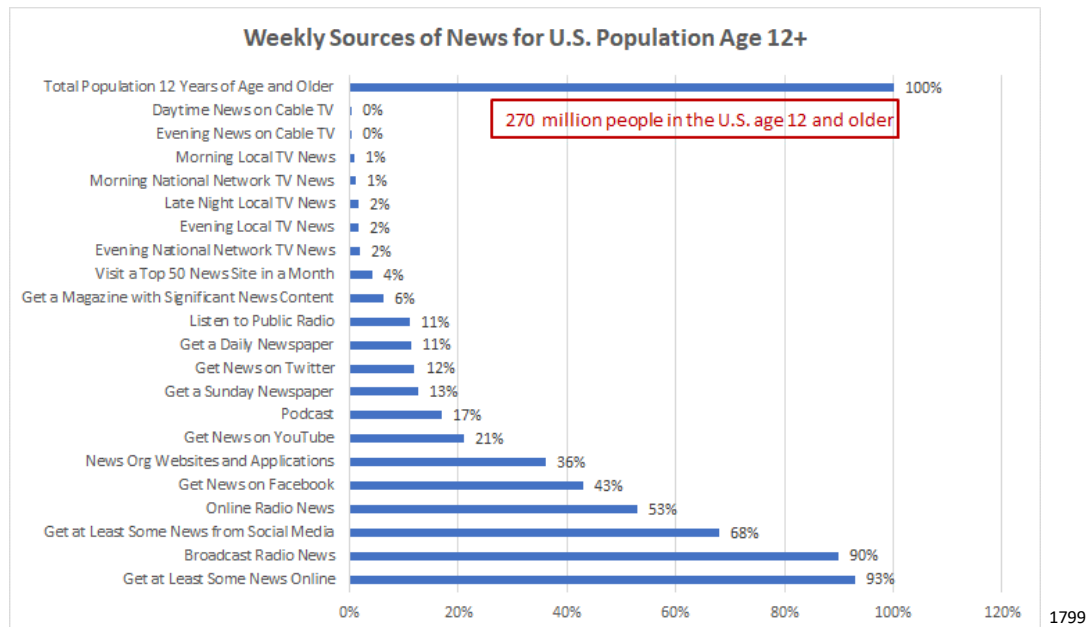


News, Information, Entertainment and Distraction

The U.S. was established to be a place and people, governed by a representative government, freely elected by its people, based on common laws, principles and human rights, that apply to all, and exceed all other powers and purposes. Its people have rights and responsibilities to make government comply, including the right to rebellion established in our Declaration of Independence. Are we doing that?

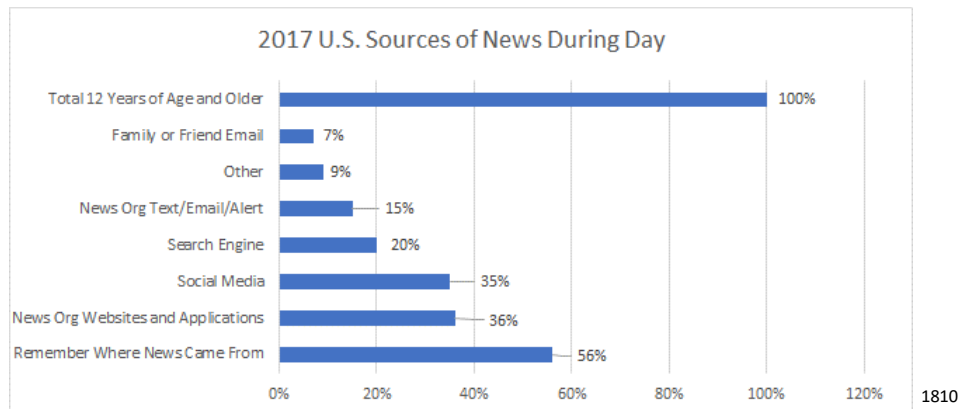
News

A very important, less formal, 4th branch of U.S. government is a system of fair and honest reporting of news and information, so citizens understand what is happening in the country, government and world, so we can knowledgably and responsibly participate in public conversations about what is happening, and decide what to do about it, if anything. We can't do our jobs as citizens without good information. Freedom of the Press was considered important enough to call out in the Constitution's 1st Amendment, as an essential human right to be protected by government. Here's where people in the U.S. get news.



In 2017, in an average week in the U.S., of people ages 12 and older, less than 1% saw cable TV news,¹⁸⁰⁰ 2% saw national TV network news,¹⁸⁰¹ 1-2% saw local TV news,¹⁸⁰² 6% got magazines with news content (7% of the top 100 magazines by distribution had significant news pieces),¹⁸⁰³ 11% heard public radio,¹⁸⁰⁴ 11% got a daily and 13% a Sunday newspaper, 4% visited a top 50 newspaper website in a single month, with average time on site of 2.5 minutes,¹⁸⁰⁵ 90% heard broadcast radio news, 53% online radio news, and 17% a podcast,¹⁸⁰⁶ 93% of adults got at least some news online, and 35 online news outlets had at least 10 million, an average of 20 million visits per month.¹⁸⁰⁷ 68% said they got news on social media, 20% often, 27% sometimes, 43% on Facebook, 21% on YouTube, and 12% on Twitter, although 57% said that social media news is largely inaccurate.¹⁸⁰⁸

During the day, people who got news online got it from: news organization websites or apps - 36%, social media - 35%, search engines - 20%, news org email/text/alert - 15%, family or friend email - 7%, other - 9%, and, of those, we only remembered where the news came from 56% of the time.¹⁸⁰⁹



So, relatively small percentages of us get our news from TV, newspapers, magazines or public radio. Most of us get most of our news from listening to the radio, or we get it online, in some mix of reputable sources and social media, only remembering where we get it online a little more than half the time.

62% of people in the U.S. believe news we get on TV, radio and in newspapers is true, 80% of news on social media is biased, and 44% of news reporting and 64% of news on social media are inaccurate. We're upset about it. 80% say we're angered or bothered by seeing biased information, and even more so about seeing inaccurate information. We just don't agree about which news outlets are biased.¹⁸¹¹ 82% trust local news orgs (60% only somewhat), 76% trust national news orgs (59% only somewhat), 77% news from family, friends and acquaintances (63% somewhat), 34% social media (30% somewhat).

