

Chapter 7

On the evolution of the NEWS

One contributing factor to our current political polarization is the changes that have taken place in how we citizens receive our news. Just forty years ago, Americans got their news from one of three network evening news programs and print newspapers. At that time, the face of network news, Walter Cronkite, was considered the most trusted man in America. Newspapers were also regulated so they presented confirmed facts. How times have changed.

Beginning in 1980 with the launch of CNN, news programming became available 24/7. Cable news also birthed a different type of news format called "opinion driven programming." This format primarily relied on panels of "experts" giving their opinions of the news, instead of objectively reporting on it.

Some attempt was made in the beginning to present views from all sides of the political spectrum, but by the time Fox News launched, cable news networks had fractured into purely liberal and conservative services. The "news" these partisan sources presented often described two different realities while promoting clickbait stories designed to rile up their audiences.

With the launch of Facebooks and Googles news feeds, information took another leap into a dystopian future. In an attempt to "tailor" the news for an individual, powerful software algorithms driven by the personal profile data collected by these on-line services resulted in the formation of

tribal “bubbles” where an individual only saw news that was meant for people who agreed with them.

Traditionally, the “news” from whatever source has been based on the adage “if it bleeds, it leads.” Sensational stories, often featuring conflict are intentionally served up to get higher ratings or increase the ad rates media corporations can charge. This tendency to promote “friction” to increase viewership has continued to evolve until currently we have two completely different realities presented to the American public, much of it not based on facts.

American democracy depends on a common set of facts from which citizens can debate. While interpretations of those facts can vary wildly, we need to debate our future based on the same information instead of the “fake” misinformation that is currently being distributed.

IF America does not find a way to return to political debate based on a common set of facts, we could find ourselves ultimately not trusting news services or each other anymore. This citizen “mistrust” is a page right out of the oligarchs playbook. **IF** nothing is “true,” decisions will not be made based on facts, but on propaganda.