at global, national, and sub-national levels have used social media to keep the public informed and up-to-date about COVID-19-related developments and restrictions.



Arguably, however, social media can also be used by leaders in less benevolent ways – for example, to spread disinformation or distract from issues that they perceive to be politically harmful to them.

Amongst world leaders, one of the most prolific users of social media is current U.S. President Donald Trump. Since the beginning of his candidacy in 2015, approx. 30,000 tweets have been sent from Trump's account. The president's tweets have generated much scholarly attention, with researchers focusing primarily on their content by examining factors such as style, veracity, and impact.

Anecdotally, there is also evidence that Trump's tweets have served to divert attention from potentially harmful news. For example, when the \$25 million Trump University settlement became public in late 2016, Trump's tweets focused on the controversy surrounding the "Hamilton" Broadway play, whose cast pleaded for a diverse America at the end of a performance. The tweets seemed to divert attention from the settlement, because both the public and the media showed far greater interest in the Hamilton controversy than the Trump University settlement.



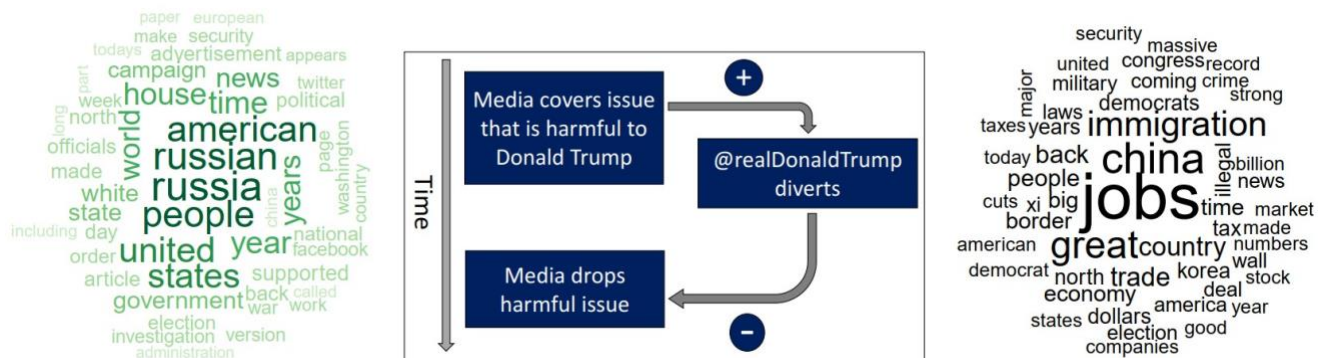
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To date, however, evidence for such diversion has remained anecdotal. To explore this diversion-based narrative systematically, we tested empirically the hypothesis that President Trump’s tweets divert media attention away from news that can be assumed to be politically harmful to him.

Specifically, studying his first 2 years in office, we tested 2 hypotheses: (i) whether an increase in harmful media coverage was followed by increased diversionary Twitter activity and (ii) whether such diversion, in turn, successfully depressed subsequent media coverage of the harmful topic.

We focused on mentions of the Mueller investigation into potential collusion with Russia in the New York Times (NYT) and ABC World News Tonight (ABC) as the potentially harmful media coverage. We also selected a set of keywords that we hypothesized would play to Trump’s preferred topics at the time and would thus be likely to appear in diversionary tweets. Those keywords related to “jobs”, “China”, and “immigration”—topics that represented the president’s political strengths.

We hypothesized that the more the ABC and NYT reported on the Mueller investigation, the more Trump’s tweets would mention jobs, China, and immigration, which in turn would be followed by less coverage of the Mueller investigation by ABC and NYT. The logic is illustrated in the Figure below.



The center panel shows a conceptual model of potential strategic diversion by Donald Trump via Twitter (where his handle is @realDonaldTrump), with the expected sign of impact (increase or decrease) shown next to each path. The word cloud on the left contains the 50 most frequent words from all articles in the NYT that contained “Russia” or “Mueller” as keywords. Those articles represent the harmful media coverage. The word cloud on the right represents the 50 most frequent words occurring in Donald Trump’s tweets that were chosen, on the basis of keywords, to represent his preferred topics.