Turning it over, only 22% of us "trust a lot" information we get from local news organizations, and 18% information from national news organizations, either online or offline, and 14% from friends and family. 74% say news organizations tend to favor one side or the other in political news.¹⁸¹²

So, many get most of our news information online, often unsure where, and don't trust it or most news. We can't do our jobs holding government responsible if we don't get good news information, or trust it.

74% of people in the U.S are not able to correctly identify 5 factual statements as factual statements; 65% are unable to identify 5 opinion statements as opinions.¹⁸¹³ So, we can't tell facts from opinions. 2/3 of younger and 4/5 of older people in the U.S. can't distinguish facts from opinions, part of many problems with public news and media literacy and critical thinking not addressed by public education, and many news outlets are increasingly opinionated.¹⁸¹⁴ Is that why 60% of us would prefer the news to only present facts, without interpretations?¹⁸¹⁵ We aren't as sophisticated as the media influencing us?

We can't do our job holding government accountable if we're not educated well enough to process information critically, discern if government is doing its job appropriately and know if our fundamental human rights are being upheld. We're not educated well enough to do that if half of high school grads are not college or career ready,¹⁸¹⁶ 1 of 4 who start high school don't finish;¹⁸¹⁷ a third of 8th graders are proficient in math & reading;¹⁸¹⁸ 32 million (14% of) adults can't read; 21% read below 5th grade level;¹⁸¹⁹ and 45% of 18-26-year-old current or former college students can't pass a global geography literacy test.

How can modern society function when: 216 million (82% of) U.S. people are scientifically illiterate;¹⁸²⁰ half of U.S. adults don't know Earth takes a year to orbit the sun;¹⁸²¹ 25% think the Sun orbits Earth;¹⁸²² and only 38% of our U.S. adult citizens are able to pass the U.S. citizenship test, with a grade of 60%?¹⁸²³ Are our news and media educating us to fill in those gaps? Where is effort to educate ignorant adults?

An undereducated, increasingly uncaring, stressed and/or distracted public, with little time to focus on public news and information, isn't showing up for and demanding quality information from competent independent journalists, so the quantity and quality of that information degrade. Many of us no longer really read, or read in depth and critically. 42% of college grads read zero books after graduation.¹⁸²⁴ We watch commercial TV, movies and Internet videos. We read if we can and must, often at relatively immature levels, a reflection of public education failure for many. Newspaper, magazine and journal circulations have generally decreased, especially for intelligent, educated content and readers.¹⁸²⁵

The U.S. news and information reporting system is compromised, corrupted by wealth and power via concentration of media ownership and control. In 1983, 50 companies controlled 90% of all U.S. media; in 2011, 6 companies run by 232 media executives did.¹⁸²⁶ It's difficult to track and assess. Media ownership is a complex tangle of rapidly changing corporate ownership and trades, like knowing who is holding what cards at a poker table, when games are changing, people are trying to hide their cards, new people sit at the table and others leave, and new cards are shuffled and dealt continuously.^{1827 1828}

In 2017, the FCC eased media ownership rules, allowing companies to own higher media concentrations, like: up to 39% of all U.S. TV households, and 6 of 10 local TV, newspaper and radio "media voices".¹⁸²⁹ As of 2019, major consolidations further increasing media company control concentrations include: Time Warner/AT&T; Sprint/T-Mobile; Disney/Fox; Comcast/Sky,¹⁸³⁰ and maybe CBS and Viacom?¹⁸³¹ Different companies can have the same major owners. 15 billionaires own most U.S. news media,¹⁸³² giving them extraordinary ability to influence what we know and think about. The owners are able to influence news and information reporting, turning many news channels into propaganda mechanisms. This is a fundamental threat to functional democracy and government in the U.S., because people do not get fair and factual information on which to base our government interactions and thoughts.¹⁸³³

News and information sharing by these companies is compromised, because the mix of entertainment and news media they own are normally managed by the same criteria: how many viewers they attract, which determines how many commercial programming advertisers they can attract, and what they can charge for advertisements, to drive profitability for business owners. Most news outlets make money, not primarily from news consumers, but from advertisers. What they sell is advertiser access to people, and opportunities to influence us, opportunities for "programming" us to think and do as they want.

Challenges arising from commercial, for-profit media, include: media censoring itself, to not alienate advertisers or upset owners; telling popular, rather than important stories, so viewer counts are high; and giving viewers stories that advertisers and owners want shared to promote business or political agendas, not necessarily what's important for us to know to supervise our government and society.¹⁸³⁴

Corporate management stifles, censors or edits news and information content to conform to powerful advertiser expectations and/or owner biases or political or business agendas. Try an experiment: switch channels between major TV news broadcasts at the same time and see whether you see the same stories being reported in the same ways at the same times!¹⁸³⁵ (See [Endnote](#))¹⁸³⁶ Eerie, right? Corporate owners make media present the same biased "must run" stories.¹⁸³⁷ Business propagandizes that there's a leftist bias to U.S. news; yet, business owns the news outlets?¹⁸³⁸ ([Endnote](#))

News can be truthful, valuable and important, but be suppressed by business management, because it doesn't produce as many eyeballs as drivel. If drivel sells, drivel is offered, even if it offers less value to society and stifles important information sharing functions. Dumbed down public demand drives drivel.

