

Technology and the News

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Algorithms, artificial intelligence, echo chambers, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, deepfakes, censoring, shadowbanning, doxing, mainstream, fringe, experts, fact check, misspoke, alternative facts, and many more terms are thrown around these days. It's easy to feel confused, overwhelmed, desensitized, or just fed up with the flood of information sent our way twenty-four hours a day. There are so many voices all clamoring for your time, attention, information, and your money.

In many ways, technology has provided tremendous benefits to our everyday life. When people wanted to communicate over long distances just two centuries ago, they had to write a letter, seal it, give instructions for delivery, and then hope it arrived with no idea if they ever got it or if you would hear back. Today you can speak to and see someone on the other side of the planet or in orbit in real time. The speed at which we communicate has changed our perceptions and our expectations of how and when we receive information. These changes have brought great convenience to people's everyday lives, but they have also allowed opportunistic individuals and groups to have more ways to disseminate information – whatever their intention may be.

According to statistical data collected by the Pew Forum, across all age groups, over 75% of Americans get their news information from a digital device. Companies and interest groups know this, and they utilize technology to push their content using advertisements, keywords, tracking cookies, and algorithms that try to predict what you are interested in seeing. This overdose of information has actually resulted in the rapid growth of a psychological phenomenon called media fatigue. People are getting overloaded with content, and it is taking a toll on their mental and physical health. Like any other activity we engage in, moderation is key. Here are some helpful tips to limit your stress as you try to keep up with what is going on in the world.

Start by limiting exposure and time. News media companies design their content to encourage you to keep interacting with it. They use psychological principles of color, shape, placement, word choice, and design to instigate chemical signals in your brain that make you feel like you want to look at more. Set a timer for yourself for just 10-15 minutes. Set a goal to only check news once a day or even just once a week. Second, try to avoid content that is inflammatory or emotionally charged. You might feel validated if the words match your opinion or you might feel incensed if it attacks your beliefs, but the more you look at news stories with that type of language, the more they will present those types of stories to you. Those stories are designed to get you riled up and to act on your emotions. It is unhealthy to constantly be in a heightened emotional state, especially if it is antagonistic. Take a break, walk around, drink some water, take deep breaths, and think about the issue clearly. You are much less likely to stress about a news story if you don't let them push your emotional buttons.

Third, remember that the goal of every news media company – regardless of its status as a company, corporation, non-profit, or government entity – is to increase viewership and readership. They could be spreading important information that citizens should know or the latest gossip of how a celebrity was attacked by Bigfoot. They need you to function. Fourth, try to have a variety in what you consume. The offerings are numerous, but like an all-you-can-eat buffet, don't try to eat everything. If you only eat all salty foods, you'll get thirsty. If you only eat sweets, you'll have a sugar crash. Likewise, try to balance your news intake to include different types of stories with different viewpoints. Do you usually stick to political stories? Try a science article! Always up to date on the latest sports news? Check out a travel story instead! If you're looking for something new or a different way to access information, stop by the library! We're always happy to help you find a new perspective, idea, or just to answer questions.

The library will be closed on Wednesday, June 19th for the Juneteenth holiday. The library is located at 17 N. Broadway and is open to the public Monday-Thursday 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday-Saturday 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.