

When Preposterous Lies Become Credible 'Truth' on the Internet

It is fascinating to watch and yet very disturbing. A boldfaced lie is manufactured on the internet, and within days, it has the air of truth behind it. Multiple sites now carry the same story, and commenters cite it as if it's the gospel truth.

To call this dangerous would be an understatement. People's reputations, if not their very lives, are on the line.

Of course, even without the internet, the media have the power to destroy and discredit by repeating the same misinformation on TV, radio and in print.

Think, for example, of the still-believed myth that President Trump stated that some violent, white supremacists (including neo-Nazis and the like) were "fine people."

As Steve Cortes pointed out on Real Clear Politics, "News anchors and pundits have repeated lies about Donald Trump and race so often that some of these narratives seem true, even to Americans who embrace the fruits of the president's policies. The most pernicious and pervasive of these lies is the 'Charlottesville Hoax,' the fake-news fabrication that he described the neo-Nazis who rallied in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 as 'fine people.'"

What the president actually said (in response to a question) was, "Excuse me, they didn't put themselves down as neo-Nazis, and you had some very bad people in that group. But you also had people that were very fine people on both sides. You had people in that group—excuse me, excuse me, I saw the same pictures you did. You had people in that group that were there

to protest the taking down of, to them, a very, very important statue and the renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name.”

Then, responding to another question, he said, “I’m not talking about the neo-Nazis and white nationalists because they should be condemned totally.”

What could be clearer? Yet watching Chris Cuomo report on Trump’s remarks back in April, aided by selectively-edited video, you would have no idea as to what the president really said.

That is simply the power of TV and news media.

But the problem is exacerbated through the phenomenon of internet, where a lie can spread and develop and take on a life of its own virtually overnight. A manufactured (or, simply inaccurate) quotation can become sacrosanct. A fabricated report can become fact.

The snowball effect is frightening to watch, with web citations literally growing by the minute.

“It’s everywhere online. It must be true!”

Many times, when dealing with Black Hebrew Israelites (and others who deny that today’s Jews are really Jews), I see this quote, attributed to former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser: “The Jews will never be able to live in Israel in peace because they left here black and came back white.”

What documentation is offered to support this quote? What verified news source? What book? What recorded speech?

No verifiable documentation is offered, since there is no evidence for such a quote.

Yet a 2018 article posted on Times of Israel, an article which helps set the record straight, noted that, “Amazon is

currently offering a T-shirt" which carries this very quote. The lie is now a meme.

This week, in response to one of my tweets linked to my article about religious liberty in California, someone tweeted, "Isn't this the Jewish 'Christian' who wants 2 put mainstream Christians in Jail 4 believing that the Church is Israel today?"

Remarkably, this person believed that: 1) I was not a true Christian, since I reference myself as a Jewish follower of Jesus; 2) I want to put "mainstream Christians" in jail; and 3) my reason for doing so is that they believe that "the Church is Israel today."

The same day, someone commented on YouTube, "isnt doc brown the dumb [expletive] that wants 'anti semites to go to jail then edited his interview with micheal e jones in such a way that allowed him to call micheal an anti semite?" (Some of these people also believe I'm an undercover Mossad agent and a Zionist shill. Seriously!)

I immediately recognized the source of these absurd charges, which grow crazier by the day. In fact, I had made a detailed video rebutting the misinformation shortly after I saw some of the charges appear online.

But who cares about truth when the lie is so much juicier? Who cares about facts when the fabrication supports the myth?

Cordell Hull, FDR's secretary of state, once said, "A lie will gallop halfway round the world before the truth has time to pull its breeches on."

But this quote, about the speed with which misinformation is spread, is commonly attributed to Winston Churchill, in whose name it is widely circulated online.

This prompted the director of the National Churchill Museum at

Westminster College, Tim Riley, to say, "The irony is that today such misattributed quotes circle the globe a thousand times before the truth even begins to think about putting on pants."

Exactly. And when it concerns you directly, it can be very distressing to behold.

In my own case, when I see these ridiculous rumors, I can only laugh and then pity the poor souls who believe them. They don't hurt me at all, and the lies come with the turf.

But in other cases, the libels are much more serious and dangerous, to the point that an internet lie can destroy a person's life in a moment's time.

May I encourage everyone to exercise a little wisdom and discernment? To be careful not to repeat something controversial unless you can verify it? To look for actual, factual evidence?

Is this too much to ask?