U.S. media serves elite interests and undermines democracy, by portraying the world in ways that shape public perspectives, to generate acceptance of U.S. domestic and foreign policy and business dogma, and make it hard for the public to have access to the information necessary to challenge elite interests. It operates less through censorship than a public relations process that selects and rewards those who see the world in a way that is friendly and unchallenging to those elite interests. The facts and framings of that process usually don't have to be censored, because they are mostly not perceived to exist.^{1839 1840}

Some say, news and other media are focused on content appealing to audiences targeted by advertisers, sidelining issues not affecting target audiences; limiting critical or controversial content interfering with audience "buying moods"; using selective and biased information sources; "spinning" stories to create desired reactions; presenting opinions to shape perceptions and spoon feed desired audience opinions; framing stories to fit any controversies within desired beliefs, rather than as in conflict with them; basing stories on official sources without presentation of opposing views; attacking individuals rather than their facts and views; proliferating content generated by corporate sponsors, owners and interests; and not pursuing facts or information suppressed or obscured by government or powerful interests.¹⁸⁴¹

Limited headlines and pervasive use of "sound-bites" diminish the breadth, depth and context of news. Many stories are chosen to produce anxiety and fear, promote beliefs on conflict, violence and crime, and beliefs about our own superiority and righteousness, ignoring or suppressing good news stories, reasons for conflict, violence and crime, and our own wrongful actions and behaviors. Some say.¹⁸⁴²

Some say, we hear of repressions by officially designated "rogue" governments outside of the U.S., but information about brutal murder and torture committed by U.S.-sponsored forces, and other crimes by the U.S. national security and surveillance state, are denied public presentation, often suppressed with consistency that would be labeled "totalitarian" if it happened in other countries.¹⁸⁴³

Over decades, the CIA engaged in drug trafficking in Italy, France, Corsica, Indochina, Afghanistan, Central and South America and the U.S., sometimes objects of extended congressional investigations, but we rarely heard about it in the corporate news. Or, if it did come out, like when a courageous reporter documented CIA-Contra crack cocaine shipments flooding U.S. inner cities and creating an epidemic doing great harm to our own African American urban communities, major media assaulted it, to discredit the stories and the story-breakers, attacking their characters and witnesses.^{1844 1845}

As propagandists, mainstream media often tries to set our perceptions of subjects with positive labels, like "stability," "firm leadership," "strong defense," and "healthy economy," which create support by association, because they sound good. Negative labels like "leftist guerrillas," "Islamic terrorists," "conspiracy theories," "inner-city gangs" and "civil disturbances" create negative beliefs and feelings, because they sound bad. Columnists, commentators and talk-show hosts, crowding new channels while claiming to be shut out of them, disparagingly label the press itself as "the liberal media". Some labels we are never exposed to are "class power," "class struggle," and "U.S. imperialism."¹⁸⁴⁶ Some say.

A common misleading label used is "reform," which really means efforts to undo valuable improvements achieved by decades of popular struggle. Ending family assistance programs is called "welfare reform." "IMF reforms" puts a positive spin on economic forces impoverishing other nations, dismantling their public economies, creating huge worker layoffs, letting corporate investors take their resources cheap, drastically cutting their public services programs, and dramatically increasing their unemployment and human suffering, none of which are mentioned.¹⁸⁴⁷

Media presents a need for “Social Security reform,” meaning privatizing and eventually eliminating a popular program that works well, as if it’s a given need, without cause for debate, because it’s in danger of bankruptcy (in decades) or hurts the national deficit, which are not true, because it’s funded and managed apart from other government accounts.¹⁸⁴⁸ Social Security provides retirement pensions, funded like a 401(k), survivors’ insurance (up to age 18) to children in families that lose a breadwinner, and disability insurance to help to those of pre-retirement age who become seriously injured or ill.¹⁸⁴⁹ Most of us are happy with it? Most have no other retirement savings.¹⁸⁵⁰ Why assume it’s broken?

“Free market” is a cherished label, evoking images of economic abundance and democratic goodness, while giving no airtime to how free-market policies, in reality, often undermine local producer markets, provide public subsidies to very profitable multinational corporations, gut public sector services, and create even greater income and wealth inequality gaps, which are already enormous and harmful. Anyone who resists free-market “reforms” is “hardline” or “a hardliner,” an ill-willed resister of good.

Media frequently accepts as given the very policy positions that need critical examination. Whenever the White House requests increased military spending, press presentations focus on how much more spending is needed, what weaponry is old, how much danger we fear we are in? No media exposure is given to the fact that most of our discretionary federal spending already goes to the military, how that compares to other nations, or to competing social needs and programs, or how we use our military.¹⁸⁵¹

Who reports that the U.S. already funds its military more than the world’s 10 next biggest militaries, combined,¹⁸⁵² has ten times the number of foreign military bases as the rest of the world, all combined, has a military that’s the largest institutional user of petroleum products and energy in the whole world, but is exempted in all international climate agreements, operates its military in 150+ countries, is at war in 7 countries now, with no authorization needed, has a military financially accountable to nobody, and is the #1 country most of the rest of the world is most afraid of for its safety and well-being?¹⁸⁵³

Press just passes along labels fabricated by officialdom, like our “global leadership,” “national security,” “free markets,” and “globalization,” as assumed goods, when they really mean “Power to the Powerful.”

Political elections are covered like sporting events, focusing on who will run, who gets nominated, what are their game statistics, like money raised and spent, who cheers for whom? The real issues and policy proposals get little attention, and 3rd party candidates are blatantly ignored, if not blatantly smeared.¹⁸⁵⁴

Labor strike stories focus not on substance of grievances, like pay and benefit loss, management refusal to negotiate, or safety, that drive people to reluctantly resort to the undesirable extreme of striking, or on why and how they organize their struggle, but on stuff like how many days the strike has lasted, inconvenience and cost to public and economy, and how negotiations threaten to break down.¹⁸⁵⁵

Some say, media pundits often talk of a “big picture,” but rarely link events to larger social issues. Instead, they give us the small picture, like demonstrations against international free-trade agreements as contests between rowdy protestors and safety-oriented police, with little reference to real problems, like sovereignty and unaccountable corporate power, causing protestors to make efforts to protest.¹⁸⁵⁶

Complying with “good journalism” standards, the press gives free airspace to competing sides of issues? In fact, both sides rarely get equal space, and there are rarely only two perspectives on anything.¹⁸⁵⁷ This is arbitrarily applied. Press often give similar airspace to pro- and anti-climate change narratives, while 97% of informed scientists agree on global warming theories and consequences, and 3% don’t.

The U.S. “criminal justice” system locking up citizens at 5.5 times the rate of the rest of the world gets presentations from politicians who are “tough on crime” and from politicians who are “soft on crime.” What about perspectives from outside the U.S. on how they see that criminal justice system, perspectives of families ruined by that system, or perspectives of prisoners abused by that system?

