

How do we solve the world's big issues if we are not interested in truth?

Making good decisions on issues of importance like climate change requires access to evidenced-based, truthful information. And yet we currently live in a world where there has never been greater effort to control people through misinformation. Unfortunately, more and more people simply don't seem to care.

Likely of no surprise to anyone, we have once again seen evidence of the current lack of public interest in truthful fact-based reporting, this time here in Canada. As a result of a new Canadian law requiring companies like Google and Meta (Facebook/Instagram) to compensate traditional media for posting or linking to their content, Meta has banned all Canadian news media from its platforms. Google is contemplating the same but has not yet implemented any change.



Source: [istockphoto.com](https://www.istockphoto.com)

Some background on how we got here. The Canadian news media has long had a revenue model that included both advertising and subscription revenues. The issue is that big tech (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) are now the main beneficiaries of online ad revenue estimated at \$9.7 Billion in 2020 (with 90% of this revenue going to just two companies), while the news industry has lost just over half its revenues over the past decade. The Canadian government has responded with Bill C-18, the Online News Act, in which big tech would pay news companies for their content. The result, big tech has said no – that they would just ban this content instead.

For us, the issue is not who is right and who is wrong (as this can be the content of a much larger discussion); but rather the fact that since Facebook has banned Canadian news sources, **its users, for the most part, don't seem to miss it**

or care. After a month of blocking news, analysis has confirmed that “Daily active users of Facebook and time spent on the app in Canada have stayed roughly unchanged since parent company Meta started blocking news.”

This should be the headline. The lack of interest in genuine news to keep people informed should have people outraged. Yes, there were complaints by users who could not share important safety information when their local communities were impacted by wildfires. Access to credible, timely information was critical for those whose very homes were at risk. But in the end, even public safety was not enough to get Facebook users to fight back.

Of course, this comes as no surprise to anyone these days. The lack of interest in truth is an ongoing topic. There are different reasons why this is the case. For some younger people, they simply have no interest in news. From “it just makes me feel bad” and “it has nothing to do with me”, we have a demographic with little interest in what is going on in the world at large. Then, there are those that have made up their minds on the issues they think are important and only want to see input from those they agree with. Often, these are the folks who do not trust the media and think they are heavily influenced by the other side (whoever that may be). After all, social media algorithms are structured to keep user’s interest in staying on the apps by delivering information they want to see. The truth is not one of the criteria.

This is part of a larger issue where we no longer trust experts to provide us with useful information as input to our decision making. As we discussed 5 years ago, in his book **“The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters”**, Tom Nichols, makes the case that America has taken freedom and liberty to an unrealistic extreme – that there is a common belief that everyone is equal and thus, so are their opinions. Experts are no longer respected to the point where *“we actively resent them, with*

many people assuming that experts are wrong simply by virtue of being an expert.” He goes on “The issue is not indifference to established knowledge; it’s the emergence of a positive hostility to such knowledge.” In fact, those that disagree with these experts are often lauded for having the courage to stand up to corrupt elites.

The reality is that a free press is a necessary pillar of modern democracies and is essential to providing accurate impartial information on issues of importance. And experts, by the very definition of the word “expert”, are needed to understand and progress complex issues like climate change.

While people are arguing about who pays to enable news organizations to survive and thrive, government should be more concerned about the public’s access to verified credible sources as part of the response to any search for information.

In an interesting article from last week’s New York climate week, Bill Gates mused, “Are we science people or are we idiots?” A bit harsh – maybe – but sadly, a good question.