FOR RELEASE November 4, 2013

Twitter News Consumers
Young, Mobile and Educated

Nearly one-in-ten U.S. adults (8%) get news through Twitter, according to a new report by the Pew Research Center, in collaboration with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Compared with the 30% of Americans who get news on Facebook, Twitter news consumers stand out as younger, more mobile and more educated.

16%
of U.S. adults use Twitter

8%
of U.S. adults consume news on Twitter

84%
of U.S. adults are not Twitter users

In addition, a separate Pew Research analysis of conversations on Twitter around major news events reveals three common characteristics: much of what gets posted centers on passing along breaking news; sentiments shift considerably over time; and however passionate, the conversations do not necessarily track with public opinion.
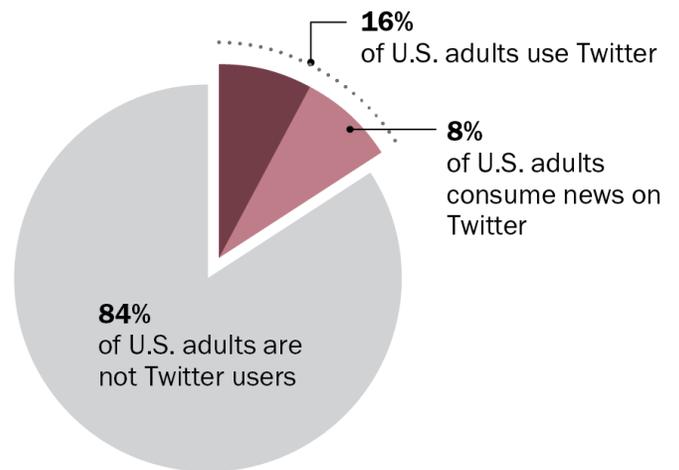
This two-part report is based first on a survey of more than 5,000 U.S. adults (including 736 Twitter users and 3,268 Facebook users) and, second, on an analysis of Twitter conversations surrounding major news events which spanned nearly three years. Twitter posts were analyzed for the information shared, sentiments expressed and ebb and flow of interest.

According to the survey, 16% of U.S. adults use Twitter. Among those, roughly half (52%) "ever" get news there — with news defined as "information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family."

Mobile devices are a key point of access for these Twitter news consumers. The vast majority, 85%, get news (of any kind) at least sometimes on mobile devices. That outpaces Facebook news consumers by 20 percentage points; 64% of Facebook news consumers use mobile devices for news. The same is true of 40% of all U.S. adults overall, according to the survey.

Twitter news consumers stand out for being younger and more educated than both the population overall and Facebook news consumers.

Close to half, 45%, of Twitter news consumers are 18-29 years old. That is more than twice that of the population overall (21%) and also outpaces young adults' representation among Facebook news consumers, where 34% are 18-29 years old. Further, just 2% of Twitter news consumers are 65 or older, compared with 18% of the total population and 7% of Facebook news consumers.

Twitter news consumers also tend to be more educated than the general population and than Facebook news consumers. Four-in-ten (40%)

Profile of the Twitter News Consumer

% of Each Population

	Twitter News Consumers	Facebook News Consumers	Total Population
	%	%	%
Get news at least sometimes from a…			
Mobile device	85	64	40
Desktop or laptop computer	87	82	65
Male	50	42	48
Female	50	58	52
<$30,000	17	22	24
$30,000-$74,999	35	37	37
>$75,000	48	41	39
18-29	45	34	21
30-49	38	39	33
50-64	14	20	29
65+	2	7	18
High school graduate or less	31	39	42
Some college	29	31	29
Bachelor's or more	40	30	29
White, Non-Hispanic	57	63	67
Non-White	43	37	33
	N=359	N=1,429	N=5,173

Facebook News Survey Aug. 21-Sept.2, 2013

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Twitter news consumers have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29% of the total population and 30% of Facebook news consumers.

Separately, Pew Research Center tracked and analyzed the Twitter conversations surrounding 10 major news events that occurred between May 2011 and October 2013. The events ranged from the opening night of the summer Olympics to the Newtown Conn. school shootings to the Supreme Court hearings on same-sex marriage. Using computer software developed by Crimson Hexagon, researchers examined which elements of the news events were discussed, the tone of the tweets and the ebb and flow of Twitter engagement. From that research, three central themes emerge:

A core function of Twitter is passing along pieces of information as the story develops. Even with the outpouring of emotion after the July 13, 2013, acquittal of George

Zimmerman in the [death of teenager Trayvon Martin](#), the largest component of the Twitter conversation (39% of all expressed sentiments in tweets about the event) shared news of that verdict without offering an opinion. Straight news accounts also led the Twitter conversations about the Oct. 1 [rollout of the Affordable Care Act](#) (42%) and the concurrent federal government shutdown (35%) — two events that stirred political passions.

