

Why Are We Flooded With Outrage-Producing News Stories?

Analysis by [A Midwestern Doctor](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › The mass media's business model revolves around emotionally enraging and upsetting its audience because that makes more money than informing and empowering the public
- › This business model has transformed the political process from one where differing parties come together to find the compromise which most makes sense to one where everyone prioritizes beating the other side
- › Our susceptibility to this business model arises from the strain modern life has placed on our nervous system. Once in this dulled state, humans have difficulty responding to anything besides strong or provocative stimuli and hence often miss many of the most important facets of life
- › One of the most important things you can do for your health is to understand exactly how the mass media emotionally manipulates you and boycott all of that toxic content

A common mantra in the media is **"if it bleeds it leads,"** which encapsulates the observation that disturbing and graphic news stories are the most effective way to ensure an audience will be hooked to the story, especially if the disturbing headline can be packaged with some type of potential solution to the problem.

Since this works, it's been a longstanding journalistic practice and a variety of methods have been concocted to both increase both the fear and disorientation mass media creates (e.g., a scary ticker always running across the bottom of a television screen). In short, like many other predatory industries, much of the media prioritizes its own interests (e.g., getting profitable viewers) over the interests of the American people.

A decade ago, I saw a [remarkably insightful article](#) written by a well-known physician blogger (Scott Alexander). It argued that the stories you will typically see covered by the media are ones touching on a controversial issue where it is unclear who is at fault. This is because those stories will have enough information available to make a strong case either side is right, and in turn, people on either side will only be able to see the points supporting their narrative.

Once that happens, it is guaranteed many people will be available on both sides to fervently attack the other “wrong” side, allowing the story to go viral and capture the attention of the nation.

This model thus allows the media to avoid covering topics which threaten their sponsors (e.g., the dangers of the COVID-19 vaccines) and to retain a large audience (along with the advertising dollars that accompany it) despite the media not producing anything of value for the public (e.g., real investigative journalism that speaks truth to power or information that empowers the audience). I believe this dynamic is extremely damaging to the country as it:

- Wedges people apart.
- Creates a great deal of stress anger and anxiety.
- Distracts people from doing meaningful work.
- Prevents us from coming together and finding reasonable solutions to the major problems we share as a nation.

The Attention Economy

One of the major problems we face in society is that everyone is constantly clamoring for our attention, and frequently to get that attention they chose the most outrage provoking message possible. This in turn shifts our culture from one that hungers for the truth and can appreciate the subtle nuances in arguments to a tribal one that wants brief soundbites to describe issues which say one side (your tribe) is right and the other sides is wrong.

I believe this issue is largely neurological in nature, and is best illustrated by the contrast of the effects of different drugs on the brain.

Many illegal drugs (e.g., cocaine or methamphetamines) work by giving a strong dopamine spike in the brain which is immensely pleasurable but fleeting. This results in the times when you don't have that spike feeling much more dead, and in time, the user becoming desensitized to the weaker stimuli of everyday life. Additionally, dopamine spikes are immensely addictive to the central nervous system, which in turn makes these drugs extremely addictive.

Other drugs (e.g., many hallucinogens) instead work by activating certain serotonin receptors in the brain for a prolonged period, which provides a less intense but more sustained euphoria (good feeling) and often makes people feel more alive and connected during that phase. Conversely, since those drugs do not cause addictive spikes, it is much rarer for people to become addicted to them. In turn, I would argue that you can choose to pursue life along either of these two paths:

- By pursuing fleeting experiences that briefly give an intense euphoria.
- By trying to feel more connected and alive, and doing so by trying to fully experience what is happening in each thing you come across.

Dopamine Spikes

If you want people to buy a product, there are two common ways to go about doing it:

- Have the product elicit a strong emotional response that makes people want to buy it.
- Have the product exude a tangible value people can recognize and wish to attain.

In marketing, since the goal is to get the largest volume of sales with the minimal amount of work, this always results in the sales apparatus catering to the lowest common denominator which can do this. In almost all cases, this requires selling the

product on the basis of dopamine spikes rather than because it makes people feel more alive.

