

## Should You Watch the News?

We live in the most inter-connected era of human history. We get access to perspectives far beyond ours. Updates are instantaneous – one is keyed into what is happening on a second by second basis. This, of course, means that we have broadened access to bad news, as well. Today, the sentiment of being overwhelmed by the news is a common one. It seems like the news keeps getting worse; everyday you're greeted by another "headline", a new "breaking news!" coverage that makes you lose your faith in humanity. At this point, it seems better to just "switch off".

By "switch off", what I mean is, of course, just not watching the news. Keeping yourself informed is overwhelming as it is due to the sheer volume of the news, even without the whole influx of bad news we're surrounded with. It's become more and more tempting to just "switch off". The mentality of "switching off" is becoming more prevalent today. Statements like "Oh, politics is not for me, ya", "I just skip the newspapers nowadays – anyway its all depressing there" are quite common. Overwhelming, depressing – with all these negative feelings surrounding news, it seems like people blocking it out is a logical next step.

The rising relevance of "fake news" has added an interesting layer to the whole scenario. The fear of getting manipulated by someone with a hidden/sinister political agenda is a very real one. The "fake news epidemic" has taken social media by storm. Fake news has been accused of being in the background of various important events including elections, and that is a terrifying prospect. What's the point of being informed when it comes at the cost of misinformation?

So, today, while you may be considering taking such stands, let's take a moment to step back and consider a bigger question: Should you watch the news? Do you have a moral obligation to keep yourself informed about the happenings of the world around you?

It's important to realise that being able to consider this question means you are in a position of privilege. Being able to turn a blind eye to the news, to politics comes with the comfort of not having your life being directly impacted by the policies passed on by the governments in power. This translates to being at some level of financial security to be securely block out the current news. The fact is that being able to even consider taking the stance of "not caring" means one is not really marginalised by their current political happenings and you can elect to just close your eyes and wish it all away.

This does not mean that you are obligated to then be informed of all things at all times. In fact, "being informed of all things at all times" is not really a viable option at all. We are inevitably doomed to be ill-informed about certain aspects of our society. I, for example, have no idea what the current political situation is in Uruguay. But that's okay. Because I simply could not function if I spent all my time getting informed about every subtlety of every corner of the world.

It is however, important to have some awareness about how the world is going on around us. In our current society, the fact that we live in a democracy makes this all the more relevant. As a citizen, you are, in a theoretical framework, an important part of your country's decision-making process. Whether or not you believe the democratic ideal has been upheld or not, it cannot be denied that as a part of this democracy, you do get to control some extent of the life around you. I am talking, of course, about voting. It is then important that you are up to date with the world around you so the decisions you make are informed, are meaningful.

Being informed of the world around you is also important to just live in a society that so heavily focuses on the individual's opinions. Social media has encouraged that (almost) everyone has access

to a platform – that everyone is a performer. Putting your personality online means being defined by your opinions. Good opinions are formed on the backbone of solid information. Being informed means you get to enhance your perceptions of yourself and of the world around you. Being informed means defining your interactions with the world in better ways.

The next question then becomes: How do I protect myself from fake news? How do I get myself in a position where I'm informed in the right way? It becomes quite obvious that all the good that comes from information is instantly undone by misinformation. To protect against this, it's important to recognise that all news is delivered with some sort of agenda. Some are more implicit than others; but at the end of the day, all form of media is a form of influence – getting you to think in a certain way about a certain thing. It is also important to recognise that this does not translate to all news outlets being malicious or manipulative.

Today, there are certain news sources (particularly ones on social media) that are objectively fake; they are pure propaganda. It is important to recognise and build awareness about such topics. To properly achieve the first, i.e., recognition, one needs to cultivate healthy scepticism; not take things at face value. Once you are able to identify one-sided news outlets, it is important to bring other people in to the loop, to help keep them immune from the misinformation. The best way to combat the problem of getting influenced easily and to work against misinformation is to – (A) try and get news from reputed, established sources only, and (B) try and get your news from a wide range of sources.

At the end of the day, it is wrong of us to believe that being wilfully ignorant makes us immune from the depressing stuff happening around us. In fact, being ignorant only helps cover up some of the inequities and misdemeanours going on around us. It is important that we are able to use both our individuality and privilege to help get ourselves and those informed of the goings on around us. Today, the ability to access news has multiplied tremendously thanks to the advent of social media. It is imperative to recognise the power of informed decision making, even if the information in question is just on a limited scope.

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