MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES AS NEWS EDITORS

**A GALLUP/KNIGHT
FOUNDATION SURVEY**

MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES AS NEWS EDITORS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

A GALLUP/KNIGHT FOUNDATION SURVEY

Major internet companies such as Google®, Yahoo® and Facebook® have millions of users who visit their websites or apps frequently to find information or connect with others. In addition to those basic tasks that popularized the sites, they now provide news to their users, typically by linking to news articles reported by outside news organizations. Given the reach of major internet companies, the content they show people can have a profound impact on the public's views of the U.S. and the world.

As part of its ongoing Trust, Media and Democracy initiative, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation partnered with Gallup to ask a representative sample of U.S. adults for their views on the news editorial functions played by major internet companies.

From a broad perspective, Americans credit major internet companies for connecting people and helping them become better-informed. At the same time, they are concerned about their role in spreading misinformation and in potentially limiting exposure to different viewpoints. They are more negative (54%) than positive (45%) about the idea of major internet companies tailoring information to individual users based on their interests, their internet search activity and their web browsing history.

Americans seem even more concerned when the approach of tailored content is extended to news coverage.

- Large majorities of U.S. adults believe people who see news content on major internet websites should see the same news topics, and the same news items on those topics, rather than the content varying for particular visitors based on their interests and online activity.

- Majorities of U.S. adults say they are very concerned that major internet companies' methods as a content arbitrator can give people a biased picture of the news, restrict the expression of certain viewpoints, and increase the influence of news that benefits the internet company and its preferred points of view.

- Likely as a result of these concerns, the public believes major internet companies should be transparent about their methods for delivering content — 88% say they should publicly disclose the methods they use.

- Further, Americans think major internet companies should be subject to the same regulations as newspapers and television news stations. However, they do not see the government as being mainly responsible for ensuring that major internet companies give Americans an accurate and unbiased summary of the news. Rather, they believe that obligation falls on the internet companies or their users.

AMERICANS ARE CONCERNED THAT MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES VARYING CONTENT FOR USERS CAN GIVE PEOPLE A BIASED PICTURE OF THE NEWS, RESTRICT EXPRESSION AND INCREASE THE INFLUENCE OF NEWS THAT BENEFITS THE INTERNET COMPANY.

DETAILED FINDINGS

AMERICANS ARE MORE NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE ABOUT DIRECTING CONTENT TO SPECIFIC USERS

In addition to providing the ability to search internet content and connect with others online, Google and Facebook, and to a lesser extent Yahoo and Twitter®, have become sources of news for Americans. Fifty-three percent of those interviewed for this survey say they see or read news about current events daily or a few times a week on Google, and 51% say the same about Facebook. Fewer say they regularly see news items on Yahoo (23%) or Twitter (19%).

Frequency of Seeing News Items on Major Internet Platforms

How often do you see or read news items about current events in the U.S. and the world on the following websites or apps?

Legend:
- % Daily/A few times a week
- % A few times a month
- % Rarely/Never

	GOOGLE	FACEBOOK	YAHOO	TWITTER
% Daily/A few times a week	53	51	23	19
% A few times a month	13	6	7	5
% Rarely/Never	34	42	69	75

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the graph.

Major internet companies often rely on computer programs or algorithms to determine which material to show particular users, commonly using compiled data about people's stated interests, search and web browsing histories, and location. The companies portray that approach as a service to its users, and the popularity of these websites and apps suggests that personalized content has significant appeal. However, Americans view the approach of providing curated internet content more negatively than positively. Specifically, 45% describe it as a good idea and 54% as a bad idea, including 16% who say it is a very bad idea.

Opinions of Providing Targeted Internet Content to People

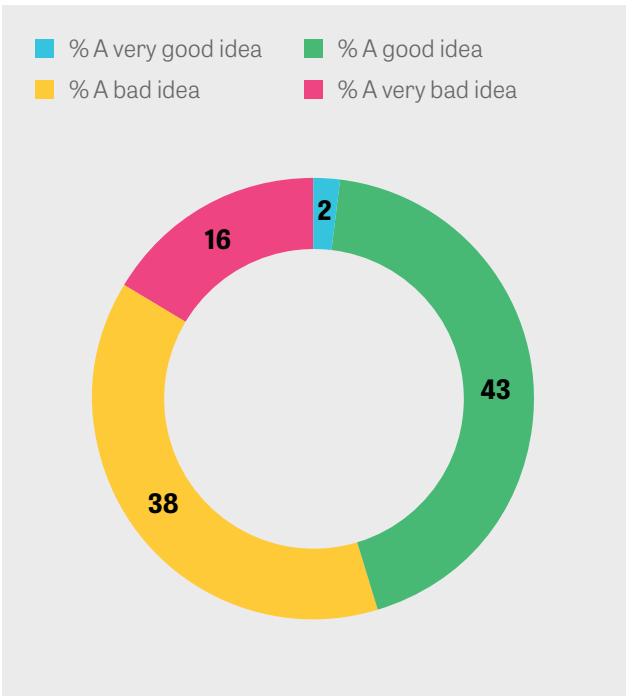As you may know, major internet companies like Google, Facebook or Yahoo often show different items or content on their sites and apps to different people depending on their interests, the websites they have visited in the past or what they have searched for online. Generally speaking, do you think this is —

Legend: % A very good idea, % A good idea, % A bad idea, % A very bad idea

Donut chart values: 2, 43, 38, 16

"No answer" percentage is not shown in the graph.

