

APCO Media Post-Election Analysis: The Shifting Media Landscape

Overview

Over the past decade, the traditional media landscape has evolved considerably and is barely recognizable today. New formats (e-newsletters, podcasts), channels (online video, streaming services, niche news sites), local news deserts, AI search engines and a move to more clearly partisan views are just a few of the many changes. In this memo, we consider what has changed specifically, as it relates to the 2024 U.S. election, how consumers are getting their news and how organizations can adapt.

Topline Analysis—What’s Changed?

While nothing has changed overnight, this election cycle has underscored that half of America consumes media differently than ever before. Mainstream media continues to lose clout to niche outlets and influencers on social media and new media platforms. As more local newspapers shutter, the sheer number of places to get traditional news declines. More people are seeking out specific [Substacks](#) and e-newsletters, podcasts, and social media platforms like TikTok to get their news. In fact, Substack grew from 100,000 paid subscriptions in mid-2020 to more than 3 million subscriptions in 2024. And, according to [a study](#) by the Civic Health and Institutions Project, young voters 18-44 years old were 20% more likely than those 65 and older to rely on their peers for election information than traditional media.

Additionally, increasing polarization has led to a proliferation of partisan outlets and alternate truths. There is a wide variance between outlets that cover hard news, soft news and those that peddle in conspiracy theories on both sides of the aisle. Increasingly, outlets pose as hard news outlets but lack the rigor and transparency of legacy media. More than ever, consumers stick with the media outlets that share their preferred narrative. A recent [Stanford University](#) study finds that the public tends to value partisanship over truth when consuming news. This exacerbates an environment where misinformation and “alternate truths” proliferate. Organizations should be mindful of this new reality and prepare to defend themselves.

According to a 2024 Gallup survey, only a third of Americans reported a “great deal” or “fair amount” of confidence in the media. In this more fragmented environment where trust in traditional media is at an all-time low, organizations should proactively consider diversifying their media strategy to best reach their core audiences.

What doesn’t change though, is organizations must still center their media relations and external communications campaigns on this principal question: Who are you trying to reach and what action do you want them to take?

Trends to Watch

Marquee Journalists Create New Media Platforms and Followings

Many journalists have left or been let go from their legacy media publications and created their own, niche and hyper-targeted following. A few have successfully created their own platforms from scratch—Glenn Beck developed his own TV channel and online news site, [Blaze Media](#), Tucker Carlson created the [Tucker Carlson Network](#) and Megyn Kelly launched a successful podcast, [The Megyn Kelly Show](#). Many have taken a different route by creating their own Substack pages and newsletters. One such recent example is Taylor Lorenz, formerly of the New York Times and Washington Post, who started her own Substack, [User Mag](#), to cover internet culture. Now more than ever, maintaining relationships with individual journalists is paramount as their careers shift and adapt to the evolving media industry.

“Traditional” Newsletters

E-newsletters (now often referred to as just “newsletters”) have jumped in popularity—22% of Americans used newsletters or email alerts in 2022, according to a [Reuters Institute report](#). They provide a direct path to a highly engaged audience that signed up because they’re already interested in a specific topic. When considering the most direct way to reach specific audiences, organizations should target newsletters and Substacks that cover

their industry and issues. This type of media can have a much greater impact by reaching invested readers compared to reaching the general population at a national media publication.

Podcasts

Podcasts have continued to grow in popularity and are yet another way to reach very specific sets of audiences. More than a third of U.S. adults listened to a podcast in the past week – a threefold increase in weekly podcast consumption since 2013 ([Statista](#)). Many podcasters have also incorporated a video element by recording their podcast on YouTube, which has become a popular place to access new podcasts (see: Joe Rogan). Some traditional media view podcasts similar to trade media and will write stories informed by podcasts. As mentioned above, many are run by former or current marquee journalists who built a household name for themselves, and thus reach large yet specific audiences. Organizations should consider whether podcasts that reach their specific audiences are more effective than traditional national media to achieve their business goals.

Growing Influence of Conservative Leaning Media and Liberal Media

During the last Trump Administration, nearly all media experienced the “Trump bump” as outlets became more partisan, and readers and viewers chose media that aligned with their viewpoints. People still chose media that align with their way of thinking and political viewpoint, but conservative media may have more sway to reach the Trump Administration and conservative-minded audiences.

For organizations looking to hold an opposing view to the new Administration, traditional and liberal media will be looking for those voices. (Slate’s daily subscription sign-ups were seven times higher the day after the election and the Guardian U.S. raised \$2.4 million just two days after both the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post pulled their planned endorsements of Vice President Harris.) Before engaging any partisan media, organizations must also consider potential blowback, especially consumer product companies with significant consumer audiences, half of whom could be alienated if they see companies in partisan media.

What Your Organization Can Do Next

Center Your External Communications Strategy on Your Key Audiences and Stakeholders

Map your key audiences and stakeholders, and then reassess your external communications plans as needed. A company selling a medical device should still tell its story in health and medical industry outlets, not on Truth Social or CNN. A company with an investor story should talk to business media and reignite a relationship with an outlet like FOX Business News. Not all stories will be worthy of front page, A1 placements in top tier media—and that’s for the best if the story is meant to reach a targeted audience.

Take an Integrated Approach

Amplify your earned story with paid promotion online and take the opportunity to share it across your owned and social channels. If the news outlet posts the story on their own social channels, be sure to include that online engagement and reach in your metrics reporting as readers are more likely to come across news in their social feeds first than by going directly to an outlet’s website.

Go Beyond Mainstream and Get to Know Your Niche Media

While mainstream media should still play a role in external communications strategy, organizations should also consider outlets that may be more niche and reach specific audiences. This could include Substack newsletters, traditional media newsletters, podcasts and media that reach specific demographic audiences.

Break Through With Sharp Policy Arguments and Consider Conservative Outlets for Opinion Pieces

Opinion pages have drastically dwindled over the past five to 10 years with many news outlets cutting these sections entirely (see: Huffington Post, CNN). Which means to break through, organizations and authors must have clear, sharp arguments that take a stand on an issue. For organizations trying to influence policy in Washington, consider more conservative outlets that are more likely to reach Trump Administration officials (e.g. Fox News opinion, the Washington Examiner, the Washington Times, the Wall Street Journal, Newsmax, and others like Free Beacon, TownHall, Breitbart, and The Stream).

Not making a policy argument to Washington? CEOs have good reason to share their point of view on LinkedIn; as opinion pages have shuttered, there has been a 23% increase in CEO posts in the past year, which has led to a 39% increase in followers for CEOs, according to [Axios](#).

Know How to Correct the Record When Misinformation Pops Up.

Misinformation is proliferating with the growth of bot farms, trolls and AI—and companies are attacked more each day. Know how to engage third-party fact checking sites, how to get an accurate message out to your stakeholders and manage and push back against misinformation.

APCO specializes in this and can help an organization prepare and defend itself.

Recommended Reading

- AdWeek – [“A Deeper Dive Into Election Night 2024 Ratings: Fox News Leads All Networks”](#)
- Axios [Communicators newsletter](#) – an ongoing look at the changing communications landscape.
- Axios Media Trends: [“MAGA media mapped”](#)
- Poynter – [“After the first ‘podcast election,’ the medium is likely to continue playing a role in future campaign cycles”](#)
- Poynter – [“Donald Trump and the media: a look back and a look ahead to the next four years”](#)
- Semafor – [“A tale of two jets: The old media grapples with its new limits”](#)

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