Although our keywords were selected carefully after systematically exploring the content of Trump’s campaign material and major talking points, one may be concerned this list could somehow be selected



arbitrarily or be incomplete. To explore the robustness and generalization of these results, we then conducted a second, expanded analysis that considered the president's entire Twitter vocabulary as a potential source of diversion. Both analyses accounted for a number of potentially confounding factors and we conducted a battery of robustness checks, such as randomization, sensitivity analyses, and the use of placebo keywords, to rule out artifactual explanations and strengthen claims of causal relationships.

Our analyses provided strong evidence for the hypothesized relations. For example, we found that each additional ABC headline relating to the Mueller investigation was associated with 0.2 additional mentions of one of the keywords in Trump's tweets. In turn, each additional mention of one of the keywords in a Trump tweet was associated with 0.4 fewer occurrences of the Mueller investigation in the following day's NYT.

Such a pattern did not emerge with placebo topics that presented no threat to the president, such as Brexit or some other non-political issues such as football or gardening.

Our analysis therefore presents empirical evidence that is consistent with the hypothesis that President Trump's tweets systematically divert attention away from a topic that is potentially harmful to him, which in turn appears to suppress media coverage of that topic.

Does President Trump engage in this kind of behaviour intentionally? We can't know for sure—it may just be based on intuition.

Are the media aware of the suppression? We doubt it—the NYT in particular has explicitly warned about the impact of Trump's presidency on journalistic standards. The fact that suppression nonetheless seems to occur implies that important editorial decisions may be influenced by contextual variables without the editors' intention—or indeed against their stated policies.

Even though President Trump failed to secure a second term in the White House, he continues to use Twitter prolifically. As the reach of social media platforms continues to grow, other present and future leaders may engage in similar types of behaviours.

Perhaps our paper can therefore serve as a reminder to the media that they have the power to set the agenda, which implies they ought to focus on the topics they deem most important, while perhaps not paying so much attention to the twitter-sphere.

*Trump-Twitter Image by [Gordon Johnson](#) from [Pixabay](#).*



## READING : How to Explain the Kamala-Brat Situation to Your Parents

SOURCE: [Olivia Craighead](https://www.thecut.com/article/kamala-harris-charli-xcx-brat-memes.html). "How to Explain the Kamala-Brat Situation to Your Parents. The Cut. July 24, 2024. <https://www.thecut.com/article/kamala-harris-charli-xcx-brat-memes.html>

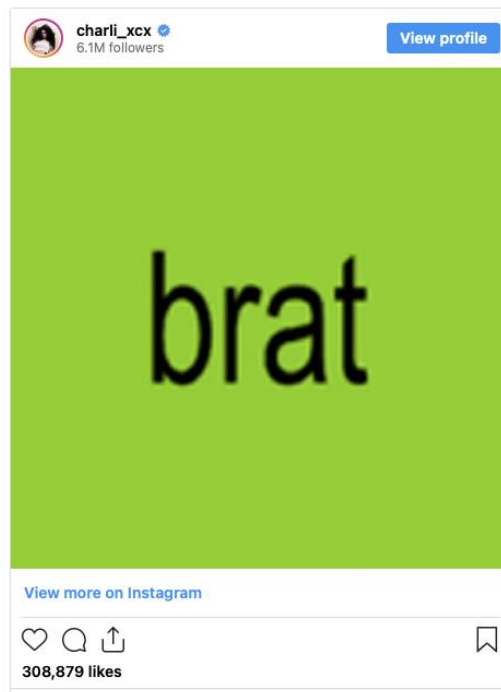
Has your mom recently texted you some version of the question, "What is Brat?" Mine certainly has. [Charli XCX's](#) latest album has reached the boomers thanks to the powerful combination of [Kamala Harris](#) and people who are addicted to posting. The stars aligned, and now Jake Tapper is sort of aware of what it means to be so Julia. But your parents want to know about Brat, and how do you even begin to explain the album, the memes, and how it all relates to Harris? You send them this post, a carefully crafted explainer made with both boomers and out-of-touch Gen-Xers in mind. Before you know it, the whole family will be bumpin' that all the way to the voting booth.