It is unclear to what extent Americans are uncomfortable with the basic idea of providing personalized content, or if their views may be influenced by concerns over related matters such as personal privacy.

Attitudes about major internet companies providing tailored content are similar across major demographic groups, including by gender, race, education and political party. Additionally, opinions do not vary by people's self-reported familiarity with the concept of computer algorithms.

There are meaningful age differences — 51% of young adults (aged 18 to 34) describe the idea of curated content as a good idea, while 60% of those aged 55 and older say it is a bad idea. Additionally, people who say they regularly (daily or a few times a week) see or read news items on Google or Yahoo hold similar views to those who do not regularly use those sites or apps. However, Facebook users who regularly see or read news items are slightly more positive about targeted content than are those who do not, 51% to 39%.

Opinions of Providing Targeted Internet Content to People, by Subgroup

	VERY GOOD/ GOOD IDEA	VERY BAD/ BAD IDEA
	%	**%**
U.S. adults	45	54
18-34 years old	51	49
35-54 years old	46	54
55+ years old	39	60
Regularly see news on Google	46	54
Do not regularly see news on Google	44	56
Regularly see news on Yahoo	48	52
Do not regularly see news on Yahoo	44	56
Regularly see news on Facebook	51	48
Do not regularly see news on Facebook	39	61

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

AMERICANS BELIEVE BUSINESS REASONS ARE PRIMARY IN DELIVERING PERSONALIZED CONTENT

Perhaps not surprisingly, Americans see internet companies' primary reasons for showing tailored content as those that help the company's bottom line. More than seven in 10 say increasing the effectiveness of advertisements (79%) and keeping people interested so they regularly visit the website or use its app (74%) are major reasons why major internet companies show certain items to certain people.

Smaller percentages see more positive goals — including those beneficial to democracy and society — as key motivations for these companies. Between 12% and 21% believe helping people become better-informed about things they care about, helping support a more informed society by connecting people to important news, helping connect people to their local community and the U.S. as a whole, and showing people the same information others in their network see are major reasons for varying content to users. Although Americans see these more altruistic aims as major or minor reasons behind the companies' methods, substantial minorities are skeptical that these goals are considerations at all.

A majority of Americans see political motivations as a major or minor factor in internet companies' chosen methods. More than four in 10 believe promoting a political agenda favored by the company is a major reason that they show different content to different people, and 28% say it is a minor reason.

Perceptions of Why Major Internet Companies Show Certain Items to Certain People

Please indicate whether you think each of the following is a major reason, a minor reason or not a reason why major internet companies show certain items to certain people.

	MAJOR REASON	MINOR REASON	NOT A REASON
	%	%	%
To increase the effectiveness of advertisements they show to people	79	12	8
To keep them interested so they regularly visit the company's website or use its app	74	15	9
To promote a political agenda favored by the company	43	28	28
To show people the same information that other people they know are seeing (e.g., Facebook friends seeing the same information)	21	47	31
To help them become better-informed about the things they care most about	17	46	36
To help connect people to their local community and to the U.S. as a whole	14	45	39
To help support a more informed society by connecting people to important news	12	38	49

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

Republicans are especially inclined to believe political motives are behind the companies' chosen methods, with 66% saying that promoting a political agenda favored by the company is a major reason that the companies use the methods they do. Only 29% of Democrats share that view.

Belief That Major Internet Companies' Methods Are Designed to Promote a Political Agenda, by Party Identification

■ % Major reason   ■ % Minor reason
■ % Not a reason

DEMOCRATS
29
32
38

INDEPENDENTS
42
31
27

REPUBLICANS
66
19
15

Republicans' opinions are likely driven by repeated allegations made by Republican-elected officials and commentators that Facebook has an anti-conservative bias. Notably, Republicans and Democrats hold similar views when evaluating the six other possible motivations as major reasons that internet companies show certain items to certain people.

AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT THE PRIMARY REASONS FOR SHOWING TAILORED CONTENT INCLUDE THOSE THAT HELP THE COMPANY'S BOTTOM LINE. SMALLER PERCENTAGES SEE GOALS THAT ARE BENEFICIAL TO DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY AS KEY MOTIVATIONS.

AMERICANS SAY MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES CONNECT PEOPLE, HELP THEM BE INFORMED

Despite the more negative than positive views of major internet companies' basic content curation practices and the motivations for using the methods they do, Americans give these companies credit for fostering two key aspects of a democratic society. Specifically, 75% strongly or somewhat agree that major internet companies help connect people to their local community and to the U.S. as a whole, and 54% strongly or somewhat agree that they help Americans become better-informed.

At the same time, U.S. adults are critical of major internet companies' actions to stop the spread of misinformation and to expose people to a variety of different opinions. Eighty-five percent strongly or somewhat disagree that these companies are doing enough to stop the spread of misinformation, and 69% strongly or somewhat agree they are limiting Americans' exposure to viewpoints different from their own.

Opinions on the Impact of Major Internet Companies

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about major internet companies, such as Google, Yahoo, Facebook and Twitter.