In turn, if you look throughout the society, you can see this same pattern in countless industries. For example:

- With food, the processed food industry has done an immense amount of work to make processed food be as addictive as possible (e.g., a former FDA commissioner [disclosed how the processed food industry deliberately did this](#) by spiking foods with dopamine releasing substances so people would overeat junk food).

Likewise, in our culture, many ethnic cuisines (e.g., Chinese food) have been forced to change from their original rendition to a greasy fatty and salty one that caters the American palate. Conversely, much of the subtle nuances in flavor have been largely lost from the American diet, which has led many chefs from other cultures to remark that Americans have a fairly unrefined palate.

- In human relationships, much of the connected experience people have from physical intimacy has been lost and replaced by conditioned responses to sexual ideas (e.g., odd fetishes or pornography).
- In Hollywood ([as discussed in this book](#)), deep and engaging movie scripts which maintain a continuity of plot (e.g., the original Star Wars) have been replaced with disconnected productions which rapidly shift from one dopamine eliciting scene to another (e.g., I felt this very much characterized [the most widely promoted Marvel Movie](#)).

Note: A screenwriter [left a detailed comment](#) on this post describing his experiences with this in Hollywood.

- In music, we've shifted from works of art that open the human heart to mass-produced music which uses a variety of algorithms known to trigger dopamine responses ad-infinitum.

- Tech uses a variety of dopamine triggering stimuli (e.g., **blue light** or how **social media engagement is structured**) to make you have brief moments of euphoria and then withdrawals from the platform.

It is my belief that the susceptibility to this form of reality is a result of the nervous system becoming weakened from our modern environment. For instance:

- Many vaccines and pharmaceuticals are neurotoxic.
- Working with computers (and poor sleep) fatigues the nervous system.
- Our sedentary lifestyles prevent us from connecting to our bodies **and circulating the fluids within it**.
- We have much less social interaction now and no longer directly activate the parts of the central nervous system that crave human connection.

To illustrate, imagine a day where you felt great (e.g., you'd had a good nights sleep and the day was not stressful) and then compare it to a day where the opposite happened. In the case of the former, since your nerves are alive it's much easier to appreciate the richness of life, you feel much more, and you want to engage with your environment.

In the case of the latter, you feel much less (hence why strong dopamine spikes that can still be felt in this depleted state easily grab your attention) and you have much less of a desire to engage with the world around you.

Consider for a moment the food example listed before. Modern processed food emphasizes strong synthetic and addictive flavors fatigued tastebuds can overtly recognize. In contrast many traditional cuisines outside the reach of the processed food industry utilize a variety of more subtle flavors that form an incredible constellation of taste many industrialized tastebuds barely can even recognize.

Likewise, when you are feeling alive, you can appreciate those flavors, but when your nervous system is fatigued, those flavors pass right by you.

Likewise, look at the modern practice of medicine. Because the schedules doctors are put under for years (if not decades) are a natural recipe for fatiguing the nervous system, doctors often are in a state of burn out where it is much harder for them to connect with patients or appreciate the subtle details a patient can present with that clues the doctor into the actual diagnosis.

Creating Dopamine Spikes

Since the total material wealth available to humanity has gradually become “limited,” (partly due to the upper class hoarding more and more of it) an interesting transition has occurred – we’ve begun to create more and more imaginary wealth (e.g., people will pay money to buy currency in online games to the point enough people do that **slave labor is used in other countries** to do the repetitive tasks necessary to earn that currency).

One of the most important new sources of this “imaginary wealth” has been an increasing importance being placed on the value of ideas. For example, much of marketing revolves around creating the expectation of getting a product and the negative feelings with having an unmet expectation.

As a result, when you at last get the product (which can simply be a mental idea) you briefly have a dopamine rush, and then once it wears off, you are left immediately searching for the next rush.

