GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

The Problem with Wikipedia and the Digital Revolution

By Dr. Paul Craig Roberts
Global Research, July 11, 2021

Theme: Intelligence, Media Disinformation

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the "Translate Website" drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

Visit and follow us on Instagram at @crg_globalresearch.

***

This was originally published in April 2019.

Yesterday (April 10, 2019) a reader alerted me to the fact that I am being smeared on Wikipedia as a "vocal supporter of the current Russian government and its policies." The reader also reports that an article in the Daily Beast calls me a "Putin worshiper." The reader says that he tried to edit the Wikipedia entry without success, and he urged me to give it my attention.

I do not know whether the person who wrote my Wikipedia entry intended to smear me or is merely uninformed. However, dissenting voices do get smeared on Wikipedia. It is an ongoing problem for many of us. For years readers and people who know me would make corrections to my Wikipedia biography, but as soon as the corrections were made, they would be erased and the smears reinstalled.

The problem with Wikipedia is that it is an idealistic approach based on the belief that truth is more likely to emerge when everyone has a voice than when explanations are provided by a select group of experts or peers. This idealistic approach is not without merit. Moreover, it might work very well with subjects and people who do not have ideological opponents or are of no threat to those intent on controlling explanations.

The problem arises when a subject or a person is controversial and is especially the case if the person's arguments disprove or dissent from official explanations. In The Matrix in which we live, truth-tellers are unwelcome to those who control the explanations in order to advance their agendas. Until truth-tellers can be silenced or completely censured, the practice is to discredit them with smears. Thus, I and many others have been described as "conspiracy theorists" for reporting factual information that contradicts the official and unproven explanation of 9/11, anti-semites for criticizing Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians and influence over U.S. foreign policy, and as "Russian agents" or "Putin stooges" for keeping the record straight about Ukraine, Syria, and Putin's effort to avoid military conflict with the West.

In the pre-Internet age it was difficult to smear people. Newspaper editors would allow letters to the editor to correct factual mistakes or to provide a different interpretation of a

collection of facts, but shied away from smears. This doesn't mean that smears never happened, but not with the abandon of the Internet era.

Open works in process like Wikipedia, Internet comment sections and social media are ideally suited for smearing people and broadcasting the smears worldwide prior to any correction of them. Thus, the digital revolution has been a godsend to government agencies such as the CIA, State Department, Mossad, the Israel Lobby, corporations and other private interest groups, ideological movements such as neoconservatism and Identity Politics, and politicians, all of whom have agendas that are furthered by controlling the explanations.

As money is the highest value for many people, there is an unlimited supply of people who can be hired to smear those who challenge official explanations. A smear can start in a comment section, move to social media, and from there to a website and on to Wikipedia.

It is truth tellers who are smeared, people such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Manning, and whistleblowers whose messages are inconvenient for powerful private and government interests.

Smears are effective. There is no shortage of gullible and uninformed or misinformed people. They take a smear at face value and avoid the person or idea smeared. Despite the extreme clarity of Julian Assange's orchestrated persecution, many see him as a "rapist escaping justice," "Russian spy," and "a blackmailer of governments and people."

In short mud sticks better than facts. That is why I am not optimistic about the future of truth in the digital age. Many see the digital age as the era when truth will flourish. I understand their case. Their belief is not without merit. But the digital age is also an age in which lies can flourish because, unlike the print age, they can be so easily spread.

Consider, for example, the description of me as a "vocal supporter of the current Russian government and its policies" and a "Putin worshiper." I am a well known critic of the Russian government's neoliberal economic policies. Michael Hudson and I have jointly criticized the Russian government's neoliberal economic policies and demonstrated that they are harmful to Russia's economy. I am known also as a skeptic of Putin's policy of turning the other cheek to Washington's and Israel's aggressions. I appreciate and admire Putin's enormous self-control, but I have expressed concern that Putin's unwillingness to put down a hard foot fails to turn away wrath and instead encourages more aggression that sooner or later will result in thermonuclear war.

