

# The Onus on Those Who Accuse Others of “Covid Misinformation”

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*Musician Neil Young finds himself in the 2022 limelight. It may well generate more on-air play and music sales for the Canadian. Young wrote a letter on his website (since removed) that garnered much attention. It [read](#):*

Please immediately inform Spotify that I am actively canceling all my music availability on Spotify as soon as possible. I am doing this because Spotify is spreading false information about vaccines — potentially causing death to those who believe the disinformation being spread by them.

Young had a specific target in mind: “I want you to let Spotify know immediately today that I want all of my music off their platform. They can have [podcaster Joe] Rogan or Young. Not both.”

Sounds a lot like a [Neil Young’s nemesis, George W Bush](#): “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

It comes on the heels of a 31 December episode from *The Joe Rogan Experience* in which one of Rogan’s guests was Dr. Robert Malone, whose [self-bio](#) boasts:

“I am an internationally recognized scientist/physician and the original inventor of mRNA vaccination as a technology, DNA vaccination, and multiple non-viral DNA and RNA/mRNA platform delivery technologies. I hold numerous fundamental domestic and foreign patents in the fields of gene delivery, delivery formulations, and vaccines: including for fundamental DNA and RNA/mRNA vaccine technologies.”

Malone is, notwithstanding, alleged to have spread COVID-19 misinformation.

Of course Joe Rogan doesn’t get everything right. He admits “absolutely I get things wrong.” Don’t we all. Rogan’s interviews are often quite interesting, but he really blew it when he [interviewed Yeonmi Park](#) and let her off easily for transparent nonsense about North

Korea. But Rogan doesn't pretend to know all the topics deeply; he is learning, as are, hopefully, all of us.

Does Neil Young get everything right?

When one accuses someone else of misinformation or disinformation, he might not be claiming to know the truth, but he does claim to know what is untruthful. That may be, but this claim carries an onus. If you want to accuse someone of misinformation/disinformation, then to maintain integrity, you should specify what that mis/disinformation is, and you must demonstrate why it is mis/disinformation. If you cannot point to any instance of mis/disinformation and why it is so, then, with all due respect, just shut the f\*\*k up. In the present Young-Rogan kerfuffle, since mis/disinformation has been alleged, if Young can't back up his allegations, then first, an apology is in order, and second this should be followed by a retraction of the allegation.

If one claims to know the truth from untruth, then that person must specify what she claims to be factually inaccurate. It simply does not pass muster to point out that misinformation was communicated by another person. Any lunkhead on the street can shout misinformation. (And it is salient to make clear the distinction here between *misinformation* and *disinformation*. Misinformation is when a person mistakenly communicates information that is factually inaccurate. Simply put, he was wrong. Disinformation is far more insidious because the person knows that what she is communicating is factually inaccurate. In common parlance, she lied.)

Imagine the misinformation paradigm:

Neil: That's misinformation.

Joe: What exactly is that misinformation?

Neil: You said [and here we have to guess what was the faulty information because Neil was never challenged to specify what was faulty].

Joe: [to which Joe could theoretically respond] Why is that information faulty?

*The onus is on the accuser to state clearly what information was wrong and prove it to be wrong.*

Imagine the disinformation paradigm:

Neil: You lied.

Joe: What lie did I tell?

Neil: You lied about Covid.

Joe: What did I say about Covid that was a lie?

Neil: You said [and here we have to guess what was the lie because Neil was never challenged to specify what was a lie].

Joe: [to which Joe could theoretically respond] How is that a lie?

*The onus is on the accuser to state clearly what was a lie and prove it to be a lie, and the accuser has to also prove that the accused knew that he was telling a lie.*

Young is probably well meaning, but that does not mean his motivations weren't ill advised or even morally questionable. In 2014, *Dissident Voice* editor Angie Tibbs [criticized Young](#) for his:

blatant show of support for the apartheid state, a nasty slap in the face for the occupied people of Palestine, and most specifically Gaza where the residents are now counting the bodies and burying their dead as a result of Israel's latest bombardment.

Who could believe that Neil Young, the long time activist, would ignore the BDS campaign, including a cultural boycott demanding that Israel recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully comply with the precepts of international law?

Young has also been called out for his misinformation concerning the "[Tiananmen Square massacre](#)." Decades after the violence that transpired *outside* Tiananmen Square, Young was still [dedicating his hit song](#) "Rockin' in the Free World" "to the Chinese students who were killed during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989," even though the CIA-orchestrated upheaval targeted the killing of soldiers.

As for COVID-19 and how best to treat it, for any non-expert (and, granted, maybe Neil Young has carried out much study and has become quite expert about COVID), to claim epistemological certitude should be greeted with more than a modicum of skepticism.