The media in turn has done a lot of work to associate strong emotional reactions to certain ideas (e.g., specific words are “bad” and will elicit very negative emotions from the audience if they are said) whereas other ideas are good (e.g. “diversity”) so people influenced by the media crave the words even if they don’t know what they mean.

Because of this, it’s extremely easy for the mass media to craft public perception, as it can chose which narratives it wishes to associate a strong emotional stimuli with and then provoke the public into reacting towards. Conversely, it can also take important events and simply not condition the public to respond to them – which results in

widespread apathy to a variety of critically important topics (e.g., all the COVID vaccine injuries).

One of the best illustrations of this is that the same people who will get up in arms about an offensive word being used to describe a specific demographic are completely numb to real life atrocities being committed towards that same demographic.

For instance, when Obama was president and you faced serious consequences for speech that was not “politically correct,” I simultaneously found it was almost impossible to get progressives to care at all about the deaths **which followed his bombing campaigns** in the Middle East **or the African slave markets** which were opened as a result of his administration illegally toppling Libya’s government.

The Outrage Economy

Since we have such widespread apathy and malaise in the society, there are essentially two ways to break through it.

The first is to package your message in a manner that elicits the maximum dopamine spike from the audience, which in most cases requires choosing something which greatly upsets or agitates the audience.

***Note:** This is also why sports announcers predominantly call out the score when it’s very close but not when one side is clearly going to win.*

The second is to put forward something which feels genuine and real and thus entices people to want it on the basis of its intrinsic merits. Since the former is easier to do, it’s been the default preference in the media sphere irrespective of the psychological and social consequences it has for the public.

However, grabbing someone’s attention through outrage cannot be used indefinitely as the dopamine spikes continually deplete the individual until they no longer respond to them.

The media has tried to compensate for this by using progressively stronger dopamine spikes (e.g., more outrage provoking material), but this is also failing, particularly since the audacity of those increasingly outrageous lies is causing many to develop immunity towards them. If you look at the mainstream media through this lens, everything is seen very differently.



For example:

- The words no longer cause you to react, and you can identify the countless subliminal things the media does to trigger that reaction.
- Most of the words the anchors say sound more and more like hollow scripts being read from a teleprompter (which they often are – best shown by the identical words frequently **being repeated by anchors across the nation**).
- You see how many of the things aired have minimal importance and are simply being done to promote a corporation's interests.

Note: The above image is from the cult-classic *"They Live,"* where the main character obtains a pair of sun glasses that allows him to directly see the controllers of society.

Generating Outrage

In my eyes, Scott Alexander's key point was that if it's relatively clear who is right or wrong with a story (e.g., Libyan slave markets are bad, committing a drive by shooting on an innocent family in a bad neighborhood is bad), unless people are directly affected

by it, they do not experience a strong emotional response to the story and it's quickly forgotten. To illustrate this concept, let's look at some recent events.

- **The Maui Wildfires (discussed further [here](#))** – What happened to the people of Lahaina was horrible, much of the world feels a connection to Maui and the government was responsible for much of what happened.

All of the media coverage of the fires did not discuss the government's role in the events, so it was a relatively clear cut issue in most people's eyes – what happened in Lahaina was bad, let's send them some support and then move on with our lives.

As a result, Lahaina has mostly faded from the public's memory, many of the victims of the fire are still suffering immensely (and need help), and no one has been held accountable for what occurred.

- **The recent events in Israel (discussed further [here](#))** – Almost everyone who does not harbor resentment towards Israel agrees that Hamas's recent massacre of Israeli civilians was very bad.

In turn, if Israel had simply condemned it and just launched a retaliatory airstrike, within a few months everyone not directly affected by the massacre would have forgotten about it and before long Hamas would resume attacking Israel (which would then get minimal attention in the popular press until another large massacre happened).

However, since Israel instead chose to attack Gaza (which requires harming many civilians since Hamas habitually utilizes human shields) this issue became immensely controversial. As a result, an acrimonious debate has ensued because people feel very strongly about one side or the other, and this issue is thus unlikely to be forgotten. for a long time.