Government is supposed to provide fair access to different news dissemination channels. Yet, in his first two years in office, the current President gave 42 interviews to one news channel that supports him, and to which he’s provided a revolving door between jobs in his administration and the news network, but only 10 to the other 3 other main TV networks combined, and 0 to the main cable news network.¹⁸⁵⁸ He limits White House press briefings, like none in 94 days,¹⁸⁵⁹ and attacks news agencies often.¹⁸⁶⁰

Confronted with an unexpectedly dissident response, media hosts quickly change subjects, break for a commercial, or inject an identifying announcement: “We are talking with...” to avoid going any further into a forbidden topic, no matter how much the unexpected response might seem to need follow-up.¹⁸⁶¹

Some say, the most effective propaganda relies on framing, rather than falsehood, shaping truth rather than lying, using emphasis and other accompaniments to create desired impressions, without resorting to explicit advocacy or departing too far from appearance of objectivity. Framing is achieved with news packaging, its exposure amounts, placement (front page or buried, lead story or last), presentation tone (sympathetic or slighting), headlines and photographs, and accompanying visual and auditory effects.¹⁸⁶²

Newscasters use themselves as accompaniments, cultivating smooth deliveries to convey an impression of detachment, placing them above the issues. Presenters and writers affect knowing, serious tones to create authoritative credibility, and auras of certainty, or provide “authoritative ignorance” with dumb truisms like “How will this situation end? Only time will tell.”, presented as if deep penetrating truths. “Unless this big strike is settled soon, its two sides will be in for a long and bitter struggle.” No joke?¹⁸⁶³

Many things are reported, but few are explained. Little is said about how the social order is organized, and for what purposes. Instead, we’re left to see the world as a scatter of events and personalities, driven by circumstance, confused intentions, random events, and ambitions, rarely by class interests. Passive voice and impersonal subject are rhetorical constructs for this kind of evasion. We read or hear “fighting broke out in the area,” or “many were killed in the struggle,” or “famine is on the increase.” Does that mean such events just randomly happen, like natural weather? “Our economy is in a slump” says little to nothing about the incessant conflict of capital against labor, imbalances between productivity and earnings, or patently corrupt things, like gross frauds creating the Great Recession.¹⁸⁶⁴

According to the media, stuff just happens, like “globalization,” a label the press presents as a natural and inevitable development. Globalization is a deliberate contrivance of multinational interests, to undermine democratic sovereignty throughout the world. International “free trade” agreements set up international trade councils, elected by no one, accountable to no one, operating in secrecy, without conflict of interest restrictions, with power in signing nations to overrule most labor, consumer and environmental laws, and public services and regulations. They ever-increasingly concentrate politico-economic power in hands of an international investor class, a global coup d'etat divesting peoples of the world of protective democratic input. Where’s discussion of that?¹⁸⁶⁵ Nothing to see here, move along!

The media doesn’t explore why things happen the way they do. Social problems are rarely linked to social or politico-economic forces that create them. That teaches us to limit our own critical thinking?

Imagine if the news, instead of just reporting there is social unrest in a country: 1) reported exploitative labor conditions in the country are supported by their government and military; 2) that government and military are fully supported by the U.S. military and state; 3) asked why successive U.S. administrations do this all over the world; and 4) asked if it's all consistent with a dedicated effort to create global free-market corporate capitalism, judged by which kinds of countries are helped and which are attacked?¹⁸⁶⁶

These influences are sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious. Many citizens continue to believe in fair and independent journalism, and to trust news reporting. But, much of news isn't fair and independent. Independent journalism in the U.S. is significantly dampened and corrupted, and it's become confusing and hard for citizens to determine what's really going on. News reporting is less independent reporting of verified facts, which we can use to try to determine the truth, and more confusing, loud, combative opinion airing, based on partisanship, special-interests, paid opinions, indoctrination and ideology.

Many news agencies report what they're told by government, without critical thinking or independent verification, as in the recitation of lies and deceptions that led the U.S. into its illegal and immoral most recent war in Iraq, a fear generated war of protecting people in the U.S. against a nation and people that had done no person in the U.S. harm, and did not have the capacity to do the U.S. harm.¹⁸⁶⁷ A man in a wheelchair lit himself on fire outside the Whitehouse in extreme protest. The Press dutifully reported the President is OK, and the man must be mentally ill, but it said absolutely nothing about why someone would do something so horrible, what he was protesting, or comparing it to similar events.¹⁸⁶⁸

News media in our "democratic capitalism" fails society, but is a skillfully evasive success for its owners. We often hear the press "got it wrong" or "dropped the ball" on a story. Actually, media does what it's really there to do very well. Many media people have a carefully trained incapacity for the whole truth. Their job isn't to inform, but disinform, not to advance democratic discourse, but dilute and mute it. Their task is to give every appearance of being conscientiously concerned about events of the day, saying much, while meaning little, offering many calories with few nutrients. When we understand this, we move from a complaint about the press's sloppy performance, to a radical analysis of how the media maintain the dominant paradigm, with much craft and craftiness. All things some say.¹⁸⁶⁹

Many in the U.S. are under the impression that we have a very free and high-quality independent press. In 2018, U.S. press ranked 45th in the world for press freedom, after Romania.¹⁸⁷⁰ Its journalists' abilities to report are increasingly weakened by attacks, arrests, border stops, device searches, whistleblower prosecutions¹⁸⁷¹ and public information access limits.¹⁸⁷² Huge and growing amounts of government information is classified or unavailable to the press or public, like 78 million government decisions to classify information in 2014, though experts deemed 50% - 90% safe to release.¹⁸⁷³ Many journalists were arrested in the U.S. in 2018, 5 killed, making the U.S. a top 5 country for journalist deaths.^{1874 1875}

Even U.S. public radio and TV are not 100% public funded, making them hustle for additional money, which, for news, is 13% from individual donors, 70% foundation sponsors, and 17% from corporate ads, which at least threatens to compromise their independence and integrity.¹⁸⁷⁶ They are also under varying degrees of influence and control from their public funding sources and management.

