Twitter Thread by Stephen Barlow



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1) Science denial is destroying our societies, our civilization. Various vested interests, usually right wing ideologues find various scientific facts and information contrary to their agenda, so through propaganda they are orchestrating the public into denying this science.

2) We are seeing this with regard to the COVID virus, where a range of denial is being promoted, ranging from absolute denial the virus exists, to different levels of denial, such as only some people are vulnerable to the virus, to facilitate business as usual.

3) For a long time, to promote business as usual, vested interests have been promoting the denial of the climate and ecological crisis through propaganda. The aim being to create a large enough body of public denial to prevent action which can change anything.

4) We have seen similar patterns over a long time, such as when tobacco companies promoted denial of the emerging scientific evidence of how harmful and addictive tobacco smoking was. This further denial uses exactly the same methods.

5) Understandably, the public can't be educated about everything and have to rely on experts to inform them of concerns about threats to public safety. Malicious vested interests take advantage of this by using pseudo-experts to misinform the public.

6) Primarily, those promoting science denial use doubt as a weapon. They will promote the false idea that there is doubt or uncertainty about what scientific experts are fairly certain about.

7) Much of this disinformation originates from right wing think tanks, which are often secretly funded by industries, or wealthy individuals profiting from certain industries or certain patterns of consumption.

8) These think tanks often pose as educational charities spreading information in the public interest, when actually they are spreading knowingly false and malicious disinformation.

9) In theory it should be quite easy to put a stop to this by making these bodies or individuals disseminating disinformation fully transparent in terms of their funding and staffing. By making them liable for the accuracy of the ideas they promote.

10) This principle already exists. In a commercial context, companies selling products have to reveal ingredients, are limited by law about what claims they can make about their products, and have to be reasonably transparent.

11) Therefore, asking lobbying firms, think tanks, or other influential specialists in information dissemination, to be transparent, legal liable for the information and influence they peddle, would not be introducing a new principle.

12) This legal liability and accountability should also extend to politicians. In theory a politician is a public representative, yet in reality most modern politicians attempt to influence the public rather than being influenced by the public. They're the tail that wags the dog.

13) As I say, I am not suggesting anything new at all. In many spheres of life people are legally responsible for what they do and say. If the public are required to fill in a form there are often dire warnings of what might happen if they make a misleading statement.

14) So why do we allow highly paid politicians and other commercial entities a special licence to mislead the public with impunity, and where these people are not legally liable or accountable for deliberately trying to mislead the public?

15) The root of the problem is that politicians write the law. They are not going to write law which makes them, or the commercial entities they use to manipulate public opinion, be subject to legal accountability, scrutiny or transparency.

16) This demonstrates how our present political systems do not represent the public like they claim to do. As I say, they are the tail wagging the dog. Rather than doing the bidding of the public like they claim to do, they in fact control what the public know and think.

17) Therefore, any attempt to change anything is doomed because these vested interests who have got huge control over public opinion, will manipulate the public into opposing any attempt to control their activities.

18) It is easy to illustrate how this happens. Donald Trump has got a large proportion of the American public believing there was voter fraud, and that is why he lost the election, despite there being no evidence at all for this. There is nothing to stop him telling this lie.

19) This example proves what the problem is. All things are not equal when it comes to influence. Some people like the president of the US can just tell any lie they want, and have a large proportion of the public take what they say to be verbatim fact.

20) Whereas on the other hand, learned climate scientists, or experts in disease control, can make very informed and knowledgeable statements, which honestly inform the public, and yet what they say is largely ignored.

21) I am not suggesting that everything a politician says, or other highly influential person says is untrue. However, this is the problem. Currently there is no way of sifting out their lies from truthful statements or them being accountable when they do provably lie.

22) It is beyond absurd that the most influential people or bodies in our societies can lie and spread deliberate disinformation, but there is currently no way of holding them to account for this.

23) Just think about how extraordinary this is. If an ordinary member of the public makes any slightly misleading statement on an official form or in an official context, they are committing a serious crime with dire consequences for them.

24) Yet some of the most powerful and influential people in our societies can tell the biggest knowing lies imaginable, in an official context, which determines our whole lives and the survival of our civilization - and they are not accountable at all for lying.

25) We should have a right that the most powerful and influential people in our society be held to the same standards of honesty and accountability that ordinary people are held to.