

Ed. Note: I adapted the following article from 1998 and it got "lost" over the years. However, it seems just as relevant today as it did then! Any similarity to current situations is coincidental . . . NOT! (That is what we would have said last millennium.)

## GULLIBILITY VIRUS

WARNING, CAUTION, DANGER, BEWARE!

Gullibility Virus Spreading over the Internet!

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Yearly Institute for the Investigation of Irregular Internet Phenomena (YIIPES – a subdivision of YIKES) announced today that many Internet users are becoming infected by a new virus that causes them to believe, without question, every groundless story, legend, conspiracy theory, and dire warning that shows up in their inbox or on their browser. The Gullibility Virus, as it is called, apparently makes people believe and forward copies of silly hoaxes relating to cookie recipes, email viruses, political policies, and get-rich-quick schemes.

"These are not just readers of tabloids or people who buy lottery tickets based on fortune cookie numbers," a spokesman said. "Most are otherwise normal people, who would laugh at the same stories if told to them by a stranger on a street corner." However, once these same people become infected with the Gullibility Virus, they believe anything they read on the Internet.

"My immunity to tall tales and bizarre claims is all gone," reported one weeping victim. "I believe every warning message and home remedy my friends forward to me, even though most of the messages are anonymous." It was a long time, the victim said, before she could stand up at a Hoaxes Anonymous meeting and state, "My name is Jane, and I've been scammed." Now, however, she is spreading the word. "Challenge and check whatever you read," she says.

Internet users are urged to examine themselves for symptoms of the virus, which include the following:

- ~ The willingness to believe improbable stories without thinking.
- ~ The urge to forward multiple copies of such stories to others.
- ~ A lack of desire to take three minutes to check to see if a story is true or watch another TV channel to get a balanced perspective.

T.C. is an example of someone recently infected. He told one reporter, "I read that the major ingredient in almost all shampoos makes your hair fall out, so I've stopped using shampoo." Anyone with symptoms like these is urged to seek help immediately. Experts recommend that at the first feelings of gullibility, Internet users should rush to their favorite search engine and look up the item tempting them to thoughtless credence. Most hoaxes, legends, and conspiracy theories have been widely discussed and exposed by the Internet community.

Those people who are still symptom-free can help inoculate themselves against the Gullibility Virus by going to websites like "Don't Click on That Link" or "You Have NO Long Lost Relatives in Africa" or reading some good balanced material in a newspaper or watching a variety of news programs from various perspectives.

Lastly, as a public service, Internet users can help stamp out the Gullibility Virus by sending copies of this message to anyone who forwards them a hoax.

This message is so important, we're sending it anonymously! Forward it to all your friends right away! Don't think about it! This is not a chain letter! This story is true! Don't check it out! This story is so timely, there is no date on it! This story is so important, we're using lots of exclamation points!!!

For every message you forward to some unsuspecting person, the Home for the Hopelessly Gullible will donate ten cents to itself. (If you wonder how the Home will know you are forwarding these messages all over creation, you're obviously thinking too much.) ACT NOW! DON'T DELAY! LIMITED TIME ONLY! NOT SOLD IN ANY STORE!

### **ALARMING YET INSIGHTFUL CONVERSATION**

I was helping lead a Utah state youth conference and spoke with a teenage girl who had come out of Mormonism. It was interesting to hear her say that the whole time she was in this cult group, she knew it was wrong. However, she did not care because of the attention and support she got from others while she was part of this group. Related to the Gullibility article, oftentimes people are willing to hold to a certain position or party because their heart, or what they want to believe or align themselves with, is stronger than their mind or the actual truth.

### **FAMOUS GULLIBILITY PART TWO**

A few hours after I finished writing this Perihelion, I read an article in our San Diego Union newspaper about world renowned singer Billie Eilish deleting all social media from her phone. It stated that she nuked "the Internet" from her phone, in part because she was tired of believing the things she read. The singer told Conan O'brien that one thing she hates the Internet for is "how gullible it makes you." "Anything I read on the Internet I believe. Me! And I know for a fact that's stupid and I shouldn't do that because I have proof that it's not all true. Almost none of it's true."