In short, news in the U.S. is a colossal mess. People aren't listening to it much, perhaps for good reason, but we're also not getting information we need to do our jobs keeping government and society in check. Our critical 4th branch of government, the free press, is instead a corporate owned money-making and propaganda machine, far more sophisticated than most of the population, and far better funded.

Distrust of media is sewn, not only in fair criticism of its genuine corruption, but also to discredit any news in opposition to the views of those in power. Accusations of “fake news” are sometimes true and sometimes false, but all function to confuse citizens and make it harder to determine true facts. That creates an environment where it is easier to manipulate the public with PR, marketing and propaganda. People in the U.S. now think fake news is a bigger problem than climate change, racism or terrorism.¹⁸⁷⁷

Fake and biased news propaganda are allowed wide proliferation as “news” via social media, like Russia and others using Facebook¹⁸⁷⁸ and Twitter^{1879 1880} as designed to spread fake news affecting elections.¹⁸⁸¹ That weakens credibility of all news, increasingly alleged to be fake. Government allows attacks on verified information provided by the public press. Government lets Facebook, now the U.S.’ largest news organization, do little to validate quality, sources or accuracy of news information on its U.S. and global network.^{1882 1883} Propaganda channels for all! Even fake people. Q1 2018, Facebook removed 583 million fake users, of 2 billion active users worldwide, and it gets \$34 in revenue per daily “free” user.¹⁸⁸⁴

The news system is corrupt and abused. In spite of that, not because of it, individual journalists and independent people manage to uncover and share quality information with those who seek it out. Everything here is just a reorganization and representation of their good and greatly appreciated work! Yay, to people rooting out and sharing valuable factual information for all! That is absolutely essential.

Other Information

Where else do we get information to manage our society, lives and governments? From governments? What information have you ever personally received from the Federal Government, other than what’s needed to send it tax returns and payments, for information it requests from you, like in the Census, or mandated election materials? Notices of postal rate changes. Anything else?

Have you ever received an organized, comprehensible accounting of how much money the Federal Government receives and what it spends that on, as required by Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution? Have you ever received proactive notification of any law passed by the U.S. government, or assistance in understanding what that means, other than for your tax returns? There are stacks and stacks of books, full of laws, codes and regulations, in legal libraries, passed and modified constantly, rarely eliminated, and ignorance of those laws is not an admissible legal defense in any cases of violation of any of them. Does the government teach us about them, even in school?¹⁸⁸⁵ How does someone who graduated high school barely able to read, know how society works? How do citizens know how to be citizens?

Try to find and understand current U.S. Federal Government revenues and expenses! Go to the website of the [U.S. National Archives Federal Register](#), The Daily Journal of the United States Government.¹⁸⁸⁶ Type *current U.S. budget* in the Find field; get 116,000 documents in response, 5,000 from the last year, 465 from the last 30 days. In dozens of pages of results there’s no budget. Enter “*current u.s. budget*”, “*2018 u.s. budget*”, or “*2018 federal budget*”, no results; “*Federal budget*” 2018, 56 results, none the U.S. budget; *official budget of the united states of america 2018*, 618 results, none in a dozen pages is the U.S. budget; *final budget of the “united states of america” 2018*, 86 results; none is the budget. Fail.

You could go to the [U.S. Data.gov](#)¹⁸⁸⁷ website, which has 246,194 datasets, to look for information on the U.S. government, but there is no category for browsing information on government, to learn what information there is on our government itself, and searching the site for any government related terms gets thousands of results, mostly irrelevant, rendering the site virtually useless for a layperson. Fail.

You could go to the USA.gov¹⁸⁸⁸ website, which has some random organization of random information, to look for information on the U.S. government, but if you search it for terms related to government you get thousands of results, mostly irrelevant. That renders the site virtually useless for a layperson looking for data about the U.S. government itself, unless you luck out on guessing from separate lists for each letter of the alphabet which of all the many dozens of government departments or agencies may address whatever you want to know, and can then laboriously navigate their individual websites, which are inconsistently organized, containing inconsistent information. Fail.

You could try Regulations.gov,¹⁸⁸⁹ but that's rules for others to follow, not information about our government itself, randomly unorganized and, again, with overwhelming volumes of content. Fail.

Ooh, the Library of Congress, 162 million books, periodicals, manuscripts, maps, music, recordings, images, and electronic resources!¹⁸⁹⁰ A search for *U.S. Federal Budget 2018* turns up nothing related to the U.S. budget. Rats.

How about Govinfo?¹⁸⁹¹ Nothing on an approved U.S. budget, only the President's budget request. There is an apparently random selection of 164 document collections organized by topic, including things like recent Presidents' public papers and JFK assassination documents. Fail.

[Catalog of Government Publications \(CGP\)](http://Catalog of Government Publications (CGP))?¹⁸⁹² Same chaos for a U.S. financial report or budget.

Maybe the [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) website](http://Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) website)?¹⁸⁹³ There is nothing identifiable as an accurate final budget for the U.S. government, among hundreds of responses in the existing documents index. There is no way to know how long an FOIA request will take to fulfill, whether it will require paying a fee, or if you can receive the information electronically. It estimates 58 to 304 days for a response to an FOIA request to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.¹⁸⁹⁴ In 2017, the government's 400-plus FOIA offices spread out across 116 agencies, received a record 800,000 FOIA requests.¹⁸⁹⁵ Is that working?

FOIA requests can take more than 20 years to get a response. Simple requests take an average 42 days. Many are refused or unanswered.¹⁸⁹⁶ An FOIA website request for a U.S. financial report or final budget submitted on the FOIA website gets a response that the information is not available from that system, and a new request needs to be sent to the Office of Management and Budget, under the U.S. President, not Congress, which authorizes the spending.¹⁸⁹⁷ No response. Fail.

You can try Internet search engines. Searching *u.s. federal government statistics* gets 236 million replies, *u.s. federal budget 2018*, 288 million, too many to realistically work with. Search engines cull through everything anybody anywhere posts online, producing a boggling volume of replies to most any query. However, it works better than government sites, and, eventually, you can find the President's budget, but then, maybe, you learn it's only a proposal. That's what Congress received as a request, cobbled together from hundreds of separate agency and department budget requests, which are out there, but irrelevant, because the President may have changed them in his budget proposal, or Congress might.