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	%	%	%	%
They help connect people to their local community and to the U.S. as a whole	20	55	16	9
They limit Americans' exposure to different viewpoints from their own	31	38	20	10
They help Americans become better-informed	8	46	27	18
They are doing enough to stop the spread of misinformation	2	13	37	48

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

Democrats are more optimistic than Republicans are about the contributions that major internet companies make, particularly when it comes to informing people. Two-thirds of Democrats but only 37% of Republicans say major internet companies help Americans become better-informed.

Opinions on the Impact of Major Internet Companies, by Political Party

Figures are the percentages that strongly or somewhat agree with each statement

	DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS	REPUBLICANS
They help connect people to their local community and to the U.S. as a whole	87	69	66
They limit Americans' exposure to different viewpoints from their own	60	72	78
They help Americans become better-informed	67	58	37
They are doing enough to stop the spread of misinformation	19	15	10

Regular users of the sites are also more positive than nonregular users about what these companies accomplish in terms of connecting people and helping them become better-informed.

Also, 66% of adults aged 18 to 34 strongly or somewhat agree that major internet companies help Americans become better-informed, compared with half of those who are older.
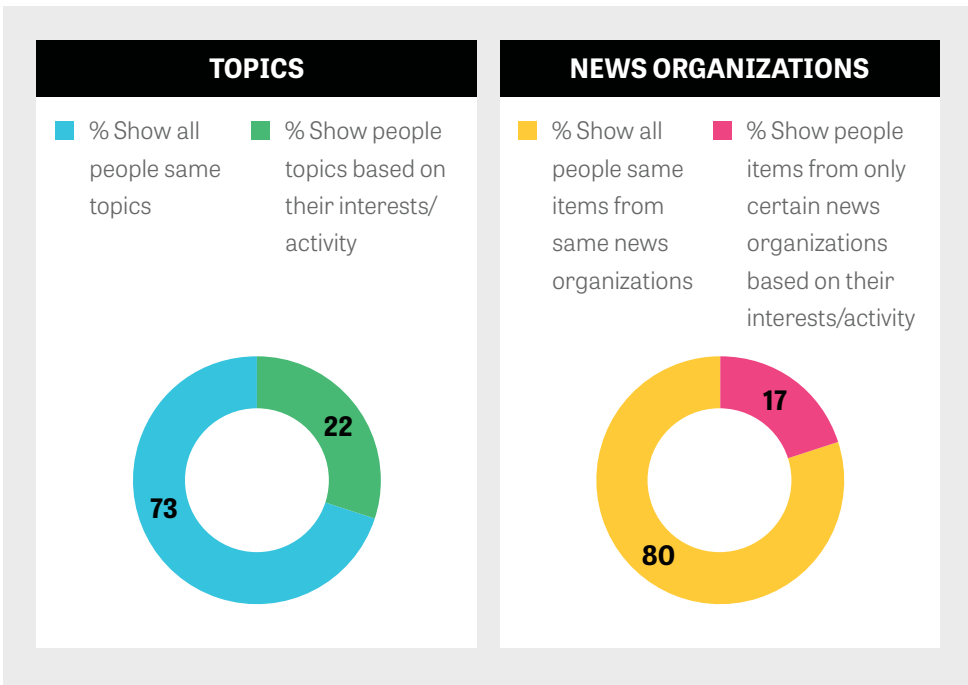
DETAILED FINDINGS

THE EDITOR ROLE OF MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES

If Americans seem uncomfortable with major internet companies providing tailored content to users, they are even more uncomfortable with these companies varying the news stories they show people. The Gallup/Knight Foundation report *American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy*[1] revealed that 57% of U.S. adults believe that it is "a major problem" for our democracy that major websites may exclude certain stories based on a user's past internet activity. Thirty-five percent said it was a minor problem.

The current survey finds that Americans prefer that major internet companies standardize their news coverage across users. For example, 22% prefer that major internet companies show people topics based on their interests or past browsing or search history. Seventy-three percent prefer that the companies show all people the same set of news topics.

Similarly, 17% prefer that these companies show people news items from only certain news organizations, again selected based on their past internet activity. Eighty percent prefer that the companies show all people the same item from the same news organization.

Opinions on Standardized vs. Targeted News Content on Major Internet Companies' Websites and Apps

TOPICS	NEWS ORGANIZATIONS
■ % Show all people same topics ■ % Show people topics based on their interests/activity	■ % Show all people same items from same news organizations ■ % Show people items from only certain news organizations based on their interests/activity
22 73	17 80

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the graphs.

---

1   https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-trust-media-and-democracy

   9

Further, Americans do not believe major internet companies should prioritize content from older, more established or more popular news organizations over that from outlets that lack those credentials. Six in 10 U.S. adults believe major internet companies should give the same priority to lesser-known or lesser-established news media organizations as large, professional media organizations with an established reputation. Thirty-eight percent believe stories from established, well-known organizations should be prioritized.

Democrats are evenly divided about whether news from better-known and established news organizations should get higher priority in major internet companies' news coverage: 50% believe they should, and 49% believe they should not. In contrast, 28% of Republicans and 36% of independents believe established news organizations' stories should be prioritized, perhaps reflecting their more negative opinions about the news media in general.[2]

No subgroups express more support for than opposition to targeting news topics to users. However, 34% of younger adults, compared with less than 20% of middle-aged or older adults, are comfortable with varying news topics for specific users. There are no differences by education or party identification; however, those who say they are very familiar with computer algorithms are more than twice as likely to endorse the approach than are those who are not familiar with algorithms.

