

*Backstory:*

*In light of social distancing, Erin Vogel has been asked by a local news station to give her opinion on all of the fake news spreading regarding the CoronaVirus pandemic.*

Good morning, Arthur!

It's great to meet you in light of social distancing!

Zoom is clearly the way of the future!

Hi, I'm Erin Vogel, a social psychologist and postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University. We all thought 2020 would be our year, some would even call it the "Roaring 20's" and then crisis struck.

From fake news and the threat of world war 3, to social distancing and murder hornets, On top of a brand new, highly contagious virus resulting in a global pandemic! It has been quite the year so far.

Scattered amid a relentless barrage of news about COVID-19 case surges, quarantine orders, and medical supply shortages on Twitter this week, some happy stories softened the blows:

"Did you hear that swans had returned to deserted Venetian canals?"

"Dolphins, too. Even a jellyfish - or two..."

But this was all fake.

A hoax.

An imitation.

And the public believed it all. I mean how could you not, seeing so many likes and comments "gives us an immediate social reward". In other words, they make us feel good."

The swans in said viral posts regularly appear in the canals of Burano, a small island in the greater Venice metropolitan area,

Where the photos were taken

The "Venetian" dolphins were filmed at a port in Sardinia, in the Mediterranean Sea Hundreds and hundreds of miles away. "People hope that, no matter what we've done, nature is powerful enough to rise above it."

Social media, however, is a way for the public to have a voice.

To have a say.

And, for some, it gives them far too much power.

Negativity strikes and feelings are hurt.

From age 12 to age 20, the internet has masqueraded lies as truth, corrupting our minds significantly

So when a tweet reads:

“The water flowing through the canals of Venice is clear for the first time in forever. The fish are visible, the swans returned.”

We all believe.

Because we are trained to.

Because that is all we know.

“In times when we’re all really lonely, it’s tempting to hold onto that feeling, especially if we’re posting something that gives people a lot of hope:

“The idea that animals and nature could actually flourish during this crisis could help give us a sense of meaning and purpose”

So we can believe that we went through all of this for a reason.

To find a bright side amidst this pandemic.

“Finding out good news isn’t real can be even more demoralizing than not hearing it at all.

I’d encourage people to share positive things. It doesn't have to be anything dramatic.

Such as a greater appreciation for health workers.

Just remember, it NEEDS to be true.”

Thank you, Arthur!