

Overwhelmed and Confused: the State of American Youth

We may be witnessing the rapid and terrifying decline of free journalism. Younger generations do not understand the value of real, integritous journalism or its importance to democracy.

A 2022 study revealed that over half of Gen Z teens were getting their news from social media platforms (Tanveer). These rates are similarly rising for adults, who are turning to Instagram and Tiktok as their sources for news rather than legitimate reporting agencies (Lepert and Matsa). Aside from social media, many draw their news from channels or reporters who are deeply biased or do not accurately substantiate their information. Most people, especially younger generations, are surrounded by huge amounts of incoming information, much of it with little value, to help them better understand the state of the world. This is causing people to lose faith: “With the broader information ecosystem overrun by misinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and clickbait, public trust in journalism has fallen to historical lows” (Sulzberger). With this avalanche of information, few turn to legitimate journalism, leaving the nation with a relatively and dangerously uninformed electorate.

The reason why so many people turn to subpar news sources is that they fail to understand the value of journalism in democracy and civic life, and do not see engagement as a priority. People consuming news do not understand the value of free, unbiased journalism in creating a democratic society, and instead often look for media that benefits them or reinforces their personal views. This confirmation bias creates vast echo chambers that stimulate increased polarization. A report from the Reuters Institute found that “the role of news for young people appears primarily individualistic; it’s about what it can do for them as individuals – rather than for society as a whole” (“How Young People Consume News and the Implications for

Mainstream Media”). If people cannot see the value of free journalism for society, they have no reason to advocate for its protection. And without advocates for free, unbiased journalism, bad actors have more license to take that right away.

Solving this issue requires systemic change. We risk entering into a dangerous cycle if children do not receive proper education about media bias and reliable sources, because those same children will grow up to be parents and their choices will likely be mirrored in the choices of their children. Everyone has a role to play in exacting this change and ensuring that democracy can continue to survive. Journalists and the public must sound the alarm and advocate for new school curriculums teaching media literacy and bias. Children have to learn not just *that* journalism is important, but *why* journalism is important, and why each and every one of us must protect it.

Works Cited

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