P.S. to the NEWS
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DO AMERICANS GET ENOUGH NEWS?

Are the American people better informed than ever before, or worse informed? Have advances in technology and communication brought us more information and access to the news -- or less than in the past?

For starters, compare this year's political campaign speeches with the "Federalist Papers" of two centuries ago, which were essentially campaign documents to promote votes for adoption of the U.S. Constitution. It is obvious that the political rhetoric of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton appealed to reason not emotion, to freedom not handouts, and to a mature and educated audience.

In our era, nearly everyone attends school at least until age 16. There is no evidence, however, that as large a percentage of present-day Americans can read and understand the "Federalist Papers" as did in 1787.

Newspaper printing presses gave the world a quantum leap forward in bringing information to the public. When the age of radio arrived, news was delivered faster and reached more people, including those who don't get past the sports page and the comics.

But the quantity of news delivered electronically is far less than by newsprint. Any avid news hound who has had to rely exclusively on radio during a newspaper strike knows that radio provides an endless repetition of first paragraphs of news stories over and over again.

The television era made the news more entertaining. But the amount of hard news shrunk even further since only a few news stories can be programmed into the 30-minute evening news timeframe (less commercials). Some call the nightly TV news merely "a headline service."

If you watch all three network nightly TV newscasts, you would swear that the assignment editors get together for coffee at 2:00 p.m. each day and agree on which stories all will cover that night. They all give the same news, often even in the same order.

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We know the networks don't do this. They are competitive rather than conspiratorial. They are merely part of the "pack journalism" syndrome (all wanting to cover the same story at the same time), and they are as subject to peer pressure as a shy teenager.

The American people apparently want more news. The CBS newsmagazine "60 Minutes" had the highest Nielsen rating of any program in prime time TV during the last season. ABC's late-night 20-minute newscast is successfully competing with NBC's Johnny Carson.

Entrepreneur-sportsman Ted Turner has bet some $40 million that the American public has a hunger for news that the networks can't fill. He went on the air June 1 with a 24-hour-a-day TV news network available to cable customers only. His viewing audience will start with 2.7 million as opposed to the 37 million who watch the network nightly news, but he is optimistic.

Many Americans feel that the big three television news casts have major defects. They are over-absorbed with politics and with foreign news. News of faraway places is low on the priority list of most Americans who are far more concerned with U.S. economic, social, school, business, religious, and health problems.

National news is overly concerned with politics, even considering the fact that 1980 is a presidential election year. Fewer than half of Americans even bother to vote, and by their nonvotes they are saing they don't care which of the two presidential candidates wins.

Many news reporters seem desperately eager to report news before it happens. They want to tell us who will win the election tomorrow instead of who won the election yesterday.

This is particularly evident in TV election night reports. The networks are so eager to be the first to report that Candidate X has won that they are willing to take a chance on making a wrong prediction. The public would be better served if the mews media would just fairly and promptly report what did happen. Let the people make their own predictions and their own speculations.

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