

IDEA AND DEFINITION OF NEWS

'News is anything that makes a reader say "Gee whiz"! Arthur Mac Ewen

As the word implies, news contains much that is new, informing people about something that has just happened. But this is not happening always as some stories run for decades and others are recycled with a gloss of newness supplied to it.

News is, anything out of the ordinary, it is the current happenings. It is anything that makes the reader surprised and curious. News is anything that will make people talk. News is the issue for discussions and debates. Any event, which affects most of the people, interest most of the audiences and involves most of the people, is news. Thus, news can be called an account of the events written for the people who were unable to witness it.

'News' is the written, audio, or visual construction of an event or happening or an incident. The news is constantly in search of action, movements, new developments, surprises, and sudden reversals, ups and downs of fate and facts and follies of the mankind.

On the surface, defining news is a simple task. News is an account of what is happening around us. It may involve current events, new initiatives or ongoing projects or issues. But a newspaper does not only print news of the day. It also prints background analysis, opinions, and human-interest stories. Choosing what's news can be harder. The reporter chooses stories from the flood of information and events happening in the world and in their community. Stories are normally selected because of their importance, emotion, impact, timeliness and interest.

Functions of News

News contains much that is new. 'News is anything out of the ordinary.' 'News is anything published in a newspaper which interests a large number of people'. The main functions of news are:

1. News **informs** people about anything unusual that take place in the society.

Mysteries, small or big, interest people and so mysteries are news. Events that affect people's lives are news, the more people affected the bigger the news.

2. People **learn** something new every day through news they get from newspaper or television. They read about things they have heard about and also would like to read about.

3. News affects people and is capable of stirring widespread **awareness**. News touches the deepest emotion of the people and appeals somehow to everyone. Thus news affects the government as well as the common people.

4. Important **messages** and decisions of the government are **conveyed** to the people through the medium of news. News broadcast carry important statements by persons in authority to the people.

5. Conflicts between man to man and also between man and environment are carried out as news. These affect us in one-way or other. Natural phenomena like violence, calamities and disasters make us aware of the present situations and **keep a check** on growing violence in our society.

6. New trends, events and ideas are the focus of soft news and thus grasp the imagination of people in the society. This further brings about change and **progress** for the country.

7. News focus on the economic, political and cultural aspects of a nation and people throughout the world learn about other nation through news only. News **forms an image** of a nation to the outside world.

8. Journalist may predict that something will happen thus forming a mental

image of an event and thus increase the **curiosity** of the audience making the news more and more relevant.

9. Reference to persons in news makes them more **popular** and **famous**. Elite personalities crave to remain in news to keep up with their image though negative publicity too these days is seen as a medium of becoming famous.

10. Stories and pictures with the capacity to entertain or amuse an audience is always the main function of news. **Entertainment** through news is done by carrying stories relating to showbiz, drama, sex, and humorous treatment by use of photographs or witty headlines.

CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF NEWS

It is said that news is difficult to define. However, news remains something that surprises the reader, listener and viewer, and will always remain so. Let us look at some of its definitions:

- Most dictionaries impart the meaning of ‘news’ as “an account of a recent event, or information that’s not known previously.
- According to the Random House Dictionary of English Language, the meaning of ‘news’ is: “a report of a recent event; intelligence, information.
- The Oxford Dictionary says: News is the report of recent events, or occurrences brought or coming to one as new information; new occurrences as a subject of report or talk.”
- Any important information coming from North, East, West and South, which deserve to be taken as ‘news’.
- Lord Northcliffe, the famous British editor, said of news: “News is something that somebody somewhere doesn’t want to print, wants to suppress. All the rest is advertising.”
- News is what people want to read about themselves.
- News is essentially about people, events, surrounding people, and places. “Get the Truth and print it,” said John S. Knight, founder of a greatest U.S. newspaper chain, adding, news is heavy on community service, and society interest and mindful of the city’s pecking order in civic and social affairs.
- When a dog bites man, that’s not news; but when a man bites dog that’s news.
- News is what affects readers directly. An emotional event that will make people laugh or cry.
- News is a timely account of a recent, interesting and significant event.
- Out of the ordinary, departure from routine convention.
- Change. The passing of an era, old landmarks being torn down, new lifestyles replacing old, new attitudes on old questions, anniversaries of major events.
- A journalism professor of Stanford University, USA, Chilton R. Bush, defined news as “...the report of an event that a reader can and will understand.”
- Another pragmatic view in defining news, says: “News is an account of an event which a newspaper prints in the belief that by so doing it will profit.”

After reading the above varied definitions of news, you would have understood the broad nature and concept of news. But it is difficult to accurately define ‘news’. For, to be correctly termed as the ‘News’, any information must be factual, new and interesting. There must be facts to report; without facts, there

can be no news. It is important that these facts must be new to the reader, listener and the viewer. Again, news is what's being published on the news pages of newspapers, and magazines, broadcast on radio and telecast on television networks, or put out on the Internet. News is also about the lives, loves and scandals of the famous, the rich and the notorious.

As William Metz, professor of journalism, University of Nevada, USA, says: "While it may not be possible to describe it precisely in words, every news reporter must come to a personal understanding of nature of news, must reach some conclusion about its essence before it is possible to recognise 'news' when it happens." We can also say in simple terms, as a well-known British writer and author, Evelyn Waugh, wrote in his book, "Scoop", way back in 1938 that "news is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read. And, it's only news until he has read it. After that it's dead."

Here, it's also important to know as to what we mean by 'news sense', or 'news judgment'. "Being able to identify what will interest readers is called having news sense," said a noted American professor of journalism, Wyford Hicks. The important dictum about the news, which is even somewhat contradictory is, bad news sells more newspapers than good news. So, what would be the news today? Given the limits of space, time and resources, what's important, what isn't, what's to be left in, what's to be left out? And in the age of Internet, infinity, who's to say what's news, asks Wyford Hicks.

Thus, it will not be an exaggeration to say that there are almost as many definitions of the news as there are reporters/journalists. Most news reporters will of course agree that every occurrence or event in itself is not and cannot be the 'news'.