

# Information, Disinformation and the Credibility Crisis. Where is the Truth in Today's News Reporting?

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*Where is the truth in news reporting today? A large percentage of the American population no longer trusts mainstream news outlets either on television or in print. A June 2013 Gallup poll indicates nearly 4 out of 5 Americans among younger generations from age 21-64 cannot trust the major news networks, not when the likes of NBC and MSNBC are owned by General Electric, Comcast and possibly Time Warner in this age of super-mergers. Both the circulation and very survival of America's news print organizations have shriveled or dried up completely.*

Amongst the nation's largest cities, few traditional newspapers are still left today. Even the perennial powerhouse dailies like the New York Times, Washington Post and LA Times have gravely suffered, and in an attempt to keep up with the changing times, years ago moved to the internet as their mainstay means of surviving the computer age. Time Magazine and Newsweek similarly have been forced to downsize with Newsweek permanently suspending its print circulation. In recent years Time Magazine in print has been reduced in size to a mere skimpy little shadow of what it once was.

To a significant portion of Americans, all the mainstream news corporations have been rendered state propaganda and disinformation tools for the US government. Indeed their embedded (alias "in-bed") news reporting has become a cynical joke amongst the populace. Entertainment fluff and filler space have come to obscure and replace real news and real issues that vitally affect the well being, safety and concerns of the American public. The controlling powers behind mainstream media outlets have made a concerted effort to keep American citizens the last to know especially when it comes to world events and developments.

According to that same Gallup poll from last year, this growing distrust that Americans have towards mainstream news is only exceeded by their distrust towards big business, HMO's and US Congress. Even last month's Gallup poll shows President Obama's approval rating dipping to an all time low of just 39% with the majority of Americans now disapproving of his job performance. This negative, across-the-boards view reflects both a generalized discontent and disconnect with today's status quo power structure. And as a result, a mass exodus of US citizens have switched viewing their world through the known distorted lens of traditional news coverage to that of the world wide web, currently celebrating its quarter century anniversary this week.

Hence, in recent years a growing number of people have been turning to online sources as their primary means for news information and current world events. Despite unlimited

numbers to choose from of websites portending to depict accurate coverage of domestic and international events, in today's world the notion of objective, unbiased news coverage becomes highly suspect. Thus, an informed public must be extremely discerning when it comes to believing what is the truth and what are the lies based on propagandist manipulation. Ultimately individuals will naturally gravitate toward whatever sources of news best fit their particular biases and beliefs based on their world paradigm. So one's sense of reality and truth about the world becomes both highly elusive and subjective, if not impossible to tease out and grasp.

To compound this already perplexing, complex problem, the systematic dumbing-down of America has produced a mounting population that all too frequently gullibly accepts either the spoon-fed deception and lies of mainstream media or often equally biased non-mainstream news outlets. For decades now Americans have been conditioned to no longer think critically and discriminately to sort out facts from fiction.

Creative questioning, exploring curiosity or daring to challenge authority is entirely absent from the current US public education system bent on homogenized conformity and socialization toward robotic compliance. And as a consequence, too many Americans blindly accept as gospel truth anything they read, that is if they still read at all, naively assuming it would not be fit to print on the internet, in books, magazines or newspapers or seen on TV, if it were not all true.

In a related matter of a few decades US academic standards have plummeted from near the global top to far down the list. Based on a 2009 Harvard study, American students rank 25<sup>th</sup> out of 34 developed nations in math and science. Likewise over the same period, the quality of written English skills of incoming college freshmen has also significantly deteriorated while an alarming increase in illiteracy rates amongst US high school graduates has been observed. The US Department of Education revealed that in 2010 twenty-six percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders fell well below the basic reading level, indicating that over a quarter of high school graduates these days do not possess the necessary skills to perform basic, everyday literacy functions.

An extremely strong correlation between this steady decline in academic standards and increased poverty rates in America largely accounts for these dismal recent trends in US education. Then it logically follows that the millions of Americans who are struggling to survive in today's hectic, pressured world neither have the time nor attention span to engage in the extra burden of fact-checking and cross-checking news sources. Yet to arrive at a closer proximity of what is actually occurring in the world and stay informed, it seems necessary.

An overwhelming, interrelated, co-existing factor further complicates this already muddled filter that distorts reality and events as they are - the growing chasm between the 1% haves in this status quo economic-political system, and the rest of us 99 percenters who struggle to survive within this same inequitable, broken system. The rapidly widening disparity between the rich and poor is driving up unprecedented levels of anxiety, powerlessness and cynicism amongst the population. The cultural values that have historically brainwashed consumers toward indiscriminate buying and crass materialism no longer have the same effect when the increasing economic gap between the 1% elite and the 99% have-nots is sinking the middle class into a swelling underclass of Americans literally fighting for survival.