Opinions of Showing People Certain News Topics or Stories From Certain News Organizations Based on Their Past Internet Activity

Next, please think about the choice of _topics or issues_ that major internet companies could show to people in their news feeds. For example, they could show people mainly national, international or local news items. They could show people mainly news on politics, business, technology or sports. They could show people mainly news on issues like immigration, taxes or gun laws. Would you prefer to see major internet companies show people: "A selection of news items on topics and issues that have been targeted to them based on their interests, the past websites they have visited and the information they have searched for online" or "The same set of news topics they show all people"?

	SHOW TOPICS TARGETED TO PEOPLE BASED ON INTERESTS AND PAST INTERNET ACTIVITY	SHOW THE SAME TOPICS TO ALL PEOPLE
	%	%
U.S. adults	22	73
18-34 years old	34	61
35-54 years old	19	77
55+ years old	16	77
Very familiar with computer algorithms	37	61
Somewhat familiar with computer algorithms	22	74
Not familiar with computer algorithms	17	81

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

---

2   https://news.gallup.com/poll/1663/Media-Use-Evaluation.aspx

Similarly, large majorities of all subgroups prefer that the companies show all people the same item from the same news organization for a given news event, issue or topic. Younger adults and Republicans are somewhat more likely than older adults, Democrats and independents are to prefer that major internet companies show people news items from news organizations that may align with users' interests or past internet activity.

Opinions of Showing People Stories From Certain News Organizations Based on Their Past Internet Activity

Next, please think about the choice of _news organizations_ that major internet companies could show to people in their news feeds. For example, they could show certain people mainly items from _The New York Times_, and show others mainly items from _The Wall Street Journal_, and others mainly items from CNN, or Fox News, or their local newspaper. Would you prefer to see major internet companies: "Show people items from only certain news organizations that have been targeted to them based on their interests, the past websites they have visited and the information they have searched for online" or "Show all people the same item from the same news organization for a given news event, issue or topic"?

	SHOW PEOPLE ITEMS FROM CERTAIN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TARGETED TO PEOPLE BASED ON INTERESTS AND PAST INTERNET ACTIVITY	SHOW ALL PEOPLE THE SAME ITEM FROM THE SAME NEWS ORGANIZATION
	%	%
U.S. adults	17	80
18-34 years old	24	74
35-54 years old	15	82
55+ years old	13	85
Very familiar with computer algorithms	21	78
Somewhat familiar with computer algorithms	16	83
Not familiar with computer algorithms	15	84
Democrats	14	86
Independents	14	84
Republicans	25	74

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

AMERICANS MOSTLY AWARE OF ORIGINAL PUBLISHER OF NEWS ITEMS

Major internet companies usually identify which news organization reported and wrote news items that they link to on their websites or apps. Americans say they are usually aware of the news organization that reported and wrote the news items they see on major internet companies' websites: Six in 10 Americans say they know the news organization that reported a news story "all of the time" (24%) or "most of the time" (36%). Eighteen percent say they "rarely" (9%) or "never" (9%) know which news organization reported and wrote the story appearing on major internet companies' platforms.

Younger adults are much more likely than older adults to indicate awareness of the news source for items appearing on third-party websites. There are similar differences for those who are very or somewhat familiar with computer algorithms. College graduates are more inclined to be aware of the reporting organization than are those who do not hold a college degree.

Awareness of News Organization Reporting Stories Shown on Major Internet Companies' Websites

As you may know, most of the news items shown on Google, Facebook, Yahoo or Twitter are links to items reported by news organizations like ABC News, CNN, Fox News, *The Washington Post*, or The Associated Press. When you see news items on Google, Facebook, Yahoo or Twitter, how often are you aware of the news organization that reported and wrote the item?

	ALL/MOST OF THE TIME	SOME OF THE TIME	RARELY/ NEVER
	%	%	%
U.S. adults	60	20	18
18-34 years old	76	13	9
35-54 years old	62	19	18
55+ years old	45	27	26
College graduate	69	16	14
Noncollege graduate	56	22	20
Very familiar with computer algorithms	74	16	10
Somewhat familiar with computer algorithms	69	17	13
Not familiar with computer algorithms	43	27	29