- **George Floyd** – A key point that inspired Scott Alexander's original post was the observation that the media only focuses on people dying at the hands of the police when a good case can be made that either side was at fault. In the case of Floyd,

that was very much the case, which resulted it in creating an immense amount of division in the country.

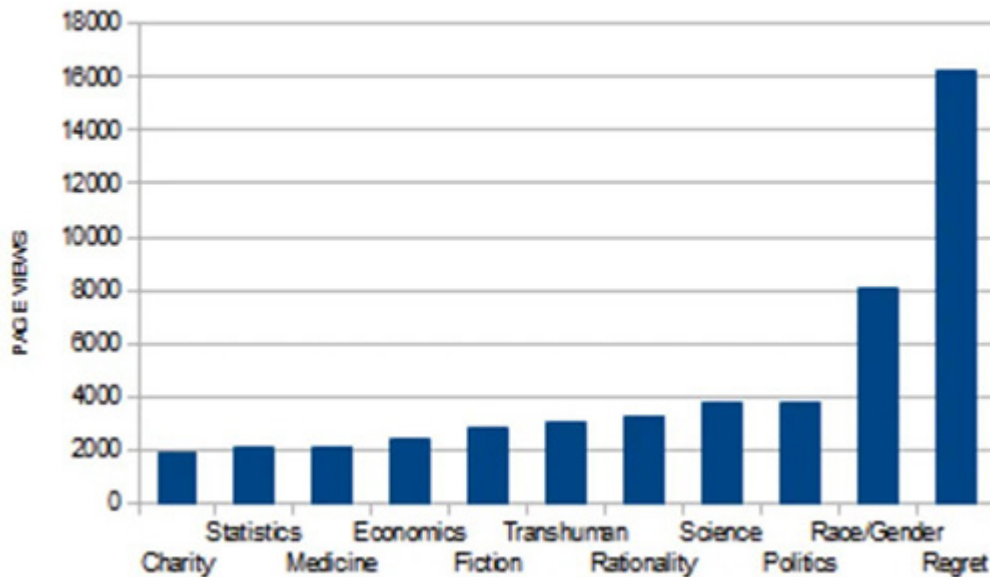
Furthermore, significant controversy existed with how the police officers involved should be punished (as punishing them would signal that police officers should avoid high crime areas, whereas letting the officers off would signal support for individuals dying at the hands of police), which thus further increased the fervor on the issue.

So, as we all know, George Floyd became one of the most divisive topics in recent history. Furthermore, it is still a vivid memory for many, best illustrated by Tucker Carlson recently [airing a viral segment](#) which alleged the police officers were thrown under the bus to protect everyone else and Pierre Kory (who served as a medical expert for Floyd's family) [publishing an article](#) arguing that those officers were responsible for Floyd's death.

The Downhill Spiral

In his article Scott Alexander shared a graph which aptly summarizes the dilemma many content producers face:

Median Hits For SSC Posts, By Category



As the above data shows, posting something about a polarizing and divisive topic which irritates his readers gets a lot of traffic, whereas posting about something which benefits humanity (e.g., charity) gets very little traffic. This in turn describes much of the online information economy.

Scott Alexander also illustrated how this situation (which I ascribe to a need for dopamine spikes) creates a lose-lose situation for activists. If activists chose to promote a message that is not controversial, people agree with it, but are not motivated to do anything and forget about it. Conversely, if they chose to promote a highly controversial message, it gets a lot of attention, but many who hear it are not motivated to support the cause.

For instance, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), is well known for staging publicity stunts that really upset people (e.g., when there was a water crisis in Detroit, they offered to pay the water bills for any family which agreed to stop eating meat).

As a result, almost everyone knows about PETA, but a relatively small number of people are converted to supporting animal rights as a result of PETA's actions (and conversely

many actually decide to protest PETA by doing things like eating meat). Conversely, principled animal rights groups that promote messages most people agree with never get any attention or motivate those who hear them to take action and thus also can't shift the public barometer.

