

Fake News, Spirituality and the Backfire Effect



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Here's something interesting: Fact-checking news headlines and statements made by television hosts, celebrities, politicians, podcasters and even scientists is essential for separating fact from fiction, and attaching warnings to fake news blogs has a modest effect on discouraging false beliefs. But those who generate fake news can actually strengthen false beliefs by putting warnings on real news articles. And as a recent scientific study (cited at the end of this article) demonstrated, there is now a "backfire effect": Fake news that *does not* have a warning is causing people to believe that it's accurate.

Purveyors of fake news use another strategy to distort people's beliefs and water down the facts reported in the media: "All we have to do is flood the zone," Steve Bannon said in a PBS interview. "Every day, we hit them with three things. They'll bite on one, and we'll get all of our stuff done. These guys will never be able to recover."

Neuroscientific studies confirm this. The more often you encounter the same lie, the truer it starts to feel. And if you already have a strong disbelief, the more that evidence is presented, the stronger that belief becomes.

When a public speaker tosses out an overwhelming number of lies and false statements, most people unconsciously assume that at least one or two are true. The fact-checkers can't keep up, and the backfire effect kicks in: If you don't challenge a lie, many people simply assume the information is accurate.

And as another study (cited below) found, the more emotionally invested you are, the more likely you are to spread fake news.

One solution is to become a skeptic and question everything. But many studies show the brain doesn't like ambiguity, especially when