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AMONG AFFLUENT AMERICANS, PRINT MEDIA IS TOPS Death of Traditional Outlets Has Been Greatly Exaggerated

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Mark Twain famously quipped that news of his death was exaggerated when the press mistook his cousin's serious illness for his own. Today, much the same could be said about traditional media. It seems that its death is foretold by any number of pundits with every new release of data on social media and digital devices. (Facebook's 500 million members would make it the third-largest country in the world! Ashton Kutcher has more than 7 million Twitter followers! iPad-mania sweeps through coffee shops around the world!)

Of course, there is no denying the rapidly growing and truly disruptive impact of new devices and social media. But at the same time, there is also no denying that traditional outlets are thriving in the lives of consumers today, and that they form the core of how most consumers interact with media. This is true for the general population, and it is even true among the affluent Americans that we study, even though they have the discretionary income to indulge in an array of devices, as well as the digital literacy to get the most out of them.

Throughout 2011, we have used our Mendelsohn Affluent Barometer to track new and traditional media use among American Affluents. This monthly survey consists of more than 1,000 online interviews with respondents making at least \$100,000 in annual household income -- in other words, the 20% of Americans who account for about 60% of U.S. income and approximately 70% of U.S. net worth. The survey was conducted between March and May 2011.

When asked how they read magazines, 93% said they read hard-copy print versions; in contrast, less than a third read them on computers, and no other format garnered more than 10%. The same pattern is evident for newspapers, which 86% read in print, compared to the 39% who read them on computers, and 14% who read them via smartphone. TV shows are watched on TVs by 94%, followed by 23% who watch them on computers. Websites are viewed on computers by 94%, followed by 32% viewing them on smartphones. The pattern is clear across all media. The vast majority consume content through its most traditional outlet: magazines and newspapers in print, websites on computers, video content through TVs and so on.

	MAGAZINES	NEWSPAPERS	TV	WEBSITES
Read hard copy	93%	86%	--	--
View on computer	27%	39%	23%	94%
View on smartphone	9%	14%	7%	32%
View on television	6%	7%	94%	13%
View on Tablet computer	6%	7%	6%	15%
View on tablet via website	5%	6%	3%	14%
View on tablet via app	4%	4%	4%	8%
View on e-reader	4%	3%	--	5%

Media usage among all Affluents. Source: Mendelsohn Affluent Barometer

Similarly, we explored data on the importance of traditional media in our Ad Age article last month, "[Media Use in Extraordinary Times](#)." When asked how affluents followed Osama bin Laden's death, network TV topped the list, cited by 70%, and an additional 40% cited printed newspapers. Similarly, when asked how they followed the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan, network TV again topped the list, cited by 76%, with an additional 49% citing printed newspapers.

It has been well-documented that younger consumers differ in their media-consumption patterns from their older counterparts, and certainly they have been earlier adopters and heavier users of some emerging and alternative platforms. But even today's younger generation shows the characteristic pattern of tending to consume media through its most traditional outlet, even as they show more cross-platform "experimentation." For example, among those aged 18-34:

- 88% read magazines in print, followed by 35% who read them online
- Newspapers show the greatest amount of experimentation -- 70% read newspapers in print, followed relatively closely by 54% who read them online
- 94% view video content on TV, followed by 35% who do so on computers
- 93% read websites on computers, followed by 38% who do so on smartphones

	MAGAZINES	NEWSPAPERS	TV	WEBSITES
Read hard copy	88%	70%	--	--
View on computer	35%	54%	35%	93%
View on smartphone	17%	27%	13%	38%
View on television	15%	22%	94%	23%
View on Tablet computer	11%	15%	12%	24%
View on tablet via website	7%	12%	7%	21%
View on tablet via app	7%	7%	8%	9%
View on e-reader	5%	5%	--	4%

Media usage among Affluents ages 18-34. Source: Mendelsohn Affluent Barometer

Of course, we're not denying the widespread use and tremendous impact of "new" media. It is vitally important in the lives of consumers, particularly Affluents, and is becoming more so. Moreover, any business that suddenly finds 20-30% of its best customers "experimenting" with less profitable options (from "analog dollars to digital dimes") will face serious challenges. Reports of Twain's death were indeed exaggerated when he made his famous remark in 1897, but perhaps those reports are better characterized as premature; he had 13 more years left before an obituary became appropriate. Reports of the death of traditional media are equally premature.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Shullman and Stephen Kraus are president and chief research and insights officer of Ipsos Mendelsohn, respectively. The Affluency column appears monthly on AdAgeStat.