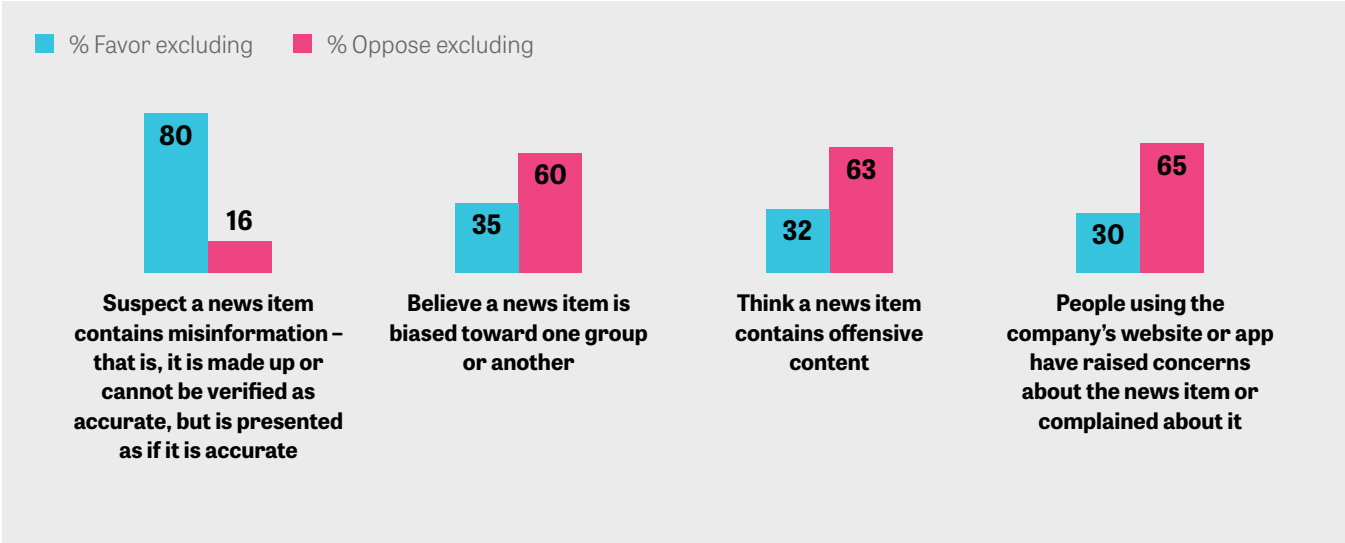"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

AMERICANS DO NOT FAVOR EXCLUSIONS OF MOST TYPES OF CONTENT

In addition to relying on computer algorithms to direct certain content to certain users, major internet companies could take more active roles in determining which information appears or does not appear on their websites and apps. For example, they could decide to delete content that is problematic for a variety of reasons.

In general, Americans do not favor those companies excluding most types of content. Majorities say they oppose internet companies excluding content from their sites and apps that they think contains offensive content, that they believe is biased toward one group or another, or that its users have raised concerns about or complained about. U.S. adults do, however, widely favor companies excluding suspected misinformation from their web platforms, with 80% holding this view.

Opinions About Major Internet Companies Excluding Certain Types of Content

Would you favor or oppose major internet companies excluding items from their news feeds for each of the following reasons?

■ % Favor excluding   ■ % Oppose excluding

80 / **16**	**35** / **60**	**32** / **63**	**30** / **65**
Suspect a news item contains misinformation – that is, it is made up or cannot be verified as accurate, but is presented as if it is accurate	Believe a news item is biased toward one group or another	Think a news item contains offensive content	People using the company's website or app have raised concerns about the news item or complained about it

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the graph.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to favor internet companies excluding stories from their platforms for all of these reasons. The largest Democratic-Republican differences are seen in potential exclusion of misinformation, which shows a 19-percentage-point gap (92% vs. 73%), and offensive content (a 17-point gap, 47% vs. 30%).

Opinions About Excluding Certain Types of Content From Major Internet Companies' Platforms, by Party Identification
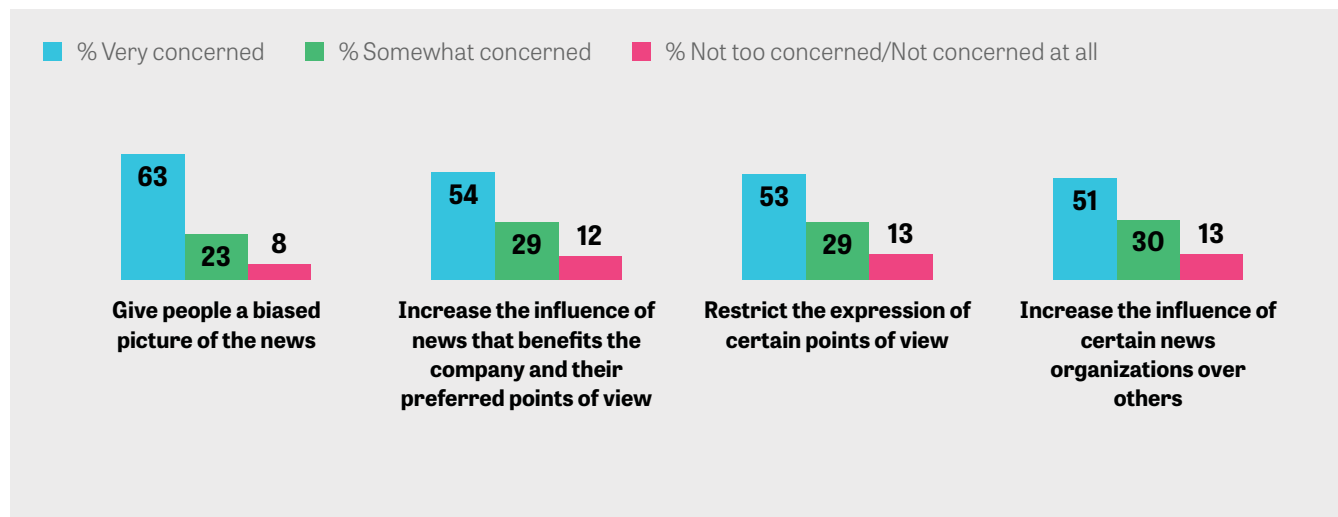
Figures are the percentages that favor excluding items for each reason

	DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS	REPUBLICANS
They suspect a news item contains misinformation — that is, it is made up or cannot be verified as accurate but is presented as if it is accurate	92	82	73
They believe a news item is biased toward one group or another	46	28	37
They think a news item contains offensive content	47	23	30
People using the company's website or app have raised concerns about the news item or complained about it	39	27	27

Americans express concerns about possible consequences of internet companies excluding stories. In fact, majorities say they are "very concerned" that such decisions may give people a biased picture of the news, increase the influence of news that benefits the company or its preferred points of view, restrict the expression of certain viewpoints, and increase the influence of certain news organizations over others. About one in 10 Americans are unconcerned about these potential outcomes of excluding content.

