

News Flash!

 By Edward Herridge

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It's been a bit of a dry spell on the opinion front for me. There are so many of them flying about lately that I felt my contribution would be superfluous. That was until I noticed something interesting. An acceleration in the constant flux state of news media's binary of fear-mongering and distraction.



Source: www.pexels.com

Here follows an illustration. **News flash:** Russia invades Ukraine - Fear. **News flash:** Will Smith slaps Chris Rock - Distraction. **News flash:** Disruptions in the supply chain - Fear. **News flash:** Elon Musk moves to buy Twitter - Distraction. **News flash:** Fuel price and inflation escalates drastically - Fear. **News flash:** Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heart trial - Distraction.

Is it any wonder that so many of us have been paralysed by the strobing of such an aggressively accelerated news cycle?

Middle ground

Barring conspiracy theories, for now, why is this phenomenon occurring? Is the world so messed up lately that there is so much more bad news to go around? Is civilisation heading for a fall?

The minds at MIT seem to harbour this point of view. According to their research and projections, we are ahead of schedule on the whole collapsing-of-the-world-as-we-know-it scenario. Their original prediction was that society would implode by 2040. Apparently, the timeline has now accelerated.

Does this mean that everything is now doom and gloom, as the headlines would like us to think? Maybe, maybe not. The opposing view maintains that we are doing better now than ever before. You decide.

Survival tactics

Which of these polar views reflects the truth? Realistically, reality should lie between these two extremes but then why does it feel like the world is ending every day?

One possible explanation might be simpler than you think. It's the internet's fault. Seriously, think about it.

Everybody knows that traditional media is dying, largely due to the popularity of online social portals such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Traditional media such as print and network news, which includes their online portals, simply cannot compete in the arena of information dissemination anymore. In the world of real-time reporting, Twitter rules the roost.

To survive, traditional media was forced to adopt their enemies' tactics. To compete with the internet's potent clickbait-style tactics traditional media was forced to switch from mostly factual headlines to patently sensational and alarming ones. Such headlines, like clickbait, only need to generally connect to their content to do the job of grabbing your attention. On the network front, partisan networks moved away from factual news to the opinion style reporting prevalent on social media to bolster engagement.

Conspiracy theory

As to the bigger picture, beyond financial motivations, I would venture into conspiracy territory and suggest that us sheeple have been left out to pasture too long, obliging the powers that be to rein our freedoms in a bit. The sheepdog of social engineering had to be let out to herd us back into camp. Fear is it's quick nip and distraction the calculated movement designed to keep us going in the right direction. Sheeple is not my word, I borrowed it because I think that it describes modern society perfectly.

We, the so-called consumers, are like sheep in many ways. We are provided for while farmed and fleeced. Some among us are even marked for slaughter to feed the ambitions of the 1% who run this world. This sheep-like herd behaviour is not through any real fault of our own. We have been trained and programmed to do it since birth. Distracted and raised by media, indoctrinated by public education, we have been domesticated.

We have grown content to bleat our minds on social media and aimlessly wander the entertainment landscape while masticating grass in demographically hedged pastures provide to us by our betters. Being consumers is inherently what we have been programmed to be.

Divided attention

Now that my diatribe has run its course let's move away from the problem to the solution. How do we survive this perfect shit storm of media barrage?

My solution is by its nature divisive. The first step is to divide your attention. Find something else to focus on, something constructive. Not necessarily a hobby, but something other than social media or whatever is on your television. I write stuff. This article ironically represents one of the things I do to channel my attention away from the subject matter of this article.

I read. Listen to audiobooks, play some games, and spend quality time with my loved ones, whether they like it or not. Sometimes I knock back a few cold ones. Simply find non-destructive ways to spend less time looking outward for signs of coming danger and begin to focus inwards for the direction and calm needed to survive the storm.

There is nothing that we can do to halt the global events that are heading our way. Therefore, it makes more sense to prepare ourselves mentally for them instead. Another truism that should be kept in mind is that 99% of what we worry about is not what gets us in the end. It's the 1% we don't worry about that trips us up.

The second division I suggest is to halve the impact of information assaulting us every day. In the world of media, you are a fish. Know that their debate always hides a hook. Don't mistake this statement as an indictment on fish. Fish are not as dumb as you think they are. If hamburgers suddenly started dangling within reach quite a few of us will find ourselves yanked into the clouds. Don't pay these headlines too much mind. They camouflage reality with alarm.

Accept that they are a permanent fixture of our media landscape and exist only to engage us. Then mitigate their impact by simply not reacting to them. Easier said than done, I know. But think of it like this. You don't click on porn pop-ups when you are at work do you? Tap into that discipline and apply it to the alarming headlines vying for your attention.

Break away

In today's world, your engagement is an investment and your attention currency and those who want your business will do

anything to make you spend it with them. Save some of it for yourself and spend it on a holiday away from the clamour. Allow yourself to relax. It's ok. You deserve it.

ABOUT EDWARD HERRIDGE

Edward matriculated in 1992 after which he performed military service and began his working career in printing by studying electronic origination at the South African Printing College. Edward eventually became an account executive for Oakes and Associates at Investec Bank. He then migrated into advertising and became brand manager for Ronin Grain Management Solutions. Edward departed Ronin GMS to pursue his own interest before finding employment at Grey advertising as a finishing artist, re-toucher, motion graphic and digital designer.

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