*Photo-Illustration: by The Cut; Photos*

### What is Brat?

[Brat](#) is Charli XCX's latest album. The cover looks like [this](#):



That's why you've seen that shade of green and that specific font as part of the Kamala memes. In addition to being the most critically acclaimed album of Charli's career, it has also been all over the



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internet. There's the viral "Apple" dance, the bright green Brat wall where Charli provided updates, and plenty of memes that you don't need to understand.



"You're just like that girl who is a little messy and likes to party and maybe says some dumb things sometimes, who feels herself but maybe also has a breakdown," Charli said in a TikTok explaining what "brat" means to her. "But [she] kind of like parties through it, is very honest, very blunt. A little bit volatile. Like, does dumb things. But it's brat. You're brat. That's brat."

## What is the coconut-tree meme?

Okay, so you need some context before we get into the meat of this Brat thing. People think Kamala is funny. Over the years, people have laughed at her for not knowing how to sing "Wheels on the Bus," for her love of Venn diagrams, and for her turkey-cooking instructions. This reached a fever pitch earlier this year, when someone shared a clip of a 2023 speech in which Kamala shared some wisdom she received from her mother:



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The laugh, the pivot to being deathly serious, the fact that we do exist in the context of all in which we live and what came before us. All of this was ripe for memeing and remained so for months, when it crashed directly into the Brat meme cycle.

### **When did Kamala x *Brat* posting start?**

The memes first started popping up in the days after Biden's abysmal debate performance. With calls for Biden to drop out getting louder, it became clear that the most obvious route would be for him to pass the baton to Kamala.

On July 3, five days after the debate, this post went up:

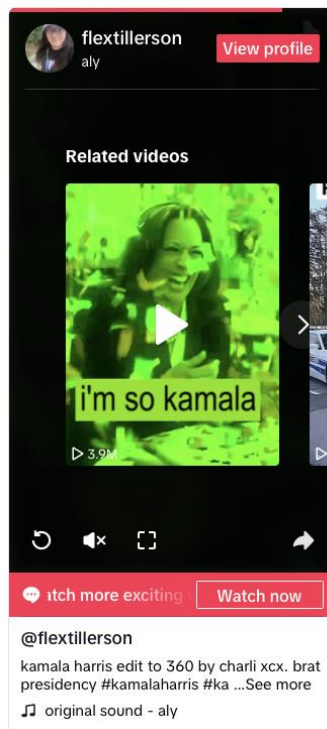




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Two days later, this one went viral on TikTok:



And we were off! The next three weeks were filled with speculation as to whether or not Biden would drop out of the race ... and Kamala fancams. There was also a whole thing where people were splicing the coconut-tree speech into various pop songs, but the less said about that the better. (This one, set to Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off," is my favorite.)



## Has Kamala embraced Brat?

Mmmm, kinda. Shortly after Biden endorsed his VP for the presidential nomination, the Biden campaign page on X was converted into Kamala HQ. The page, obviously run by plugged-in social-media professionals, quickly changed its banner image to one that read “kamala hq” in the style of the Brat album cover.



Harris herself has not said a word about Brat or the coconut-tree meme, which is for the best. Variety critic Allison Herman hit the nail on the head when she posted on X, “kamala if you’re reading this do NOT acknowledge the coconut memes. I repeat: do NOT acknowledge the coconut memes. the children will turn on you.”

While Kamala hasn’t said anything about it yet, everyone else has. Charli, in an X post that’s now been seen 49 million times, wrote “kamala IS brat.” Jake Tapper attempted to explain the phenomenon on CNN. Stephen Colbert did the “Apple” dance and even threw his arms up from his hips on the right beat.



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## What's the endgame here?