For the first time in US history, the standard of living and upward mobility that have been a constant given for every previous younger generation in America is now sadly a phenomenon of the past. Also for the first time a growing segment of citizens is recognizing that the status quo system is non-sustainable over the long run. They have come to painfully realize that the economic-political system of trickle down economics and so called free enterprise democracy - rooted in exploitation, competition, greed and sociopathy - no longer serves them or is even working. Hence, vast increasing numbers of desperate Americans have become so skeptical, cynical and disenchanting, they do not believe in much of anything except in their own bleak future.

Songwriter Paul Simon once wrote, "Where have you gone Joe Dimaggio?" reacting to the absence of American heroes. Virtually all the greatest modern superstar athletes have broken records by cheating on performance-enhancing drugs. Film and singing idols have their dirty laundry viewed and aired daily in public. And America's most powerful leaders - politicians and generals - have long been viewed alongside the lowly used car salesmen as the most notorious liars, swindlers and cheats.

Feeling betrayed by their own government, the growing masses have finally come to realize the scam of American democracy, that their government they once trusted represents and protects only the special interests of the powerful elite, having systematically bought off their government representatives only to do the elite's shady, unfair bidding. They see the dominoes of austerity spreading throughout southern Europe, fast concluding that the writing on the wall for a very grim tomorrow awaits them as well. They witness the ravages of climate change and the inability of the government to protect them from free falling disasters. They observe the rising political unrest in today's rapidly polarizing world, the re-emergence of explosively tense cold war hostilities between East versus West, and potential World War III's triggered at any moment in any number of places, Ukraine, Syria, Iran, North Korea. Take your pick.

Without the illusion of security to buffer them and nothing and no one left to trust, where can the public turn to in order to understand and comprehend their ever changing world that to them is spinning out of control? If mainstream media can no longer be trusted, is the infinite number of blog sites and alternative news sites spewing out their own versions of reality any more accurate in delivering the truth to a lied to, skeptical and forsaken world? A proliferation of bogus, off-the-wall, conspiracy theories-gone-mad websites are currently feeding a frenzied, disenfranchised, albeit fringe element. Meanwhile, hundreds of small alternative news sites have mushroomed to serve an expanding market of news consumers desperately searching for honest and accurate depiction of real world events and developments as they really are.

One of them, the RT news outlet, launched in the US in 2010 became an overnight sensation largely due to its coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement, instantly becoming the biggest source of news for a growing young population watching RT on youtube. Yet unbeknownst to many RT fans for obvious reasons, RT stands for Russia Today. On RT's most popular show "Breaking The Set," its host Abby Martin recently criticized Russian President Putin for his overt act of military aggression. Russian troops invading Crimea, a region inside Ukraine along the Russian border comprised mostly of fellow ethnic Russians, is seen as a violation of the sovereign independent nation. Of course the recent coup overthrowing democratically elected leader Viktor Yanukovich covertly committed by the

West was also a clear violation of international law.

A couple days after Abby made her controversial comment, in solidarity with her colleague, another RT anchor chimed in to spontaneously announce her on the air resignation. In the meantime, the world is still waiting for any detectable recrimination from Moscow that would instantly be construed as unfairly targeting Martin for her bold honesty. Thus far no punishment has come her way, much to Western media's chagrin. But what has been widely viewed as a legitimate alternative news source delivering independent global news to the world by its viewers is now under utmost scrutiny. Additionally, a wave of mainstream press has attacked Abby Martin in an attempt to undermine her reputation and credibility, branding her an extremist as a 9/11 Truth-er kook. Suddenly mainstream press dragged out a several year old video of Ms. Martin interviewed while vehemently protesting "the inside job" of 9/11.

In damage control mode, Abby took to tweeting that she has since backed off from her earlier hard-line stance, much to the dismay of those in the truth movement contending that 9/11 was fully orchestrated by neocon government insiders. So this last week the RT anchor has been caustically blasted from both sides. The vicious zealotry of jabs from mainstream media exposes its own unethical ploys to, in one fell swoop, falsely discredit Abby Martin, RT, Putin and his Russia.

But really it is a feeble attempt to cover up its own desperate fear that she and others in alternative news outlets will continue spreading the truth to the masses, gain more popularity and trust in the process and seriously erode the establishment's credibility that "the jig may be up" for them. Mainstream reactivity is but a barometer of the very real threat that honest investigative journalism and dissemination of exposed truth pose for the powers-that-be who are in fact pulling virtually all the strings behind the curtain of censorship and control.

Meanwhile, former Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald of Edward Snowden fame who this last year fast became a rising star in the alternative news world, recently tweeted his support for Abby calling her a courageous broadcast journalist. When *Secret Wars* author and Oscar nominated documentarian Jeremy Scahill along with high profiled Greenwald were hired by eBay billionaire Pierre Omidyar several months ago to lead their own startup news organization the Intercept to focus on national security issues, the buzz inside the alt-news world began speculating that Scahill and Greenwald were selling out with the foregone conclusion that unbiased reporting from them in the future would be necessarily compromised and tainted.

