

Are you clickbait?

Written for *The Journal Record*, August 29, 2016 by Shannon Warren, OK Ethics Founder/CEO

You might be clickbait if you have ever....

- Forwarded an email about Obama banning the Pledge of Allegiance. (It's a hoax.)
- Shared a Facebook post about Hobby Lobby closing. (Big whopper lie.)
- Provided phony medical advice indicating that consuming water at bedtime will prevent heart attacks. (Nonsense.)

Each one of these stories are easily disproven with facts, but were senselessly circulated thousands of times. The sheer volume of those reposting the Pledge of Allegiance malware-producing con was astonishing. (I quit counting after seeing 25 headlines from fake news sources.) When last checked, the fib about Hobby Lobby was shared 92,000 times and *Huffington Post* counted 33,000 Facebook shares of the bogus water therapy that was falsely attributed to Mayo Clinic in 2013.

Clickbait tempts people by piquing their curiosity through sensational, misleading headlines. Even though these are often generated by counterfeit sources, many people hastily react, failing to check the facts before sharing. This is especially true when the headline confirms preconceived notions about politics or religion. The more provocative the story, the more likely it is to be distributed.

So what?

The erosion of truth undermines the trust that must be the foundation of American commerce. And, if you disagree about the need for integrity on a larger scale, think about the cost to companies when reputations are tarnished by ridiculous rumor-mongering. The knowledge that this deception is profitable for manufacturers of harmful gossip is particularly irksome.

This mindless clicking a "like" or "share" on Facebook may aid an untrustworthy source:

The originator fabricates a headline, then tracks the number of clicks as an indication of popularity. The more popular the site, the more marketable it is to buyers who want quick, easy access to innumerable users. So, if someone simply clicks "like" on Facebook without getting the facts straight or checking the source of the information, he could be enriching a dishonest person.

Fortunately, there are ways to stop this exploitation of misinformation through several fact-checking sites. Interested in the truth behind the prank about Halloween falling on Friday the 13th? Go to *Snopes.com*. Need a reality check on the so-called Clinton Body Count? Try *TruthorFiction.com*. Did POTUS really cancel the National Prayer Day? Visit *FactCheck.org*. Are politicians keeping their promises? Check out *PolitiFact.com*.

Spread the word: Friends don't let friends get hooked by clickbait.