

Op-Ed: News Literacy and the Importance of Local Journalism

In 2020, more news is available at our fingertips than ever before. It comes at us fast, and as technology advances, the flow of information becomes a deluge. This presents challenges and opportunities for both journalists and consumers. The demands of the 24-hour news cycle, the reduction in the number of reporters, and the increase in competition can incentivize speed over accuracy and flash over substance. At times, reporters make mistakes or resort to sensationalism, flashy claims, or clickbait instead of well-researched, impartial journalism. For consumers, the nonstop flood of news can be overwhelming, and the temptation to tune it all out or limit our consumption to stories that are lurid or confirm our biases becomes difficult to resist.

It's National News Literacy Week; what better time than now to evaluate our habits and examine our role in the news cycle. As information consumers, we have the power to dictate the market. We have the ability to seek out solid, well-sourced journalism. It's important for us to use discernment and reward fair and accurate journalists, publications, and outlets with our clicks, our dollars, and our time.

One sector of journalism that definitely deserves our support is local news. Good local reporting not only tells a story, it also reaffirms the ties that bind us together as a community. Regional newspapers, radio stations, and television outlets keep us informed about what's going on at City Hall, in the State Capitol, and with local people, organizations, and businesses. These sources are often the only places you can find this information – and they need our support and attention to survive in an increasingly volatile environment.

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin – a former newspaper owner – was asked what sort of government the Constitutional Convention had established. His reply was, “A republic, if you can keep it.” The decisions we make as citizens are critical to the continuation of our form of government and our way of life. It is important that those decisions be made on the basis of facts, and it is our responsibility to seek out truthful sources and to stay informed.

