

Broken and distrusting: why Americans are pulling away from the daily news

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. What do you know about world news? Choose the best answer in each case.

1. The daily newspaper with the biggest circulation in the world is **American / Japanese**.
2. The oldest newspaper in the world (started in 1703) is **Austrian / English**.
3. The world's first radio news broadcast was in **1870 / 1920**.
4. The Reuters news agency was established in **England / Germany** in **1851**.
5. The world record audience for a TV news programme was for the **2008 Olympics opening ceremony / the funeral of Michael Jackson**.
6. The world's first 24-hours news network was **the BBC / CNN**.

2 Key words

a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. An adjective meaning *favouring one person, thing, or idea to another in a way that seems unfair* (paragraph 2) _____
2. An adjective meaning *feeling as though you have no mental or physical energy left* (paragraph 3) _____
3. A verb meaning *to control the amount of something* (paragraph 3) _____
4. A phrasal verb meaning *to stop doing something* (paragraph 3) _____
5. An adjective meaning *having doubts about something that other people think is true or right* (paragraph 4) _____
6. An adjective meaning *receiving more than you can deal with* (paragraph 7) _____
7. A phrasal verb meaning *to decide not to take part in something or to stop taking part in it* (paragraph 8) _____
8. An adjective meaning *attractive and interesting* (paragraph 8) _____
9. A verb meaning *to accept that something is true or real* (paragraph 12) _____
10. An adjective meaning *very popular on the Internet because so many people look at it* (paragraph 12) _____

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Chris McGreal *in New York*

Sun 17 Jul 2022

- 1 The Reuters Institute revealed recently that 42% of Americans avoid the news because it is depressing or they just don't believe it. In other countries, such as the UK and Brazil, the numbers avoiding it were even higher.
- 2 "In the United States, people on the right avoid the news because they think it is biased, but those on the left often feel overwhelmed, or worry that the news might create arguments," the institute said.
- 3 Amanda Ripley, a former journalist, said she was embarrassed to admit that she has "been actively avoiding the news for years". Ripley said it left her "so drained that I couldn't write". So, she rationed her consumption, cutting out television news altogether and waiting until later in the day to read the papers. But it kept coming at her on her phone and social media. "If you look at that Reuters data, we can estimate that roughly 100 million American adults are not getting their news needs met," Ripley said.
- 4 And yet major news organisations are sceptical because their audience numbers just keep growing. Professor Emily Bell, of the Columbia Journalism School, said that the long-term trend is up.
- 5 Bell said that in recent years the total number of stories read by Americans has grown to be much larger than she would ever have imagined. "So, I start from this position of, is this really happening? People say, 'I'm sick of the news, I'm not paying attention to it.' I would like to see a bit more evidence it's actually true," she said.
- 6 Bell also pointed out that although younger people may be turning away from traditional news sources that doesn't necessarily mean they're turning away from the news. "Podcasting has an incredibly strong, young audience. This is a format which really appeals to the under-25s," she said.
- 7 Ripley said she has been "inundated" with messages from Americans who feel as she does about what seems to be constant negativity. "Particularly with the pandemic, there has been a lot of very bad news. You can't avoid it."
- 8 Bell agreed. "The sense of being overwhelmed with bad news is very real. It's exhausting," she said. "People feel for their own mental stability, that there are a certain number of things about which you can't do very much on a daily basis, where opting out of the news might be something that is very appealing."
- 9 Molly Bingham, the founder of Orb Media, sees a wider problem. "There is massive simplification. If you look at the current conflict in Ukraine, the American media reports it as 'good Ukrainians resisting bad Russians'. But when Iraqis were opposing the presence of foreign troops in their country, they were terrorists, they were very bad," she said.
- 10 All of this raises an old question: – do readers and viewers really want positive stories? Bell is sceptical. "We often say, if only journalists would write more good news stories. This is a horrible thing to say, but people tend not to read the good news," she said.
- 11 "For instance, if you write a fairly long piece about climate change, it tends to get fairly low traffic. If you have a piece saying Britain is going to go to 40C (104F) next week, everybody is going to read that piece."
- 12 Ripley acknowledges the problem. "I think there's some truth to it but I don't think it's the whole story. Increasingly, stories that are hopeful and surprising go viral. Stories that offer hope feel like breaking news right now, because there is so much of the opposite," she said.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. More people in the USA avoid the news than in the UK or Brazil.
2. People on the right think the news is biased.
3. Amanda Ripley has just started to avoid the news.
4. She doesn't read newspapers.
5. Major news organisations say the number of users is growing.
6. Young people don't get any news at all.
7. A lot of people believe the news is too negative.
8. Molly Bingham believes the news is too simplified.
9. According to Professor Bell, people don't read good news stories.
10. More people will read a long story about climate change than one about a heat wave.

4 Key language

a. Rearrange the words to make language chunks from the text.

1. the actively avoiding for years news
2. she would larger imagined than ever have much
3. later until in day waiting the
4. million adults hundred roughly one American
5. of very news a lot bad
6. can't do very about things which much you

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "No news is good news."
- "Watching the news on TV is too depressing."

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6 In your own words

- a. Pick a country that you don't usually read about in the news. Open an internet search engine and type 'latest news from [country of interest]' into the browser. Choose one of the news websites that are shown (e.g., CNN, BBC, Euronews, etc.) and choose the most interesting or the most significant story from the country you chose. Make notes about what happened, when and where it happened, and why it is important.

Report your findings to the class.