The Russian government is aware of my position, as is the Russian media where I am often interviewed. My position is also clearly expressed on my website, which is read internationally. So why does the Daily Beast and Wikipedia misrepresent my position?

Wikipedia and comment sections can work only if commentators are responsible people who are carefully monitored by knowledgeable and responsible monitors. But this takes us back to peer-reviewed explanations that Wikipedia was created to avoid.

Historically, messengers are killed, so truth tellers have to expect smears or worse–Julian Assange was arrested this morning inside the Ecuadoran embassy in London. Mankind is fallen. Governments do evil. The most evil is done to those who oppose evil. Truth cannot be told without cost to he who tells the truth.

When I speak of truth-tellers, I am speaking of people whose motive is to tell the truth. Truth is their agenda. I am not saying that truth tellers are infallible and always right. I am saying that they strive to be. They do not intentionally write falsehoods and mislead.

Truth is not opinion. It is pointless to tell a truth teller that you disagree with him. You can present a case that his facts are wrong. You can present a case that there is a better explanation of the facts.

In my experience when most people say they disagree, they mean that they prefer another explanation that is more congenial to their feelings and emotions. For example, many Americans believed the preposterous Russiagate fib because they dislike Trump, just as today conservative talk radio has adopted the official explanation of 9/11 because it can be used against the outspoken female Muslim member of Congress. The facts have nothing to do with either belief. In both cases, the facts are resisted because the truth is not as emotionally comforting or as useful for the agenda at hand as the lie.

I have no objection if readers undertake to monitor and correct the account presented of me in Wikipedia. It will be an ongoing process, and will require the commitment of many of you. Those behind the attacks on me have a lot of money and a lot of hirelings, and they can erase your work as soon as you finish.

The digital revolution and the control mechanisms it provides makes it far more likely that we will end up in a locked down dystopia than would ever have been possible in the print age. But the digital revolution represents perhaps an even greater threat to humanity. It is making humans redundant.

What are humans to do when everything is automated? If the tech nerds have their way, we soon won't be allowed to drive cars.

What will humans do when there is no need for their labor? Boston Dynamics, a Waltham Massachusetts company, has come up with a robot that replaces warehouse workers. The prediction is that 40 million more Americans will be shoved out of the workforce by robots over the next ten years.

Has anyone thought about who is going to be employed and have the money to purchase the products of robots? No doubt we will be promised all kinds of new and better jobs like we were promised to take the place of the offshored manufacturing and professional service jobs. The promised jobs never showed up. And no, this is not a luddite argument. Everyone can't be employed designing robots to replace humans.

Each warehouse will rush to increase its profits by laying off employees, and none will consider the aggregate effect on consumer demand for the products in the warehouses. Will the warehouses have to give back their gained profits in taxes to support the unemployed? Will the warehouses have any profits if people haven't income from jobs with which to buy the products in the warehouses? Does the robot age mean profits have to be socialized in order to sustain human life?

An intelligent approach to technology would be to focus on technology that enhances human performance, not on technology that eliminates the need for humans.

At Stanford University technology has emerged, or is emerging, that permits real time changes in the movements of a person's mouth as he speaks in order to broadcast a

message different than the one the speaker is speaking. The mischief possible with this technology is unacceptable. Television could destroy any unwelcome politician or leader by showing him delivering a message designed to destroy him. If people catch on, it would mean the end of televised speeches as no one would believe any speech unless they were present in person.

People already find it challenging to comprehend reality. The emergence of technology capable of falsifying reality in real time presages a future in which fact and fiction become indistinguishable. The unintended consequence of this technology may well be the death of truth.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above or below. Follow us on Instagram, @crg_globalresearch. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Dr. Paul Craig Roberts writes on his blog site, PCR Institute for Political Economy, where this article was originally published. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Featured image is from The Grayzone

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © Dr. Paul Craig Roberts, Global Research, 2021

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Dr. Paul Craig Roberts

About the author:

Paul Craig Roberts, former Assistant Secretary of the US Treasury and Associate Editor of the Wall Street Journal, has held numerous university appointments. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research. Dr. Roberts can be reached at http://paulcraigroberts.org

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca