There has rightfully been much public discussion on how to fight back against the scourge of fake news. We at ACSH attempted to shed some light on the issue by publishing a guide to detecting fake science news [2].

Perhaps just as troubling as the spread of fake news is the proliferation of non-news; that is, fluff pieces with little to no news value that seem aimed at generating clicks. The worthwhile goal of informing the public about relevant global events, which is presumably the entire point of journalism, has been replaced by entertainment.

Obviously, this isn't a new development, but it seems to have gone into overdrive in recent years. To stay in business, media outlets need viewers. So, they give readers what they want, which apparently consists largely of pointless political bickering, epic acts of stupidity, and naked people.

In this article [3], a CNN political analyst -- who clearly spends way too much time on Twitter -- is wondering where President Trump got that wrestling GIF that he tweeted.
Fox News wasted precious electrons on an article about a belly-flop gone wrong: Celine Dion posing naked for Vogue is apparently worth a headline, too: Even the normally stoic journalists at BBC sometimes feel the need to generate some clickbait.

Norway 'troll penis' restored to its former upstanding glory

Like a jelly donut, a fluff piece every once in a while is perfectly fine. But when our entire diet consists of the journalistic equivalent of jelly donuts, then we have a problem.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to pin the blame on any one entity. It's the classic chicken-or-egg scenario. Does the media provide mostly useless journalism because that's what Americans want,
or have Americans simply become accustomed to fluff because that's what the media likes to serve up? Of course, the answer is probably a little of both.

Collectively, as a society, we seem to suffer from ADHD. Mainstream news both reflects and encourages that behavior. Social media -- that perfect storm of incivility, anti-intellectualism, and tribalism [7] -- exacerbates the problem. Instead of digesting and pondering complex news, we prefer the quick fix that is the "outrage du jour."

It really shouldn't be surprising, therefore, that American culture is in the state that we find it in 2017: Dangerously unknowledgeable [8] and hyperpartisan.

The good news is that there is a solution. And that solution involves personal responsibility. If you want to lose weight, you have to put down the donuts and go exercise. If you want to be an informed citizen, you need to turn off the TV and read.

It takes self-discipline, but if enough Americans did just that, perhaps we could finally get the journalism we desperately need.

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