Concerns About Major Internet Companies Excluding News Content From Their Platforms

How concerned are you that increased steps by major internet companies to exclude certain news items they see as problematic would do each of the following?

■ % Very concerned   ■ % Somewhat concerned   ■ % Not too concerned/Not concerned at all

63	54	53	51
23	29	29	30
8	12	13	13
Give people a biased picture of the news	**Increase the influence of news that benefits the company and their preferred points of view**	**Restrict the expression of certain points of view**	**Increase the influence of certain news organizations over others**

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the graph.

Consistent with Republicans' greater opposition to major internet companies excluding certain types of content from their platforms, Republicans also express much more concern than Democrats and independents do about the potential consequences of those exclusions. More than eight in 10 Republicans are very concerned that excluding certain types of content could give people a biased picture of the news, compared with 54% of Democrats. Less than half of Democrats — but two-thirds or more of Republicans — are very concerned about the other three potential adverse outcomes.

Concern About the Effects of Excluding Certain Types of Content From Major Internet Companies' Platforms, by Party Identification

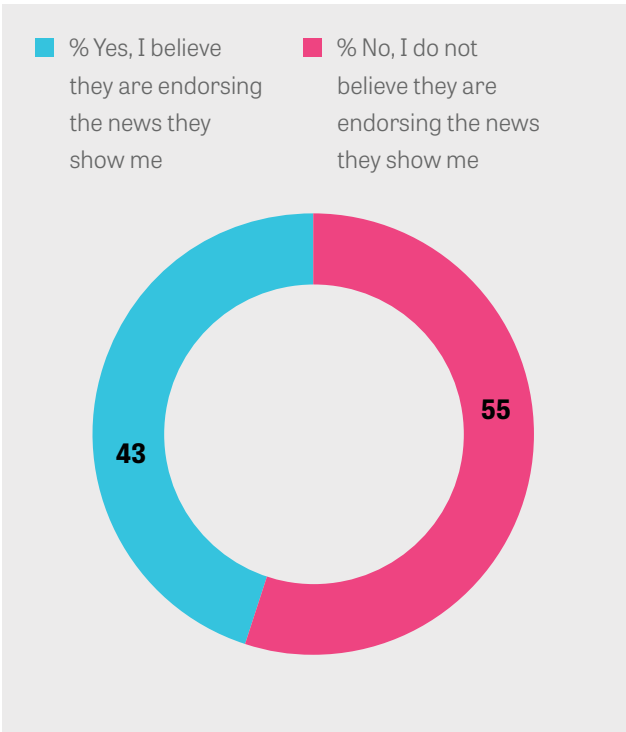Figures are the percentages who are very concerned that excluding would result in each effect

	DEMOCRATS	INDEPENDENTS	REPUBLICANS
Give people a biased picture of the news	54	67	82
Increase the influence of news that benefits the company and their preferred points of view	45	56	71
Restrict the expression of certain points of view	41	59	70
Increase the influence of certain news organizations over others	43	54	66

PUBLIC DOES NOT EQUATE DISPLAYING CONTENT AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF IT

Although Americans express a great deal of concern about the news editorial role that major internet companies play, the majority do not believe these companies are implicitly endorsing a story or its message by showing it on their websites and apps. Overall, 55% of Americans do not consider displaying a news item on a major internet company's news feed as an indication the company believes the story is accurate and agrees with its message. Forty-three percent disagree.

Beliefs That Major Internet Companies Are Endorsing News Items Shown on Their Websites and Apps

When a major internet company like Google, Facebook or Yahoo displays a particular news item on your news feed, do you believe that they are endorsing that news item — that is, telling you they believe it is accurate and that they agree with its message?

- % Yes, I believe they are endorsing the news they show me
- % No, I do not believe they are endorsing the news they show me

43 **55**

"No answer" percentage is not shown in the graph.

Sixty-two percent of Republicans equate displaying a news item with an endorsement of its accuracy and message. Twenty-seven percent of Democrats share that view.

There are modest differences among regular users and nonusers of Google and Facebook for news. Those who use those sites regularly are less inclined to think the companies are endorsing the story.