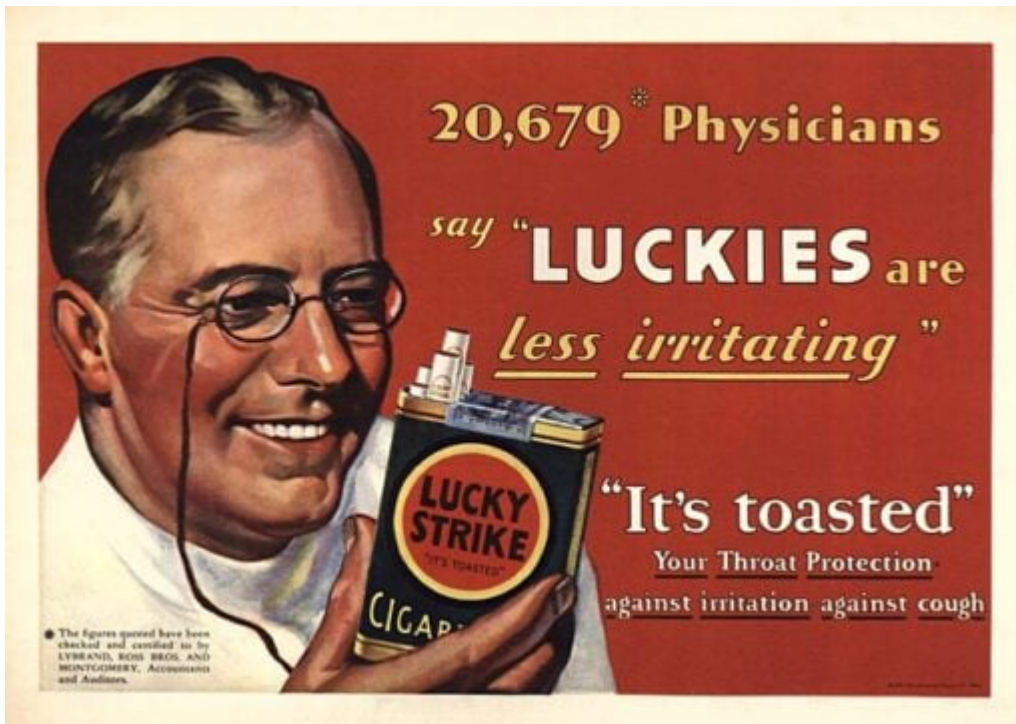
Who can state with absolute or near absolute certainty on all the vectors involved with COVID-19?

Likeliest, the virus is spread by aerosols. But who is most at risk? Probably the elderly and the infirm. What are the dangers of infection? What is the best way to combat an infection? What is the best way to gain immunity? What are the best ways to avoid an infection? What reasonable, science-backed precautions should one take: mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, disinfection of surfaces, etc? Should one be vaccinated? What are the side-effects from the vaccines: dangerous? life threatening? short-term? long-term? Does recovery from COVID-19 provide greater protection from re-infection? If vaccination is found to provide safe and reasonable protection (obviously it does not confer immunity), then which vaccine should be prescribed?

How much is known about the safety and possible side-effects given that vaccine trials are [still ongoing](#)? Can the pharmaceutical manufacturers be trusted? Why have the pharmaceutical companies' COVID vaccines been [indemnified](#)? How should people regard [the report](#) that Thailand's National Health Security Office paid out about 927 million baht (about 28 million USD) to 8,470 people who suffered side effects after being vaccinated against COVID-19? Is the clinical data transparent? VAERS reports reflect what percentage of the adverse events? Is the virus petering out? There is so much to be considered and knowledge is still coming to light.

Some of the I-know-better-than-others crowd have called for censorship. Is censorship how humans arrive at the truth? Have the people who argue for censorship learned anything from when the church proscribed the teaching of heliocentrism? Wasn't it a heresy at one time (and even still in some backwaters) to theorize human life as having evolved from simpler lifeforms?

We are exhorted by government officials and government spokespersons to follow the science. But when do they ever bother to present the scientific evidence? Do they point to the independent peer-review science literature? Can we trust that doctors and scientists always get it right? Didn't doctors use to be big boosters of cigarette smoking?



Spotify has reacted to Young's complaints and removed his music from the platform. Spotify has also promised to be [vigilant against misinformation](#), as we all should be. But is one not promoting misinformation when one falsely accuses another of misinformation?

Rogan supports Spotify's plan to put a disclaimer at the start of controversial episodes.

For his part, Young [denied pushing censorship](#). "I support free speech. I have never been in favor of censorship. Private companies have the right to choose what they profit from, just as I can choose not to have my music support a platform that disseminates harmful information."

Neil, you say you support free speech, but did you not just threaten Spotify because that platform allowed Joe Rogan to exercise his free speech?

The podcaster has taken the high road. "My pledge to you [the listener] is that I will do my best to try to balance out these more controversial viewpoints with other people's perspectives, so we can maybe find a better point of view." Whether balance is the best way to arrive at what best approximates the truth is a question to be pondered in another article.

[Rogan added](#), "I'm not mad at Neil Young, I'm a huge Neil Young fan."

Still, it would have been preferable if Rogan had respectfully put the onus on Young to point out the inaccuracies that the musician had alleged.

Maybe Young is an expert on COVID-19, and maybe he can discern what is factually accurate and inaccurate. However, there are thousands and thousands of physicians and scientists (and [plenty of Canadian truck drivers and their supporters](#)) out there that disagree with Young.

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