Then, there are various versions of budget resolutions, separate ones by each house of Congress, their drafts of what to actually fund, maybe the same, maybe more, maybe less than the President requested. But that's not it, because there are two separate final versions, one for each house.

Then, there are versions of compromises attempting to reconcile the two, finally reaching a version which is voted on by both houses, and eventually approved. Whew!

Oh, but that's not it, because that is then carved out into 12 separate pieces, assigned to 12 separate committees, which each draft various versions of appropriation bills, eventually arriving at final versions of 12 different appropriations bills. But those are not it, because the President has not signed them, separately, and he can veto each one individually. If he vetoes any, there is no approved budget. If he signs all, there is no single intelligible document of what the budget is?¹⁸⁹⁸ At each step along the way, there are hundreds of documents by all kinds of special interests and advocates making noise about issues associated with various versions of budget element drafts and their possible esoteric implications.

At no point, among these hundreds of documents, is there a presentation of the government budget intelligible to laypeople? With the explicit purpose of obfuscating and making unintelligible to the public what money our government receives and spends, it would be hard to create a more effective design?

For 131 years, from 1878 until 2012, the U.S. published *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*, the authoritative and comprehensive summary of statistics on the social, political, and economic organization of the United States, designed to serve as a convenient volume for statistical reference, and as a guide to other statistical publications and sources both in print and on the Web.¹⁸⁹⁹ It gave the people one organized place to look for statistical information. Cool! Oh, but it doesn't do that anymore, and it left no instructions for how people would get that information any more. Oh, but it seems there is something out there that does that now. Oh, but it's been privatized,¹⁹⁰⁰ and you have to pay for it.

The government produces thousands of reports in a year, overwhelming volumes, yet the information is largely unintelligible, because it is overwhelming. There is so much information, it becomes almost useless, because it is so difficult to find the information you actually need or want. And, when you do find it, it is in the form of some report or universe of reports, with hundreds of pages of technical blather almost impossible to wade through while maintaining sanity, rendering the information unintelligible.

It isn't just government. We produce 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day on Earth. A quintillion is a one with 18 zeroes. Daily, we produce 2,500,000,000,000,000,000 bytes, text character equivalents.¹⁹⁰¹ Some 60 zettabytes of information are created annually, globally,¹⁹⁰² 60 sextillion bytes, or 60 billion terabytes of data. That's 60 with 21 zeroes, or 60,000,000,000,000,000,000. This amount of data can be represented as a string of text 78,914,141,382,575,800 miles long, long enough to go around the Earth at the equator 3.2 trillion times.¹⁹⁰³ We are drowning in information and entertainment choices.

The U.S. has experienced a massive proliferation of media choices, which is both helpful and harmful. Hundreds of channels are offered on T.V. broadcast, cable and satellite networks. Astounding volumes of content are available via the public Internet, including show series, documentaries, movies and user-generated material through companies like Apple, Google, Facebook, Netflix and YouTube. Hundreds of broadcast, satellite and Internet radio stations are available. There is ridiculously far more content available on the public Internet than anyone could ever access, and there is a vast "Darknet" of 40 times more content than is accessible by search engines on the public Internet, that includes illegal activity.¹⁹⁰⁴

This proliferation of media choices dilutes public attention across all media, creating needed competition and choice, but also decreasing the likelihood of people accessing the same or any given media source or information. There are many alternatives to any information or entertainment choice. Only a small fraction of available media is educational or designed to help develop and improve people. Our awarenesses are increasingly diluted across this universe of media choices. We think we are better able to communicate than ever, but we're increasingly separated on different communication channels.

The affordability and availability of computing and network devices and the Internet has empowered people in incredible ways, making it possible for individuals or small groups to create, publish, distribute, share and interact with all kinds of content: blogs, papers, videos, Tweets, Facebook, photo editing, Wikis, audio, music... That is wonderful, but it has created an incredible noise level in people's lives. The available content is overwhelming in volume and variety. Nobody can possibly be exposed to it all.

There are 4.2 billion Internet users, half of people, and 1.7 billion websites in the world.

Some context in how we're distracting ourselves:

Global Online Activity in 2018/2019							
Global Internet Users	4,200,000,000	Per Second	Per Minute	Per Hour	Per Day	Per Year	Per User/Year*
FedEx/USPS/UPS parcels delivered in U.S.		349	20,928	1,255,708	30,136,986	11,000,000,000	92
Photos uploaded on Instagram		579	34,722	2,083,333	50,000,000	18,250,000,000	4
Tumblr posts		926	55,556	3,333,333	80,000,000	29,200,000,000	7
Skype calls		2,083	125,000	7,500,000	180,000,000	65,700,000,000	16
Tweets		5,324	319,444	19,166,667	460,000,000	167,900,000,000	40
Apps downloaded		6,501	390,030	23,401,800	561,643,200	204,999,768,000	49
Instagram users		9,259	555,556	33,333,333	800,000,000	800,000,000	-
Hours of Netflix content watched		11,574	694,444	41,666,640	999,999,360	364,999,766,400	87
WeChat users		11,574	694,444	41,666,667	1,000,000,000	1,000,000,000	-
Facebook Messenger users		15,046	902,778	54,166,667	1,300,000,000	1,300,000,000	-
Money spent online		\$16,616	\$996,956	\$59,817,360	\$1,435,616,640	\$524,000,073,600	\$125
Facebook Logins		16,667	1,000,000	60,000,000	1,440,000,000	525,600,000,000	125
Twitch views		16,667	1,000,000	60,000,000	1,440,000,000	525,600,000,000	125
Whatsapp users		17,361	1,041,667	62,500,000	1,500,000,000	1,500,000,000	-
Swipes on Tinder		23,333	1,400,000	84,000,000	2,016,000,000	735,840,000,000	-
Active Facebook users		25,463	1,527,778	91,666,667	2,200,000,000	2,200,000,000	-
Gigabytes of data sent across Internet		34,722	2,083,333	125,000,000	3,000,000,000	1,095,000,000,000	261
Snaps created		35,000	2,100,000	126,000,000	3,024,000,000	1,103,760,000,000	263
Google searches		42,824	2,569,444	154,166,667	3,700,000,000	1,350,500,000,000	322
YouTube Videos Viewed		46,296	2,777,778	166,666,667	4,000,000,000	1,460,000,000,000	348
Texts sent		301,667	18,100,000	1,086,000,000	26,064,000,000	9,513,360,000,000	2,265
Mobile video viewing minutes		347,222	20,833,333	1,250,000,000	30,000,000,000	10,950,000,000,000	2,607
Messages sent via Facebook or Whatsapp		693,333	41,600,000	2,496,000,000	59,904,000,000	21,864,960,000,000	5,206
Emails sent		1,620,370	97,222,222	5,833,333,333	140,000,000,000	51,100,000,000,000	12,167
Households in U.S.	119,000,000	* FedEx/USPS/UPS parcels delivered in U.S. is divided by this to show packages per household					