Opinions of Whether Major Internet Companies Are Endorsing News Items They Display, by Subgroup

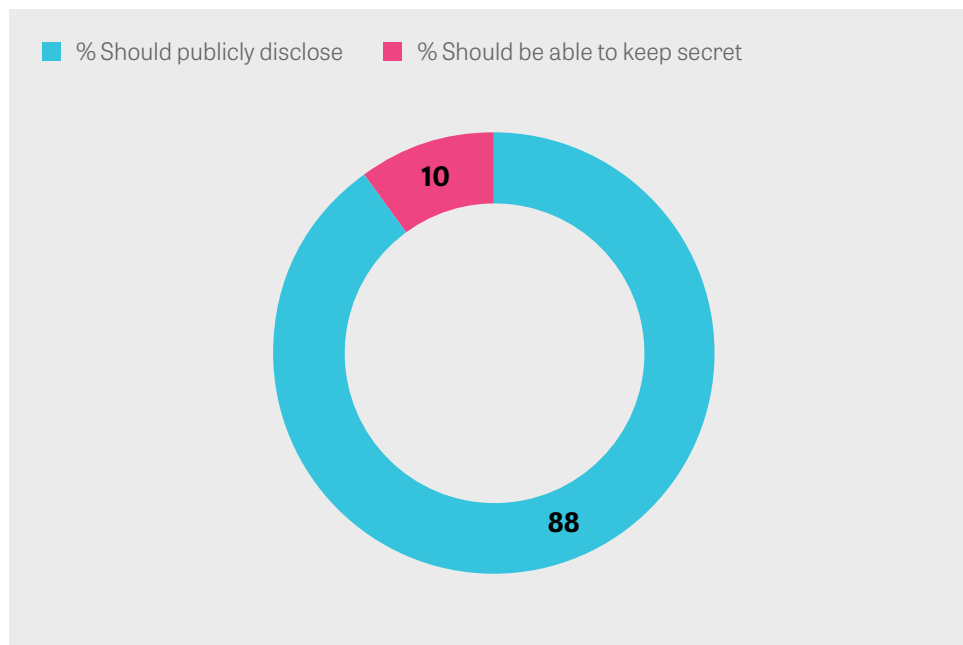|	YES, ENDORSING THE STORY	NO, NOT ENDORSING THE STORY
	%	%
U.S. adults	43	55
Democrats	27	73
Independents	46	54
Republicans	62	37
Very familiar with computer algorithms	42	58
Somewhat familiar with computer algorithms	41	59
Not familiar with computer algorithms	50	49
Regularly see news on Google	39	61
Do not regularly see news on Google	49	50
Regularly see news on Facebook	38	62
Do not regularly see news on Facebook	50	49

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

DETAILED FINDINGS

TRANSPARENCY AND REGULATION

Many people familiar with major internet companies know they use computer algorithms to determine which content people who use their websites or apps see. However, the specifics of how those algorithms work are generally not known. Americans widely believe that major internet companies should disclose their methods for targeting certain news items to particular users: 88% say they should, and 10% believe they should be able to keep those a secret. Opinions on this matter are similar by subgroup.

Opinions on Major Internet Companies Disclosing Their Methods for Targeting Users

Which comes closer to your view about the methods major internet companies like Google, Facebook and Yahoo use to determine which news items appear in their news feeds: "They should publicly disclose the methods they use to determine what news items show in their news feeds so that people have a better understanding of how they work" or "They should be able to keep their methods for determining what news items show in their news feeds a secret to protect their business and their intellectual property"?

■ % Should publicly disclose   ■ % Should be able to keep secret

10

88

"No answer" percentage is not shown in the graph.

MOST AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES SHOULD DISCLOSE THEIR METHODS FOR TARGETING CERTAIN NEWS ITEMS TO USERS.

Many observers have called for increased regulation of major internet companies, which are largely not subject to the same laws and rules that govern traditional news organizations. A key area of concern is how major internet companies functioning as gatekeepers or intermediaries between citizens and information can affect exposure to a wide variety of information sources and ideas. Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election — done to a large extent on the Facebook and Google platforms — has made clear the potential impact of major internet companies on democracy.

Seventy-nine percent of Americans strongly or somewhat agree that major internet companies should be subject to the same rules and regulations as newspapers and broadcast news stations are. Twenty percent strongly or somewhat disagree.

The idea that major internet companies should be subject to the same rules and regulations as traditional news media is shared by all major subgroups, and there are no meaningful differences by party identification or education.
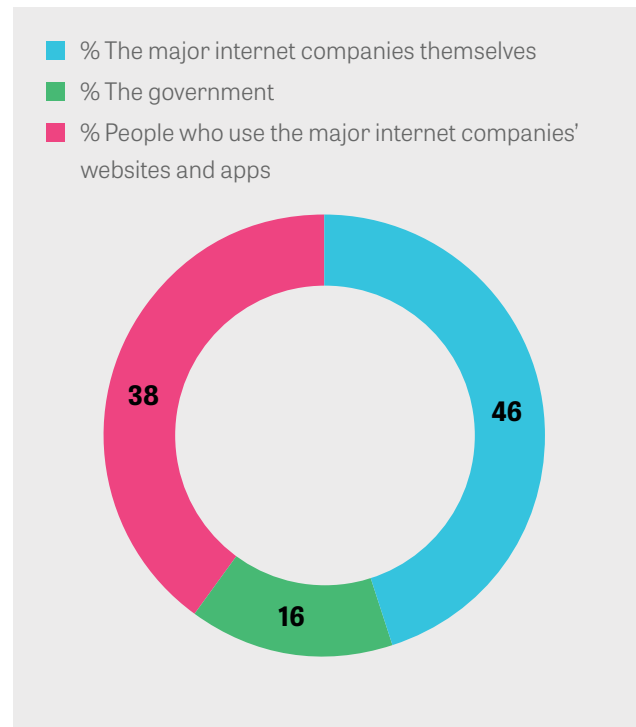
Younger adults, however, are less likely than older adults to hold this view. Whereas 69% of 18- to 34-year-olds strongly or somewhat agree that internet companies should be regulated like traditional news media companies,

83% of 35- to 54-year-olds and 86% of those aged 55 and older agree. Moreover, older adults tend to hold their opinions with more intensity: 55% of those aged 55 and older strongly agree that internet companies and media companies should abide by the same rules, while a smaller 31% of 18- to 34-year-olds strongly agree.