That is typically how the status quo power structure handles its opposition, ultimately when most threatened resorting to either the full onslaught of character assassination as in Abby's case, or to actual assassination by murder as more than likely in Michael Hasting's case, or through the much softer, subtler, "honey is sweeter than vinegar" method of courting and buying out the opposition as potentially in Glenn and Jeremy's case.

The Intercept's senior policy analyst Marcy Wheeler recently went on record in the aftermath of last month's Ukrainian revolution speculating that the regime change came as the result of "deep dark forces" at work, implicating a coalition of groups funded by the West. On a February 23<sup>rd</sup> tweet she identified the deep funding source for the revolution to be "Pax Americana," a nebulous term for American Empire. [Mark Ames from internet news](#)

[independent Pando](#) then broke a February 28<sup>th</sup> story asserting that those deep pockets at least in part came directly from Marcy's billionaire boss Pierre Omidyar.

The Ames article included financial records of the major funding sources of the various Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) that were instrumental in the Ukraine coup. The Kyiv Post last month printed the specific breakdown of 2012 monetary contributions from the three largest funding sources of one of the more prominent Ukrainian NGO's, the Centre UA, used to overthrow the government.

Those funding sources are the taxpayer financed US Agency for International Development (USAID) at 54%, the Omidyar Network at 36% which owns both First Look Media and the Intercept, and the also tax paid for National Endowment for Democracy (NED). These funding sources financed the same opposition groups that last month ousted the existing democratically elected Ukraine government from power.

What the Intercept's senior policy analyst in her February 23<sup>rd</sup> tweet conversation failed to mention was that a significant portion of monies for the overthrow came directly from Pierre Omidyar, who for several years had been pouring millions into various neo-liberal NGO's in Ukraine. It was this interlocking coalition of neo-Nazi groups working on the ground with Omidyar's backed neo-liberals in Ukraine months in advance of the coup that currently makes up the newly formed coalition government.

This reality certainly does shed light on those "deep dark forces" at work all around the world in the form of one billionaire's money helping to shape US foreign policy, the same US foreign policy that is synonymous with the neocon agenda for regime change in every nation on earth where a US installed puppet government has not already become a US induced coup benefactor. Despite what Wheeler and Greenwald say, these "deep dark forces" do simultaneously cast a long dark shadow on the professed free press independence of their billionaire owned Intercept.

After the Pando article Ms. Wheeler subsequently responded in a tweet that the allegations connecting her boss to financing the Ukraine coup were inaccurate, yet apparently did not elaborate beyond her cursory denial. Instead within twenty-four hours, [Glenn Greenwald on the Intercept was pointing out](#) that Pierre Omidyar disclosed his financial contributions to the Ukrainian "pro-democracy" groups on the Omidyar Network website way back in September 2011, insisting that because there was complete transparency from the beginning with Omidyar's Ukraine investment, there really was no story at all. The link to Greenwald's rebuttal is below:

Even to the most casual observer a regime changing billionaire as the boss of the only two holders (Greenwald and colleague Laura Poitras also at Intercept) entrusted with all of Snowden's NSA documents might create a conflict of interest. Minimally, it raises viable questions about unbiased press and conflict of interest. That said, it is important to also point out that reporter Mark Ames' Pando website is also financed by a bunch of Silicon Valley billionaires, one of whose views Ames' admitted are "repugnant" to him. [But as Pando editor Paul Carr asserted in his March 1<sup>st</sup> rebuttal to Greenwald](#), the Pando financiers stay far and away out of their newsroom whereas Jeremy Scahill openly admitted to the Daily Beast that, "Pierre writes more on our internal messaging than anyone else," which sounds very "hands-on" in implementation of his boss' vision that Scahill also alludes is so

important to Omidyar.

So we now know that Omidyar the billionaire is passionate about co-financing regime changes with the US government and with hands-on passion also invests another quarter million dollars on a media outlet that his hired guns claim will battle that very same US government. More conflict of interest?

If an independent journalist unencumbered by his or her boss writes about anything that is honestly reported, exercising first amendment right of free press, then the particular boss should become a non-issue. However, who is to know? The differential power influence between an owner-supervisor over an employee may be so subtle that it is even too imperceptible for the employee's awareness to discern. It certainly poses another gray area in life if not a dangerous slippery slope where the need for honest transparency is essential.

Much has been written and said about all the onetime free spirited, independent-minded mavericks from the world of politics ("elected-on-hope" Obama and current right wing reactionary McCain come to mind), to journalists, inventors, entrepreneurs and artists with initially spotless reputations for integrity and ultra-independence, being courted and then co-opted with enormous cash buyouts, and subsequently subsumed and controlled by larger powerful forces and entities.

These latest developments within the alternative news world may in fact give impetus to the need for increased oversight if not producing an outright credibility crisis that thins the ranks of so called truthful, accurate reporting while inflating the ranks of the less than honest, controlled media outlets coming from both the political left and the political right. Ultimately in today's complicated world responsible consumers are relegated to having to do their own homework, taking the extra time to seek out and critically examine the more rarefied, still reputable, less biased news sources. Readily available truth in the modern world is very hard to come by.

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