

Social media resistance and 'alternative' facts

By Louise Marsland

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When the President of the United States is called out for blatant lies on his very first day in office by the media – facts which are then dismissed as “alternative facts” by his team in turn, you know we are in for a headache-inducing time and an era of obfuscation.



Image by 123RF

Donald Trump and his newly-minted White House press secretary Sean Spicer were both accused of lying over the past weekend about the rather petty issue of inauguration day attendance figures. They accused the media of lying. So the media went digging for the facts. CNN even took the unusual step of not airing the White House press conference until it had verified the facts.

Confronted with this, Trump's controversial campaign manager and now counsellor to the President, Kellyanne Conway, defended both the President and Spicer, saying they had presented "alternative facts". Classic George Orwell '1984' alternative reality. All this spin makes my head spin.

Not that politicians lying for the own gain is anything new. But in this world of increasing fake news sites and “black ops” political “war rooms” designed to spin elections, we the media and as individuals need to be more vigilant than ever and truly understand how to spot fake news and not to share emotive social media posts without being sure of our facts.

It is also time for the media to call out public figures for lying, to not take the bullsh*t being fed to us at press conferences and in statements. To question more vigorously absolutely everything that crosses our desks, from the most innocuous press release to the most politically charged speech.

The era of diplomacy and respect is over, thanks to Donald Trump. The gloves are off and it is about time. And in this season of social media, every slip and every lie will be documented, that is the saving grace of free information flows.

We will certainly be seeing more of the fractious media relationship between the new US President and the media. And countless more funny memes, such as this one that was spawned after the Spicer White House press conference, #SeanSpicersays and #alternative facts:

“ [#SeanSpicerSays](#) Trump is a fashion icon. His inspired look of crotch length tie is a spreading global phenomenon for both men and women. pic.twitter.com/zGrSW4eRf6— Marco Scheurer (@phink0) [January 25, 2017](#) ”

“ [#SeanSpicerSays](#) The Sun moves around the Earth, not the other way round. And the Earth moves around [#DonaldTrump](#) Period.— Mac van Dinther (@MacvanDinther) [January 25, 2017](#) ”

“ [#SeanSpicerSays](#) Voldemort won the Battle at Hogwarts. pic.twitter.com/cfepKdK56F— Soula Pefkaros (@soulapefkaros) [January 24, 2017](#) ”

[Newsweek](#) wrote about how the “Trump team welcomes ‘alternative facts’ in assault on media” in the debate about the size of crowds at the Presidential inauguration. In the end it was more about the size of the lie being told and by whom. “Priority one appears to be denigrating and delegitimising the media,” wrote [Newsweek](#).

In an excellent [New York Times](#) article on how people seem to enjoy being lied to, in the context of our so-called reality television era, author Adam Kirsch writes that the collapse of the distinction between truth, fiction and lie, has given rise to the ‘Age of Trump’.

And here at home, fake Twitter accounts pushing a sinister agenda emerged. As Justice Malala wrote on [RDM.co.za](#), “A dirty propaganda war – where truth doesn’t matter, where reputations are routinely torn to shreds through innuendo – has been joined.” Editor [Ferial Haffajee](#), herself a victim of trolling on social media recently, said the fake news sites in question were not parodies, but “actual fake news sites meant to deceive the public” and vowed to take action and out them.

It’s as if some political leaders in both the US and SA are reading from a similar script and exactly as George Orwell predicted in his dystopian novel *1984*, which incidentally, is being reprinted because there is so much interest in it again after comparisons with Trump’s ‘leadership’ style and political agenda.

But in the flurry of executive orders banning this and that, including climate change and Federal employees from tweeting, the resistance lives on in national park employees in the United States. These khaki-clad unlikely heroes, who decided that while Trump could “take our official Twitter, you’ll never take our freedom”, to set up alternative accounts at [@AltNatParkSer](#), tweeting up a storm on climate change and real facts and giving courage to every bunny hugger out there that rebellion lives on in the hearts of brave park rangers.

They have been followed by a host of other ‘rebel’ sites to put out scientific facts on climate change in the light of climate change pages being scrubbed off official Federal Government websites: [@ActualEPAFacts](#), [@altUSEPA](#), [@Alt_NASA](#), [@altusda](#), [@AlternativeNWS](#), [@Alt_CDC](#), [@AltHHS](#), [@AltNIH](#), [@altNOAA](#), [@altfda](#), [@AltUSFWSRefuge](#).

This alternative National Park Services account, [@AltNatParkSer](#), describes itself as “the Unofficial #Resistance team of US National Park Service. Not taxpayer subsidised! Come for rugged scenery, facts & 89 million acres of landscape #climate”.

“ Mr Trump, you may have taken us down officially. But with scientific evidence & the Internet our message will get out.— AltUSNatParkService (@AltNatParkSer) [January 24, 2017](#) ”

“ The thing the dystopian novels could never predict was the sudden rebellion of the national park social media managers— David Hoyt (@DavidJHoyt) [January 25, 2017](#) ”

“ Sorry, Mr Trump

That blue tick verifying your ID doesn't verify your belief that China invented global warming. Even if you ARE President. pic.twitter.com/ZuHOgBJdLz— AltUSNatParkService (@AltNatParkSer) [January 26, 2017](#) ”

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