Ultimately, though, Americans are not looking to the government to ensure that major internet companies provide their users with an accurate and politically balanced summary of the news — sixteen percent say the government should be most responsible for doing this. Rather, Americans see the responsibility as falling more on the companies themselves (46%) or their users (38%).

Responsibility for Ensuring Major Internet Companies Provide an Accurate and Balanced Summary of the News

Which of the following should be most responsible for making sure major internet companies are giving people accurate and unbiased news?

■ % The major internet companies themselves
■ % The government
■ % People who use the major internet companies' websites and apps

46
16
38

Americans' unwillingness to have the government be most responsible for ensuring Americans get an accurate and unbiased summary of the news from major internet companies may mostly reflect a lack of trust in

the government.[3] They may also indicate that Americans are conflicted about how much major internet companies should be regulated. In the 2017 Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey on Trust, Media and Democracy, Americans divided evenly as to whether major internet companies' methods for determining what news content they show should be regulated or if the companies should be free to deliver content using whatever methods they choose.[4]

Men and women have very different views on who is most responsible for ensuring Americans get an accurate and unbiased summary of the news: 54% of women say the companies are, compared with 36% of men, and 48% of men say the companies' users are, compared with 29% of women. Men and women are, however, similar in their views of the government's role (15% to 17%, respectively).

Democrats, independents and Republicans are about equally inclined to say the companies are responsible. But Democrats (25%) are more likely than independents (13%) and Republicans (11%) to believe the government should have the main responsibility, and less likely to think site users are.

Older adults are slightly more inclined than younger adults to believe the companies are the most responsible and less likely to see site users as having the primary responsibility.

Perceptions of Which Group Should Be Most Responsible for Making Sure Major Internet Companies Give People Accurate and Unbiased News, by Subgroup

	MAJOR INTERNET COMPANIES	THE GOVERNMENT	PEOPLE WHO USE THE COMPANIES' WEBSITES AND APPS
	%	%	%
Men	36	15	48
Women	54	17	29
18-34 years old	41	15	45
35-54 years old	45	16	39
55+ years old	51	17	32
College graduate	42	19	38
Noncollege graduate	47	14	38
Democrats	47	25	27
Independents	42	13	45
Republicans	45	11	43
Very familiar with computer algorithms	39	19	42
Somewhat familiar with computer algorithms	46	16	38
Not familiar with computer algorithms	48	14	38

"No answer" percentages are not shown in the table.

---

3   https://news.gallup.com/poll/219662/narrow-majority-trust-government-handle-foreign-problems.aspx

4   https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-trust-media-and-democracy

CONCLUSION

The internet has the potential to enhance U.S. democracy. Americans give credit to major internet companies like Google and Facebook for bringing people together and helping them become better-informed. Although the companies were not established to keep people up to date on the news, majorities of Americans say they see news items about current events on Google and Facebook at least weekly. Americans' use of major internet sites and apps for news has given rise to a new media environment and forced traditional news organizations, struggling to maintain advertising and subscription revenues, to find new ways to fund their operations.

Because major internet companies' sites and apps are so widely used, they can greatly influence the way Americans perceive the state of the nation and the top issues facing the country — but Americans are not entirely comfortable with the companies providing curated content in general, and they appear even less comfortable with the companies taking on a news editorial role.

Offering additional transparency about companies' methods for determining which news items people see may help make the public more comfortable with their role as a news provider, and it is a move Americans widely endorse. Americans appear to be looking more to the companies themselves than to the government for ensuring the companies play a positive role in society and in U.S. democracy.

METHODOLOGY

Results are based on self-administered web surveys with a random sample of 1,203 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, who are members of the Gallup Panel™. Gallup uses probability-based, random sampling methods to recruit its panel members.

Interviewing took place between May 21 and June 4, 2018.

The response rate among panel members sampled for this study is 38%.

Gallup weighted the obtained sample to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2015 Current Population Survey figures for the aged-18-and-older U.S. population. For results based on this sample of U.S. adults, the margin of sampling error is ±4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

The full questionnaire, topline results, detailed cross tabulations and raw data may be obtained upon request. For questions about how the survey was conducted, please contact galluphelp@gallup.com.

ABOUT THE JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION

The Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy.

For more information, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE FORD FOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than 80 years it has worked with courageous people on the front lines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. www.fordfoundation.org

ABOUT THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people — especially those with the fewest resources — have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

ABOUT THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people. In the United States, the Open Society Foundations aim to nurture the development of a society that allows all people to participate equitably in political, economic and cultural life; encourages diverse opinions and critical debate; protects human rights; and promotes broadly shared prosperity and security.

ABOUT GALLUP

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

For more information, visit www.gallup.com or education.gallup.com.

GALLUP®