

For almost two decades, celebrated newscaster Walter Cronkite sat at the forefront of the journalism industry, definitively stating “and that’s the way it is” at the conclusion of CBS’ *Evening News* program from 1962 to 1981. Cronkite’s monikers, “Uncle Walter” and “the most trusted man in America,” illustrate his integrity, but today no single reporter is as widely trusted. Lee Thornton, who worked in the newsroom with Cronkite for ten years, honored the life of her coworker in 2009 by reflecting on his legendary personality: “He projected an ethos that you could *believe* him when he spoke to you,” she said. “Back in the day, the news was not seen as having a political agenda... Nobody thinks a[n Edward R.] Murrow [or] a Cronkite could come through the system as it exists today and have the same authority.”¹ To Thornton, Cronkite’s uniqueness rested in his trustworthiness, a word that was much more easily associated with the media within the context of Cronkite’s career than it is today. Back then, Cronkite was the only source of news for many Americans. Today’s atmosphere, however, requires Americans to confirm stories across a variety of platforms and navigate politically polarized news outlets in order to read, digest, and share news responsibly.

In today’s age of digital literacy, media consumers have instantaneous access to more news than ever before: audiences are armed with smart-devices that can make breaking-news headlines go viral within minutes. The way we get our news is changing, with 81% of U.S. adults receiving news online in 2016 compared to just 12% in 1996.² Moreover, increasing numbers of users receive their news from websites and apps such

¹ Lee Thornton, “Walter Cronkite and TV News,” On Point with Tom Ashbrook, WBUR, NPR, Podcast audio, 20 Jul 2009, <http://onpoint.legacy.wbur.org/2009/07/20/walter-cronkite-and-the-news>, 00:04:44.

² Amy Mitchell, “Key findings on the traits and habits of the modern news consumer,” *Pew Research Center*, 07 Jul 2016, accessed 23 Feb 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/07/modern-news-consumer/>.

as Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat: 26% of all U.S. adults rely on two or more social media sites for their news, following an upward trend since 2015.³

Readers must be wary of the political polarization that can affect media digestion; many news outlets are labeled “liberal” or “conservative” based on their target audiences.⁴ A responsible reader, however, will not only read articles that reflect their own viewpoints—they will also challenge themselves to read articles they may not agree with in order to diversify their understanding of a particular topic.

With more information at our fingertips, however, comes a heightened sense of responsibility for consumers to share and spread accurate information. While terms such as “fake news” and “dishonest media” are common phrases in today’s political climate, readers seek to confirm facts among multiple news platforms in order to verify the accuracy of stories. Furthermore, consumers now curate their own feeds, causing writers to work harder to make readers click on their articles. With the appeal of instant-gratification to 21st-century consumers, journalists today often strive to be *first* rather than *right*. As a result, readers need to frequent multiple news feeds to receive a complete, factually correct story.

³ Elizabeth Greico, “More Americans are turning to multiple social media sites for news,” *Pew Research Center*, 02 Nov 2017, accessed 23 Feb 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/02/more-americans-are-turning-to-multiple-social-media-sites-for-news/>.

⁴ Amy Mitchell et al., “Political Polarization & Media Habits,” *Pew Research Center*, 21 Oct 2014, accessed 23 Feb 2018, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/#media-outlets-by-the-ideological-composition-of-their-audience>.

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