1905 1906

Numbers per user are generally far higher than calculated for U.S. users, because U.S. users do far higher volumes of most of this than people in many other places in the world. We are distracting and confusing and removing ourselves with these extraordinary volumes of online activities. We are also abandoning privacy as a human right and value.

- In 2017, 60% of financial transactions worldwide were digital.
- Only 9% of people in U.S. reported not buying something because of data privacy concerns.
- The last data protection laws passed in U.S. were in 1974, versus 2018 for Europe.¹⁹⁰⁷

By the time we reach age 65 in the U.S., we're exposed to 2 million TV commercials.¹⁹⁰⁸ In the 1970s, people in the U.S. were exposed to 500 ads a day. Today, it's 5,000 a day,^{1909 1910 1911} 1.8 million a year. We watch 15 minutes of ads per hour of broadcast and cable television channel viewing, 1 of 4 minutes, 40 ads on a typical news webpage, 15 on a typical non-commercial website, 36 ads a day if we Facebook, and 4.6 billion video ads per month on the top 10 online platforms.¹⁹¹² We're drowning in marketing, advertisement, and selling noise, which dulls us, distracts us, causes us to put up shields between us, makes us cynical, creates feelings of vulnerability and anxiety, and contributes enormously to media-related problems of alienation and withdrawal from civic and social engagement.¹⁹¹³ Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

Media Addiction and Attention Deficits

We are divided and overwhelmed by this enormous volume of information and media choices, and it is doing many of us harm, creating problems with media addiction, abilities to pay attention, think clearly and critically, be present with life, family and friends, get work done, organize our lives, and be happy. Our interactions with devices, systems, media, information and entertainments is rewiring our brains.

96% of U.S. households have televisions,¹⁹¹⁴ 75% of the people in the U.S. have networked computers, half have tablet computers, and 95% carry a cellphone, 80% a smartphone that's almost always on.¹⁹¹⁵ These empowering tools can provide enormous benefits, like, abilities to communicate with each other, find information when and where we need it, make financial transactions, navigate through the world, learn new things, translate languages, and be entertained.

They are merely tools, though. Many of us relate to them in unhealthy ways. A hammer is just a tool. We don't check our hammers compulsively, or sleep with them. We pull them out when we need them. Many of us can't stop checking our electronic devices. 61% of teens admit addiction to the Internet,¹⁹¹⁶ and to increased loneliness and depression associated with that.¹⁹¹⁷ An average person in the U.S. unlocked their cellphone 73 times a day in 2018.¹⁹¹⁸ If we sleep 8 hours, that means we're compulsively unlocking our phones every 13 minutes in the rest of the day, leaving less and less time for other things.

Floods of information overstimulate and overload us, triggering threat impulses that shut down higher brain regions associated with empathy, engaging threat-seeking functions, and triggering releases of dopamine, an addictive brain chemical pleasure reward, when we release information and switch focus. Attentions increasingly flit from one thing to another.¹⁹¹⁹ We think or pretend we're more efficient and capable as we "multi-task," trying to do many things at once. Really, we're less efficient and capable.¹⁹²⁰

Those are precisely the mechanics of addiction. That's what lab rats do, pressing levers to get food pellets in addiction experiments. We push cellphone and computer buttons and get dopamine rewards.

With games and other entertainments, the dopamine rewards can be even bigger and more frequent. 64% of the U.S. population are gamers. The gaming industry earned \$80 billion (7% of FADS) in 2017,¹⁹²¹ twice as much as global movie box office revenues.¹⁹²² 28% of games sold in the U.S. are shooter games, which reward people for killing with guns. The U.S. has 1 in 25 people in the world, but 1 in 5 mobile phone video game sessions, with 72% of U.S. mobile phone users playing games on our phones.¹⁹²³

Information overload costs the U.S. economy \$1 trillion (86% of FADS; 5% of U.S. GDP) per year in lowered employee productivity and reduced innovation. A fourth of an average information worker's day is used looking for information and being interrupted. It takes about 25 minutes to get back into productive flow after an interruption.¹⁹²⁴ 28% of an information worker's day is spent on email.¹⁹²⁵ That leaves these workers, arguably those best able to gather information on news and government, unlikely to seek such information, because they are burned out on information gathering?

People are interrupted often, day and night, with email, text messages, Facebook messages, phone calls, Tweets, Instagram photos and hundreds of other applications we check and receive messages from. These media and interrupt driven conditions create distracted human beings, increasingly unable to pay attention, even when we want or try to.¹⁹²⁶ Many of us have a hard time relaxing at any time, and exist in states of anxiety, because we know at any moment we may be interrupted by electronic devices.

