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A Decisive Social Media: Domination of Social Media in Deciding News Content-A Case Study of American Media and Trayvon Martin Tragedy

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More than a quarter of Americans (27%) now get news on mobile devices, and for the vast majority, this is increasing news consumption, the report finds. More than 80% of smartphone and tablet news consumers still get news on laptop or desktop computers. On mobile devices, news consumers also are more likely to go directly to a news site or use an app, rather than to rely on search — strengthening the bond with traditional news brands.

Almost immediately after the February 26 shooting of Trayvon Martin, the conversation about the case began simmering on Twitter. But it was nearly three weeks later, on March 17—after the release of 911 tapes—before the story exploded on Twitter, on blogs and in the mainstream media to become the first story of the year to get more coverage than the race for the president.

As attention to the story surged, the focus within these three parts of our media culture varied greatly, according to a special report by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. On Twitter, the conversation has focused on sympathy for the slain teenager and expressions of outrage at the killing. On blogs, the emphasis has been on the role of race in the highly charged case. In the mainstream media, the Trayvon Martin controversy was heavily a cable news and talk radio story. And there, the primary discussion has focused on two politically oriented issues—gun control laws and the Florida Stand Your Ground statute, which gives citizens the right to use deadly force when they believe they are being threatened.

Moreover, the Martin story has been a much bigger story on MSNBC, whose talk show hosts are liberal, and a much smaller story on Fox, whose prime time lineup leans conservative. The focus of the discussion differs as well. Conservative talkers paid the most attention to questions about who Martin is and to the defense of the man who pulled the trigger, George Zimmerman. Liberal hosts focused primarily on gun control and the Florida law.