Winning the presidency, I guess? Hopefully Kamala never acknowledges either the Brat memes or the coconut tree and lets the kids (adults ages 26 to 33) keep having their fun online. At the very most, the campaign could play "Von Dutch" on the first day of the convention. Anything more than that would be cringe.

## How long did it take to stop being fun?

Nothing chartreuse can stay. Biden stepped down on Sunday, and by Tuesday, Brat got into the wrong hands. First, Fox Business found the CNN clip, and conservative comedian Jimmy Failla gave this awesome take:





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Then, someone in the press pool asked Mayor Eric Adams, “What is your advice to Vice-President Harris on how to have her best Brat summer?” Boo! Adams, obviously confused, asked, “Do her ‘brat’? Is it called ‘brat’? Okay, am I a ‘brat’? I hope I’m not a ‘brat.’” He then did what he has a true gift for, which is pitching New York in a way that makes it sound lame as hell: “Tell her to come to New York and be a ‘SOP’ — summer of possibility.” That doesn’t even make sense!

Look, I love and respect all social-media managers, but I have a bone to pick with whoever took Adams’s confusion and set it to “365.”



What’s funny is that Adams kind of is a 365 party girl, but it’s not fun for him to know about that. As New York City councilmember (and actual member of Gen Z) Chi Ossé declared on X, “BRAT SUMMER IS OFFICIALLY OVER.” It was fun while it lasted!

This post has been updated.



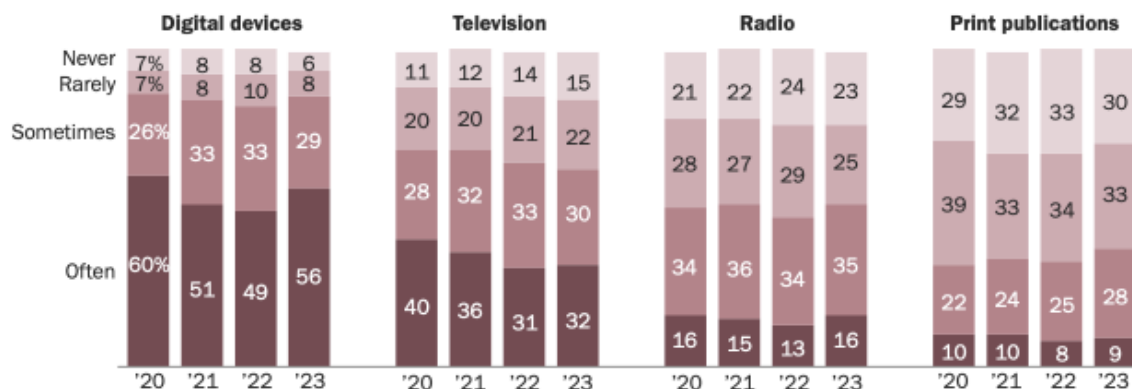
# TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY

## READING: News Consumption Across Platforms

SOURCE: Pew Research Center. "News Platform Fact Sheet." November 15, 2023.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet/>

### News consumption across platforms

% of U.S. adults who \_\_\_ get news from ...



Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

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## READING: Social Media and News Fact Sheet

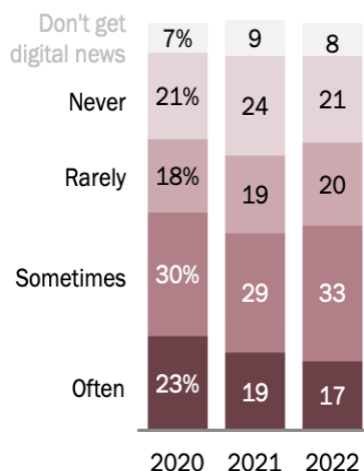
SOURCE: Pew Research Center, "Social Media and News Fact Sheet." November 15, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>

Digital news has become an important part of Americans' news media diets, with social media playing a crucial role in news consumption. Today, half of U.S. adults get news at least sometimes from social media.

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### News consumption on social media

*% of U.S. adults who get news from social media ...*



Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 18-Aug. 21, 2022.