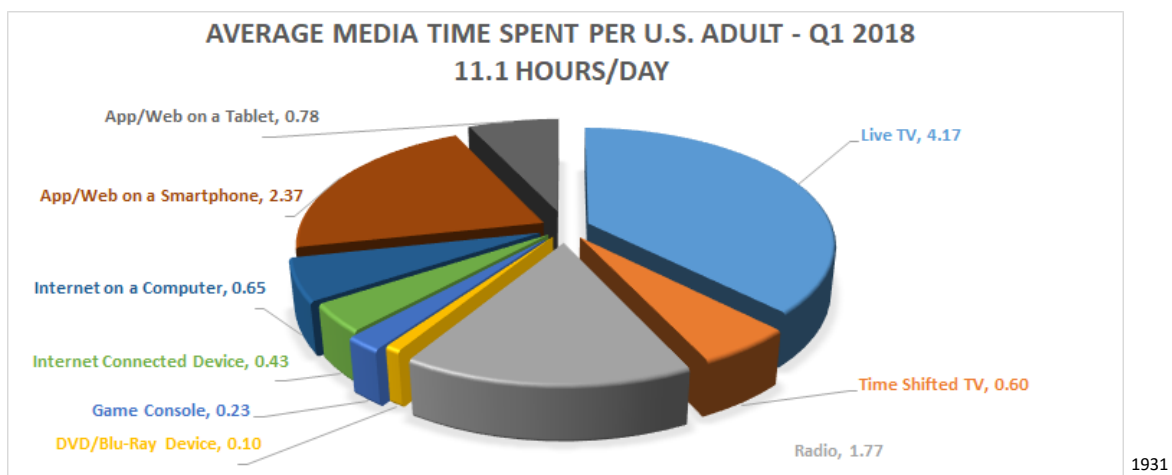
Media addictions and attention deficit problems are becoming epidemic, with some studies indicating human brains are being rewired, so we're no longer capable of focused attention and concentration.¹⁹²⁷ In the U.K., members of parliament have said that social media addiction should be declared a disease, harming health and well-being.¹⁹²⁸ We can be addicted to electronic gaming, checking email, television, news, the Internet, YouTube... In 2016, 6.1 million (10% of) children aged 2-17 years living in the U.S. had been diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), 62% being drugged for it.¹⁹²⁹

Without the ability to focus attention and concentrate, we effectively lose the ability to be analytical, critical, thoughtful, and participate as an informed and thinking member of a representative democracy. That damages our abilities to do intellectual thinking, absolutely critical skills in the knowledge, information and innovation economies of the 21st century, where many of the best opportunities are. This all makes it hard for us to come up with solutions to our many wicked problems, and do something about them, except as business solutions people are paid to think about at work.

Public education systems, often focused on regurgitating content, rewarding students for accurately aping back "the right answers," rather than developing independent critical thinking and analytical skills, don't prepare citizens well to be able to discern credible from incredible and discreditable information. So, people become confused and misled by all kinds of false information.

Entertainment frequently presents an imagined "good life," where people are wealthy, free and do what they want, or dark fantasies of anxiety, fear, anger, pursuit, danger, retribution, ugliness, crime, killing, war and other such stories. Doing so, entertainment creates or perpetuates unrealistic beliefs or expectations about reality, fear and other negative emotions and energies, and harmful behaviors.

People increasingly seek and find distraction through media in the U.S. Screen time consumes an average of 11 hours per day for a person in the U.S.,¹⁹³⁰ more than the third of the day spent sleeping, theoretically, or the more than a third of the day spent working, on average. We are not present in our lives, families or heads, because our attention is too consumed by media distractions.



Look around you on the streets, in public spaces, on public transportation, anywhere, and notice how we're lost in our devices, not present, randomly dispersed across the ether! That defies common sense. It contributes to problems in our lives, families, communities, workplaces, and society, because we are too distracted and media drugged to participate in them fully. We're lost in abstraction and distraction.

Need for Change

The U.S. emerged from a popular revolution by its people, rebelling against government control and exploitation, basing its organization and society on sweeping ideas and ideals of broad human rights, applying equally to all, with representative democratic government chosen and overseen by its people, using high quality information provided by a Free Press, basically a 4th branch of government.

That independent press has now been compromised in a variety of ways, including: extreme media ownership concentrations, which limit choice and enable information controls; information sources owned by businesspeople focused on financial wealth and power, who optimize operations to cater to those trying to exercise influence over others, via advertisement and propaganda; ignorance, apathy and lack of education, critical thinking and responsibility in the public, increasingly not insisting on, showing up for or getting information needed to hold government and society accountable; increasing proliferation of false information, casting doubt on all information and making it hard to know what's going on; and increasing government restrictions and attacks on journalism and information sharing.

We are increasingly distracted, dispersed and disconnected across an overwhelming proliferation of information and media choices, which is taking us away from the real worlds we live in, our families, relationships, communities and society. That is rewiring our brains and making us increasingly unable to pay attention and do sustained thinking, addicting us to virtual stimuli that make us feel worse overall. Meanwhile, our many wicked problems are getting worse; we're less knowledgeably aware of that; we're less able to respond to that; and we're spiraling down into mental problems, harms and despair.

It doesn't make sense that we are doing this to ourselves. Let's change! Turn it off and detox from it! Don't turn it on again without clear purpose! Go outside, get exercise and have fun with real people! Take quiet time! Be in nature! Get healthy and whole! Break the habits and addictions! Wake up!

Put limits on electronic communications and entertainments! Do only one thing at a time and do it well! Check electronic communications at clearly defined times of the day, and turn them off at other times! Take time without electronic devices before going to bed! Make time to be present with loved ones!

Get out in nature and the real world with real people in living communities! Turn electronic devices on only when you really need them for a clear and useful purpose and keep them turned off otherwise! Limit text and other forms of electronic messaging! Call and talk instead! Slow down! Breathe deeply! Understand that almost any real-world experience is more valuable than almost any virtual experience!

Learn to seek facts and information, not opinions, and be able to analyze and evaluate them critically! Turn off commercial televisions and radios! Seek out information you are interested in proactively! Avoid real or electronic environments with advertisements, marketing and selling, whenever possible! Support high quality independent journalism! Take time every day to learn something that's valuable! Figure out trusted ways to get informed about what is going on in the world around us, and do it!

Share good information with others and talk about it! Be skeptical! Try to understand the big picture! Why are things the way they are? How could they be different? How are they different elsewhere?

Figure out what you can do yourself to make things better in your life and society! Do it, in good faith! Share what you're doing with others, and why! It's hard to root out corruption outside ourselves if we are corrupted inside ourselves. Let's root out and release corruption inside ourselves! We can change!

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