most of us are ashamed of it

HILDA BURKE
PSYCHOTHERAPIST

refers to taking delight in other people's bad news. It's a part of human nature that most of us are ashamed of.

"Most of us won't admit to this and it's often subconscious but it's there."

Burke's theory is backed by Harley Street psychiatrist, Dr Raj Persaud, who believes our fascination stems back to caveman times and being hypervigilant to danger.

He said: "It is pivotal to the evolution theory that in order to survive you have to focus on danger.

"If you ignore it, historically you won't survive and this has been passed down through generations.

"Bad news is often connected to something dangerous, so it is a positive thing and a natural instinct to take an interest in those stories or events to ensure you can overcome them."

The Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman was one of the first to note that humans have a tendency to give far more attention to negative details than positive ones.

After all, someone taking part in a stupid act or something going terribly wrong generally attracts greater interest than a new and innovative invention such as smart meters. "We've come to learn to be suspicious of news," says counsellor and psychotherapist, Katerina Georgiou.

"I think over time, we have polarised the news between brilliance and horror. In relation to smart meters, what we have here is a projection onto the government.

"Leaders and heads of organisations are always going to be the perfect people to project on to for all society's ills. There is always going to be a human desire to topple down power.

"It's a process that happens in the mass news media, but it's a process that happens on a personal level between people all the time also."

So maybe the pull is to find out whether smart meters can really cause a cyber attack, result in an electrical fire or produce inaccurate readings that can inflate a customer's bill.

Reacting to bad news is human nature that we're all guilty of but it's important to look beneath the headline at the facts.

Words of the experts to make you think again

Howard Porter - CEO, British Electrotechnical and Allied Manufacturers' Association "Meters are installed by experienced technicians with extensive training"

Jane Lucy - Founder and CEO, Labrador "Consumers should be confident that switching suppliers can be easy"

Dr Azadeh Peyman - Public Health England "Radio waves produced by smart meters do not pose a risk to our health"

Claire Perry - Energy Minister "Smart meters are ending estimated bills, helping to save money and are forecast to take £300m off consumer bills alone"