The Twitter conversation about big news events can shift and evolve, both in terms of sentiment and topic. In the two weeks after the March 2013 [Supreme Court hearings on same-sex marriage](#), Twitter sentiment was far more opposed to the idea of legalizing same-sex marriage (55%) than in favor (32%). Yet in the month after that, support for same-sex marriage (43%) easily trumped opposition (26%). A study of the aftermath of the [Newtown shooting](#) reveals how quickly the focus of the Twitter conversation can change. On Dec. 14, 2012, expressions of sympathy for the victims made up nearly one-third of the conversation; by Dec. 17, it was down to 13%. In the same period, attention to President Obama, the shooter and mental health issues more than doubled — from 11% to 24% of the conversation.

Although sentiment on Twitter can sometimes match that of the general population, it is not a reliable proxy for public opinion. During the 2012 presidential race, Republican candidate [Ron Paul easily won the Twitter primary](#) — 55% of the conversation about him was positive, with only 15% negative. Voters rendered a very different verdict. After the Newtown tragedy, 64% of the Twitter conversation supported stricter gun controls, while 21% opposed them. A [Pew Research Center survey](#) in the same period produced a far more mixed verdict, with 49% saying it is more important to control gun ownership and 42% saying it is more important to protect gun rights.

Each of the 10 full Pew Research Center reports is below, with the detailed analysis, findings and methodology.

On Twitter: Dueling Views on the Shutdown and Obamacare, Oct. 2, 2013.
http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/02/on-twitter-dueling-views-on-the-shutdown-and-obamacare/

On Twitter: Anger Greets the Zimmerman Verdict, July 17, 2013.
http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/17/on-twitter-anger-greets-the-zimmerman-verdict/

News Coverage Conveys Strong Momentum for Same-Sex Marriage, June 17, 2013.

http://www.journalism.org/2013/06/17/reactions-twitter/

In Social Media and Opinion Pages, Newtown Sparks Calls for Gun Reform, Dec. 20, 2012.
http://www.journalism.org/2012/12/20/social-media-and-opinion-pages-newtown-sparks-calls-gun-reform/

Hurricane Sandy and Twitter, Nov. 6, 2012.
http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/06/hurricane-sandy-and-twitter/

On Twitter, Verdict on Paterno Unchanged by Freeh Report, NCAA, July 25, 2012.
http://www.journalism.org/2012/07/25/twitter-verdict-paterno-unchanged-freeh-report-ncaa-punishment/

On Twitter, Mixed Reviews for Opening Night at the Olympics, July 21, 2012.
http://www.journalism.org/numbers/twitter-mixed-reviews-opening-night-olympics/

Twitter Conversation About Student Loans is More Personal, Less Political, May 4, 2012. http://www.journalism.org/numbers/twitter-conversation-about-student-loans-more-personal-less-political/

On Twitter, Still Tough Going for Komen, Feb. 7, 2012.
http://www.journalism.org/2012/02/07/ontwitterstilltoughgoingforkomen/

Twitter and the Campaign, Dec. 8, 2011. http://www.journalism.org/2011/12/08/twitter-and-campaign/

About the Survey

This report, an initiative with in collaboration with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, is based on a Pew Research Center survey conducted Aug. 21-Sept. 2, 2013, among a nationally representative sample of adults 18 years of age or older. The sample comprised 5,173 respondents, including 736 Twitter users, of which 359 are Twitter news consumers, and 3,268 Facebook users, of which 1,429 are Facebook news consumers. The survey questionnaire was written by the Pew Research Center and administered by GfK using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel.

For questions asked of the full sample of 5,173, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 1.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For Twitter users, the margin of error is plus or minus 4.6 percentage points; for Twitter news consumers, it is 6.5 percentage points. For Facebook users, the margin of error is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points; for Facebook news consumers, it is 3.3 percentage points.

Facebook news consumers are defined as those who answered that they "ever get news or news headlines on Facebook." News is defined as "information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family."

About the Content Analysis

The analyses of Twitter conversations employed media research methods that combined Pew Research's content analysis rules with computer coding software developed by <u>Crimson Hexagon</u>.

Crimson Hexagon is a software platform that identifies statistical patterns in words used in online texts. Researchers enter key terms using Boolean search logic so the software can identify relevant material to analyze. Pew Research draws its analysis sample from several million blogs and all public Twitter posts. Then a researcher trains the software to classify documents using examples from those collected posts. Finally, the software classifies the rest of the online content according to the patterns derived during the training.

Full individual methodologies, including the search terms used to identify relevant tweets, are available within each report.