

# 'Being Informed' No Longer Means Following the News

"Being informed" has been regarded as one of the highest virtues in the post-Enlightenment era of the West.

And for the majority of this era, "being informed" has largely meant following the news and current events on a daily basis. So much did the ritual of checking the news each morning and evening become part of the Western makeup that Nietzsche once cynically [remarked](#) that it had replaced prayer in the life of modern man.

Many of us in the 35+ age range have fond memories of this ritual—our parents seated around the table in the morning with a section of the newspaper in hand, or the voice of Peter Jennings or Tom Brokaw in the background as dinner was being prepared. This was what was done by someone who sought to stay "informed". It was something to be emulated.

However, this is no longer the case. "Being informed" no longer means following the news. As veteran journalist Michael Goodwin [has noted](#), we are witnessing "the complete collapse of American journalism as we know it." The mainstream news outlets have become shells for partisan politics. Fact-checking a story is becoming a thing of the past, frequently trumped in favor of the need for speed. The quality of discourse that we encounter in the news is something akin to the level of meanness and gossip one encounters at a typical America middle school. The overarching goal of the content now featured in the news is not about "informing" the educated, but about getting the masses to "click".

But—and those with nostalgia for the better days of journalism may not like hearing this—there's reason to believe that

following the news never really kept one “informed”.

Thomas Jefferson was an early witness to this more pessimistic view of the news. He essentially [regarded](#) newspapers as purveyors of falsehoods and propaganda machines, “the most effectual engines for pacifying a nation.” He wrote, “I really look with commiseration over the great body of my fellow citizens who, reading newspapers, live and die in the belief that they have known something of what has been passing in the world in their time...”

More recently, in [Amusing Ourselves to Death](#), Neil Postman helped us realize that the information we receive from the news is, for the most part, context-less, disconnected from our actual lives. It “gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action.”

The rise of the modern news coincided with a changed view of knowledge—exemplified by the creation of the encyclopedia—that emphasized breadth rather than depth. As Postman says of the telegraph, which first enabled us to quickly receive context-less news from around the world:

“Telegraphic discourse permitted no time for historical perspectives and gave no priority to the qualitative. To the telegraph, intelligence meant knowing *of* lots of things, not knowing *about* them.”

The digital age has enabled the negative elements of news media to thrive, and in so doing, has perhaps unmasked the true nature of the news.

Those who break the spell of this association between “being informed” and following the news will find that world events go on much as before without them, but that their own lives will probably be changed for the better.

They'll find that they have more time to read deeply on issues and become intellectually prepared to recognize and combat propaganda.

They'll find that they have more time to focus on their relationships with those immediately around them and the activities taking place in their local communities.

And they also may find that they're less angry and depressed, because in reality, anger and depression are about the only courses of action available to us when we're made to care about things that we have no real power to change.

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