Similarly, if you look at all the BLM events since Floyd's death, it's quite hard to say if they accomplished anything or created any of the changes the less radical members of BLM had spent years pushing for. Instead people are simply much more divided on this issue now, and many of the provisions that were put into place at the time of the protests are now being rolled back.

On the internet, you see a similar dynamic. Those who promote the most provocative or divisive content tend to get all the attention, while the more moderate voices are drowned out unless they already have a large following.

Note: *Before the "fake news" meme was weaponized against anyone who challenged the status quo, it was directed at a legitimate issue; many websites would publish patently false stories that were crafted in such a manner as to produce maximum outrage and have people be compelled to share them (e.g., "second man eaten by alligator that climbed out of a NYC sewer – city officials refuse to address this growing crisis").*

Navigating the Attention Economy

I've been aware of this issue for much of my life and put a lot of thought into the best ways to both get people's attention and to do so in an ethical way that benefits everyone involved. My own perspectives here were largely shaped by my faith's belief that "anything of true value takes prolonged work to attain, while anything that promises instant gratification typically has minimal value."

Because of this, I believe that a long and sustained effort to promote a good message rather than going for provocative topics and click-bait typically results in the best long term results.

For example, I've followed a lot of natural health websites over the years, and noted that [Dr. Mercola](#) has consistently gained a much larger following than the rest of them. In parallel, I've noted that [Mercola's website](#) only covered things that could be supported with credible references, and that a relatively moderate tone was used which did not claim more than could be claimed with the available information.

In contrast, many of the other natural health websites frequently would cover much more provocative subjects that they often could not provide evidence to substantiate, and while this might provide a temporary spike in traffic, it greatly limited their sustained growth because readers gradually realized not everything said there was true.

The central dilemma I in turn have faced has been “how do you get people to care about subjects that do not directly affect them” and “how do you do so in a manner that does not dissipate once the emotions of the moment have passed.” My strategies have been:

1. Connect the issue at hand to something I believe people already care about. For instance, as much as I complain about the medical system, I think the unnecessary suffering it creates is far less than what the military-industrial-complex inflicts upon the world – but sadly most people are numb and apathetic to that issue. In turn, a large part of why I decided to pursue medicine was because I saw that the same exploitative practices were used in both industries.

I thus thought that if I could make people recognize medicine's predatory business practices (which they often could not ignore since they were being directly harmed by them), then they would also be open to considering what the military was doing overseas.

Similarly, a major reason why I constantly mention similarities to the COVID-19 response when discussing previous medical atrocities is so that a context can be created to anchor the reality of those atrocities to each reader as almost everyone was directly affected by how COVID-19 was handled.

2. Do everything I can to make my content be genuine (e.g., writing in a heartfelt manner, trying to focus on the crux of the issue, and doing my best to ensure both

the quality and integrity of what I write – which is very challenging when you consider how many data points are often involved), and then having faith it will be appropriately received.

I find one of the most important things for doing this is having a frame of mind which prioritizes discovering what is true rather than being right (and is comfortable accepting when you are wrong), and I believe this mindset is imperative for effectively navigating the immensely complex and divisive times we now live in.

3. Waiting for the correct window to cover something. Throughout my life, I've observed doing things at the right time allows you to get much more done (e.g., you do not run into all the resistance of trying to push things through), so as the years have gone by, I've come to have more and more faith in allowing things to unfold as the universe wishes for them to happen rather than forcing my desired outcome to be what happens.

For instance, I never planned to be a blogger as it takes an immense amount of work to build a following, and I did not have the time to commit to it. However, during the vaccination campaign, I started to have a very strong intuition I needed to get a message out through writing.

I then made a few unsuccessful attempts to get that message out with my friend's platforms and then before giving up, tried posting it myself on in a few places online (which I did not expect to go anywhere). To my great surprise, it caught on, and [Steve Kirsch](#) for some reason decided to build a platform for me to get the message out.

Not sure what do with this newfound following, I shared [the log of the COVID vaccine injuries](#) that for some reason I'd felt strongly compelled to compile over the last year. [It went viral](#) and thus created this platform.

Since that time, I've continued to focus on posting about what feels "right" for the moment and things keep on working out in very fortunate ways for this publication.

So, even though writing here takes a lot of time (e.g., I've had to make sacrifices in my personal life and I can't see as many patients now) – the amount of positive good I can do for the world has already greatly exceeded what I thought would ever be possible even if I pushed as hard as I could to make things happen.

Note: *Allowing a patient's system to guide the pace and direction of treatment is also frequently the fastest way to cure a complex illness.*

While this sounds "easy," it is initially extremely challenging to let go of what you think needs to happen and what you want to happen – especially since you have to also be able to simultaneously recognize when a little push needs to be given to initiate the natural healing process or when it is critical for you take control of what's happening in order to protect the patient.

Conclusion

[An obscure song](#) I heard decades ago provides an incredibly poignant description of the world by illustrating how the rulers of the world have continually hidden the truth from us and then trapped us within a state of mind that makes it impossible to see it. One of the most memorable lyric in it is:

*And what you'll find is hate so blind
It destroys every way out of here
And what you'll find is hate so blind
It destroys every way out of here*

Since I was a child I've been able to viscerally feel how the mass media manipulates and emotionally antagonizes us, and it's been immensely depressing to see how effectively it invisibly influences those around me.

Similarly, once I started entering the holistic health field, I noticed one of the frequent pieces of advice I heard from many of the now forgotten figures in that movement was that the greatest thing you could do your health was to turn off the television as they all

recognized how psychologically damaging the emotional manipulation (which the media thrives upon) was.

On one hand, what they each predicted is even more true now than it was in the past as, thanks to the internet, we are constantly inundated with the media from every direction and as hard as we try to escape it, we often can't and frequently feel we have no choice but to go along with the tide it creates.

This trend is best illustrated by the tsunami of mental illness (e.g., anxiety and depression) affecting the current generation of children which **has been directly linked to their continual consumption of social media.**

Conversely, because of the more and more audacious lies being fed to us by the mainstream media, due to the ease by which independent information (e.g., competing narratives) can be easily dispersed through the internet, more and more people are waking up both to ideas that the media has continually censored (e.g., that vaccines are not always "safe and effective") and that it just is not healthy for them to even listen to its lies in the first place.

Having watched this dynamic play out for decades, I feel the current shift we are witnessing is nothing short of remarkable. However at the same time, it's a very different paradigm and cultures typically struggle when they have to suddenly confront massive changes in the foundational constructs of society.

For instance, how do you functionally process the overwhelming amount of information the internet puts at our fingertips? I would argue many people can't, and this is both the root of both much of the mental illness we are seeing in the digital age and why it's so hard for the right voices to be heard is the sea of noise that permeates every facet of our lives.

Similarly, to process that information, we've transitioned to a lifestyle that's replaced most of our physical activity with mental activity, something which places immense strain on the body, mind, and spirit, and I believe is a root cause of much of the physical and mental illness we see today.

In short, the new environment we've found ourselves in has placed us under a variety of pressures many are understandably struggling to handle. The hope I and many other share is that this dizzying pace of events is making many things (e.g., the emptiness and dishonesty of the media) easy enough to see and that it will encourage many of us to move beyond the longstanding paradigm of being controlled through negativity.

Being able to navigate this new reality is highly dependent on the state of mind you engage it with, and I hope that some of the approaches I use and shared here will assist you in engaging it too.

A Note From Dr. Mercola About the Author

A Midwestern Doctor (AMD) is a board-certified physician in the Midwest and a longtime reader of Mercola.com. I appreciate his exceptional insight on a wide range of topics and I'm grateful to share them. I also respect his desire to remain anonymous as he is still on the front lines treating patients. To find more of AMD's work, be sure to check out [The Forgotten Side of Medicine](#) on Substack.