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### News consumption on social media

When it comes to where Americans regularly get news on social media, Facebook outpaces all other social media sites. Three-in-ten U.S. adults say they regularly get news there. Slightly fewer (26%) regularly get news on YouTube.





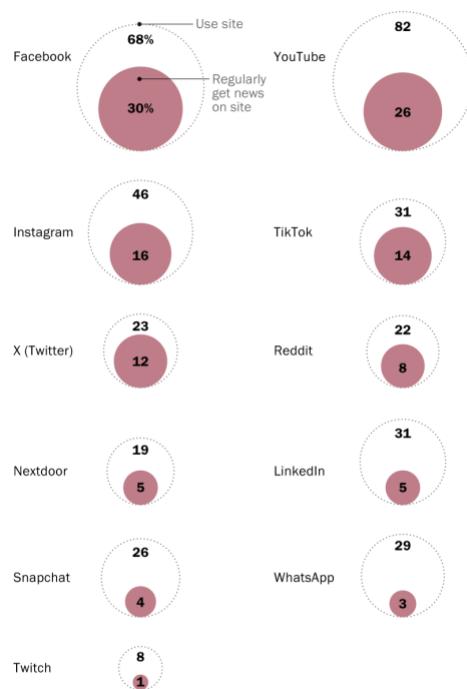
# TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY

Smaller shares regularly get news on Instagram (16%), TikTok (14%), X (12%) or Reddit (8%). Even fewer Americans regularly get news on Nextdoor (5%), LinkedIn (5%), Snapchat (4%), WhatsApp (3%) or Twitch (1%).

(Seven-in-ten U.S. adults say they have seen or heard something about the renaming of Twitter as X. The platform's name change took place in July 2023.)

## News consumption by social media site

% of U.S. adults who ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

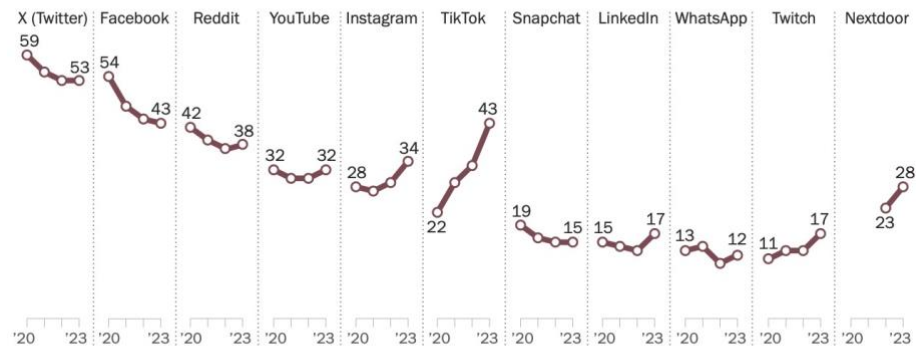
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Some social media sites – despite having relatively small overall audiences – stand out for having high shares of users who regularly go to the site for news. For example, roughly half of users on X (53%) get news there. On the other hand, only 15% of Snapchat users regularly get news on the app.

## Social media sites by portion of users who regularly get news there

*% of each social media site's users who regularly get news there*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

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## Who consumes news on each social media site

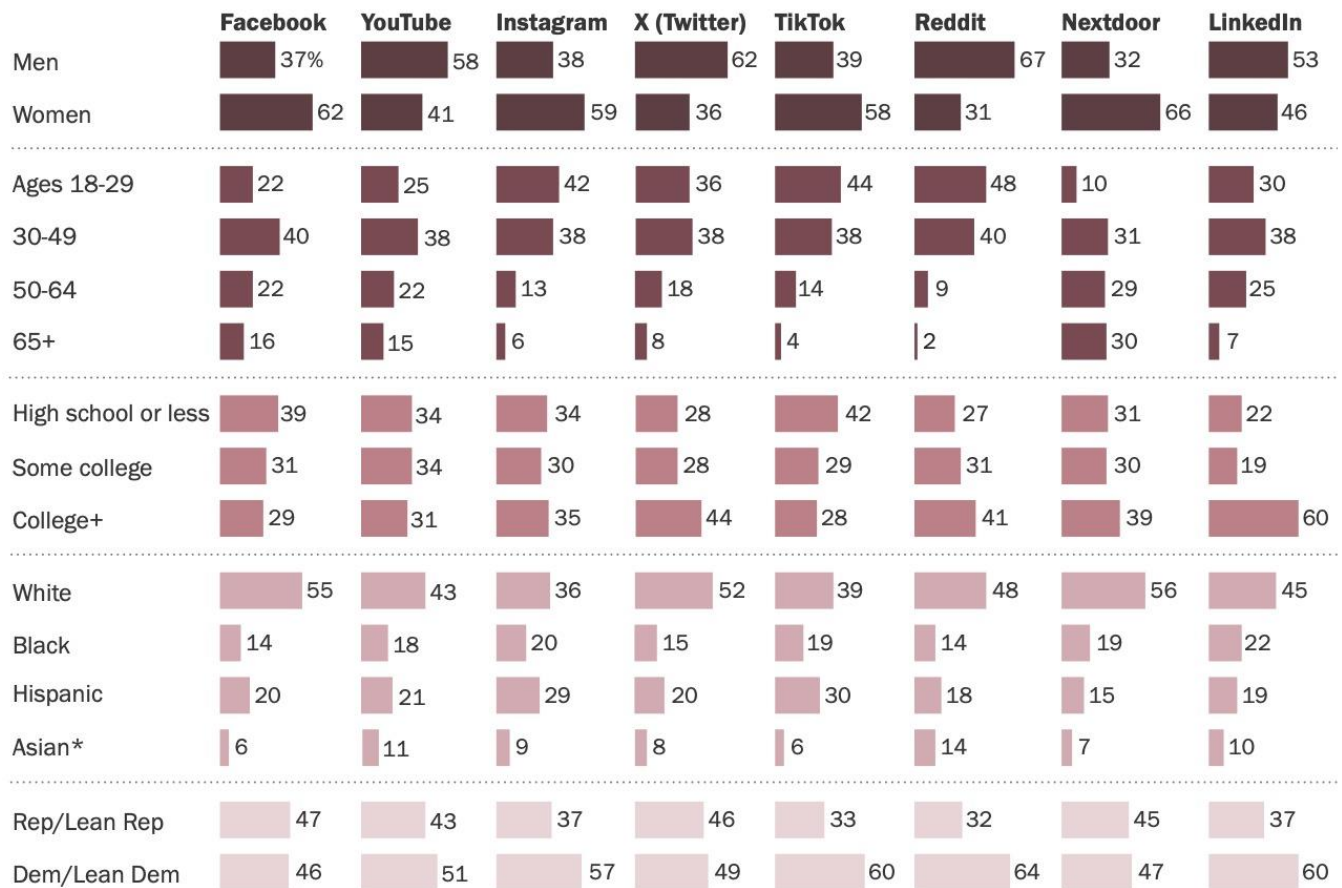
There are demographic differences, such as by gender, in who turns to each social media site regularly for news. Women make up a greater portion of regular news consumers on Nextdoor (66%), Facebook (62%), Instagram (59%) and TikTok (58%), while men make up a greater share on sites like Reddit (67%), X (62%) and YouTube (58%).

Some partisan differences also arise when it comes to who regularly gets news on some social media sites. The majority of regular news consumers on many sites are Democrats or lean Democratic. No social media site included here has regular news consumers who are more likely to be Republicans or lean Republican, though there is no significant partisan difference among news consumers on Facebook, X or Nextdoor. ([Read the Appendix](#) for data on U.S. adults in each demographic group and party who regularly get news from each social media site.)



## Demographic profiles and party identification of regular social media news consumers in the U.S.

% of each social media site's **regular** news consumers who are ...



\* Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: Snapchat, Twitch and WhatsApp not shown due to small sample sizes. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanic adults are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.

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