

Keep The Floodgates Wide Open

Here is the history of the West in the past 30 years: There occurred what was in the grand scheme of things an utter frivolity, about which people talked a bit to pass the time as they went about their ultimately existentially gutted and frivolous lives; then the frivolity was followed by a triviality; a couple weeks later, there transpired an insignificance, followed by the most immaculate inconsequentiality. Then there took place a paltriness, which made for great chattering for two weeks; the media discussed it with fervor and reaped salaries worthy of imbuing trifles with thunder. One thing happened, then another, and then yet again; things seemed to be happening faster and faster, but they were less and less of things; everyone talked about them, but they didn't matter, so whenever the next thing happened that didn't matter, the media and the masses would move onto that. Nothing was worth saying much about, so not much was meaningfully said about anything.

In the course of this, there came about what we call the Internet, and social media, but since there was nothing constructive and immediately pressing to talk about, these were used only to circulate pornography, share pictures of puppies and lattes and nephews and Christmas trees (to circulate pornography), amplify the jibber-jabber of the official media (to circulate pornography), and to enlist some gullible men in particularly disaffected segments of society to terrible extremist terrorism.

Then came COVID-19—virus of deadly pandemic, vector of resurgent History. Finally, there is in the West something real to talk about again, not just for 15 minutes, but for what is going on months now. Not even 9/11 itself (rather than its ramifications) were discussed as much as this intangible terror. But for the first time ever, it isn't just Those Whose Talk Is Deemed Worthy To Matter—the political and media elites, the bureaucrats and think tank mouthpieces—who are having an effect on how the reality is being engaged with. There is little else of note on social media platforms and WhatsApp groups, and people are taking it seriously.

You would think that the talking heads and mouthpieces would be jubilant. After all, the phenomenon they were so excited about two decades ago is finally happening: The Internet is empowering people! The masses are speaking! Alas, there have been problems, and the legacy voices haven't been pleased. Moreover, the upswell of talk has created a proper deluge, and it's been very difficult to manage all of the information and separate the true from the false, especially for boomers, who largely run the news desks. An "infodemic," this has been called, by institutions of the liberal order ranging from [The New York Times](#) to [the World Health Organization](#).

A lot of misinformation has undoubtedly spread on social media. For example, India, which has 400 million WhatsApp users, has had a WhatsApp chatbot launched by the central government to curb misinformation, which, in its first ten days, [processed over 25 million conversations](#). But

by and large, to dub the flood of information circulating on the Internet as a complementary pandemic to the virus is nothing short of a paranoid reaction by the gatekeepers of public discourse and the dominant institutions of the ruling order.

Take [this article](#) by *The New York Times*, titled ‘Surge of Virus Misinformation Swamps Facebook and Twitter.’ It describes exactly what the headline suggests is the problem: “...a search by *The New York Times* [that] found dozens of videos, photographs and written posts on each of the social media platforms that appeared to have slipped through the cracks [of efforts to prevent misinformation].” But a more pernicious and far-reaching problem may be that this was “a search by *The New York Times*.”

This is because the *Times* is threatened by the so-called “infodemic,” where one can find not just fake news, but also, if one knows where to look, the best information, better than is being doled out by the legacy media. It is on social media that the most intelligent commentary about COVID-19, as far back as January, was already taking place, even if muzzled from being part of establishment media. For example, that was when Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Yaneer Bar-Yam and others were calling for a travel ban from China, [which may have](#) influenced Donald Trump’s decision to implement.

On the other hand, the gatekeepers, well into February, were inhabiting a different planet:



However, while those with official headlines were telling us that the real problem was racism or the ordinary flu (both still unverified as ever having pushed civilization into never-before-seen economic collapse), it was only within the “infodemic” that [someone was talking about](#) how masks were a huge part of avoiding catastrophe before [it became clearer](#) that establishment organizations had misled the public, and well before the US government [announced new mask guidelines](#). It was only within the “infodemic” that there are accounts that [have been sharing](#) sophisticated information, since affirmed, about the pharmacology that can possibly defeat the virus. It was only within the “infodemic” that there were observers [warning about the economic risks](#) associated with the virus since February with a graveness that was fear-mongering then but is reality now. It was only the unwashed hordes on the Internet [that were fostering communities](#) around life-saving open-source medical supplies.

