

And Once Upon a Time... There Was Truth  
by Gary Goldman | May 24, 2021 | Op-Ed

Once upon a time, we woke up looking forward to stepping outside and grabbing that old newspaper, so we could spread it along our kitchen table, sip on our coffee and get on with our ‘in the know’ state of the daily news. Once upon a time we turned the radio on during our ride to work and enjoyed listening to the current affairs of our local area and beyond. Once upon a time, we looked forward to coming home from work and turning on the nightly news on our big televisions while resting our feet on the perpetually loved recliner after a full day of work. Once upon a time we believed that reporters, journalists and media editors were our trustworthy source of information... and those were the times when ‘The whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ meant something to us. We would find ourselves connected to information, diving into being well informed and being excited about our daily newspaper ritual. We were educated on current affairs; we were dependent on the hard work of the correspondents who ensured unbiased accuracy on the news being delivered to us. Those days have fallen behind us, leaving us forced to consistently get around the truth.

For those of us who know true journalism, we know we are reaching a critical point where we are forced to question everything and everyone; we can no longer read the paper without fact checking, we can no longer watch the news without questioning the context of content, we can no longer listen to the radio without feeling increasingly misguided. What comes next? Divergence among society? Where did it all begin? Did we see it coming? What comes next?

Social Media has become for many a source of informatic news. With just a touch, most of us can acquire our news source on any social media platform, leading social media to become the main source of breaking stories, nearing 65% of the 2.4 billion of internet users. From Facebook to Twitter, from Instagram to Snapchat, from YouTube to the newly overly popular TikTok. With over a half a billion worldwide users, and 40,000 employees, TikTok has become the newest Next Big Thing for many industries, including the once relied upon News Industry. In the age of ‘Fake News’ 50% of web users rely on social media platforms as their main source of news information. This is a very disturbing statistic, especially when considering the average visitor will click on an article and read for less than 15 seconds!

According to a team study led by Sinan Aral from MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, ‘falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false *political news* than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information.’ Through extensive data research on 160,000 stories released on Twitter by three million people between the years of 2006-2017, the team was able to investigate the ‘differential diffusion of all of the verified true and false news stories’ – disturbingly concluding that robots actually spread true as well as false news at the same rate as humans.

Although changing the meaning of the word ‘Truth’ may have started with a little white lie, there is an incredibly unique marriage between the algorithms found in social media and advertising

systems where people can take things out of context and create the, notorious ‘Fake News’ that has gripped much of our nation.

Fake News is not only disturbing but it is also infuriating and when we cannot change the definition of the word truth, because facts say otherwise, we close our eyes and yell, and stamp our feet like spoiled little kids. According to former President Trump, in reference to political campaign, ‘Social Media has more power than the money they spent, and I think to a certain extent, I proved that.’ Not only has the rise of social media news brought along a plethora of problems, but the trending news source has introduced the problematic algorithms – resulting in many social media users spending much of their time exposed to political propaganda, with much of the content encompassing puffery, drumbeating and opponent slugging. Fake News has taken over the web, the television, even our good ole newspaper, but to state that former President Trump has deployed this term to attack news media is a farce. On Hillary Clinton’s December 8<sup>th</sup> of 2016 speech, she goes on to state that the ‘Epidemic of malicious fake news and false propaganda that flooded social media over the past year’ ‘It’s now clear that so-called fake news have real world consequences’. One thing we can agree on is the fact that fake news does have real consequences. The truth will have an affect in your life. It can be ugly. It can be painful. It can also have moral and ethical benefits; but the political correctness and wokie perpetual phrasing of news stories with language that is intentionally used to avoid offending or marginalizing specific social groups will never be the answer.

While having access to the news at the tip of our fingertips is extraordinary, not checking sources and not taking precaution is a huge mistake. Keep in mind that in accordance with the First amendment, ‘Freedom of Speech’ refers to ‘government restrictions’, with that being said social media companies are not government institutions, therefore able to ‘control their content’ as they see fit and at times creating a truth, false enough to empower them.

We cannot survive in a society without truth. We cannot keep going with the continuously feeling of deceit. We must find a way to stop the mendacious propaganda from creating the dreadful smoking mirror. Only then we will be able to look forward to our morning paper, to our ride to work while listening to the news on the radio, and to the nightly report much like our once upon a time: ***Whole truth... and nothing but the truth.***