The hallowed *New York Times*, still, would rather have had us *not* to “[try to think more carefully, but trust the experts](#).” Foremost among the experts, we can presume, would be the World Health Organization, whose epoch-making ruinous oversights and otherwise questionable follies in the last few months have included: [discouraging mask use among the public](#), even as of the end of March; somehow making it a cause of importance [to educate the masses](#) to “talk about people ‘acquiring’ or ‘contracting’ COVID19 ... [not] about people ‘transmitting COVID-19’ ‘infecting others’ or ‘spreading the virus’ as it ... assigns blame”; and not even getting its act together well enough to call it an official pandemic [until March 11](#), well past when the world had already concluded that it was one and had begun to plan accordingly.

The truth is, the ruling nexus of international organizations, governments and journalism constitutes an old order that has neither the disposition nor the cognition to think about non-linear reality, doesn’t know what it’s talking about right now, and needs to be unseated. And indeed, it is afraid that as it is losing its ability to pry the truth, its sovereignty over people’s senses and effective response is being taken over. Thus only does it groan in prideful agitation about a supposed “infodemic,” which it no longer has any moral or intellectual authority to be proclaiming.

So if the West and its liberal, humanistic institutions are the old order, what is the new that it is feeling threatened by? Externally, and in terms of material strength, it is obviously China, and internally, and in terms of informational hegemony, it is the tech industry. Indeed, there is something about the better, alternative disposition and cognition in the tech world that has led to its being the most proactive wing of at least US society with respect to the virus. (As Claire Lehmann [put it](#), tech people intuitively understand what “going viral” means.) But the steps being taken by the tech industry haven’t been received well by the media elites. Alphabet (Google’s parent company) may be able to mobilize with unprecedented speed to aid in enabling mass testing during a historic pandemic, but tech reporters of the NYT commentariat class [would much rather raise concerns](#) about social justice and privacy. Silicon Valley may be able to send 9 million masks to Americans, but Vox, after [having been part](#) of the mainstream misinformation campaign telling people that masks don’t help, [can only criticize](#).

The critiques of tech relate to China as well. The liberal media, after all, has gotten off quite well on [attacking China](#) for cracking down on or ignoring speech raising concern about the virus, or in general grandstanding about Communist Party propaganda. But then, without so much as half a blink, it has tried its level best to suppress lively dialogue about the crisis by labeling it as an “infodemic,” propagandized falsehoods about disease control, and marginalized those who have threatened its hegemony.

There is, ultimately, no “infodemic.” There are groups saying informative and intelligent things, and groups saying useless and idiotic things. The latter includes a subset that has hitherto monopolized the discursive shots in society, and wants to defend this power by labelling all the talk—intelligent or idiotic—not occurring under its flailing auspices as an informational counterpart to the pandemic itself. But there is no credibility to those who, let alone seeing the exponential writing on the wall that should have been clear since January, are [unable to divide](#) a few million by a few million and [defend the inability to do so](#). Contemporary global problems are of a complexity that the old guard lacks the capacity to wrap its minds around, and if there actually were an “infodemic,” these fancily educated talking heads and fingertip flutterers should be the first ones ignored.

But especially because of that, those who have our wits about us need to make sure we keep our focus where it belongs—because, one last time, *the problem is not an “infodemic.”* The real threat about the coronavirus is not fear, privilege, wrongspeak, authoritarianism, central planning or the market. It is also not an overabundance of information. It is, in fact, the coronavirus. All else, with respect to blunting this principal threat, can be good or bad or irrelevant depending on how it is manifested. Those who believe in the existence of an “infodemic” would do best to not add to it. The rest of us will go about addressing this crisis at a minimum of six feet from the rusting claws of the gatekeepers of discourse.