



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 8, 2009

Media Taken in by “Moon Hoax” Spoof

Has it ever seemed to you that the media tend to move as a herd? That no matter how the number of news outlets multiply they all end up following the same stories from the same angles and that the same mistakes or biases get repeated over and over again?

Several newspapers in Bangladesh have served up a particularly humorous example of the herd mentality, as first one paper was taken in by a hoax, and then another followed them into the same embarrassing error.

It all started with a satirical article at the Onion.com: “[Conspiracy Theorist Convinces Neil Armstrong Moon Landing Was Faked.](#)” “Moon hoax” conspiracy theorists make a pretty easy target for satirists, and reading the article at Onion.com it is hard to imagine anyone actually taking the bait ... until the *Daily Manab Zamin* did. [As the BBC News reports:](#)



The *Daily Manab Zamin* said US astronaut Neil Armstrong had shocked a news conference by saying he now knew it had been an “elaborate hoax.” Neither they nor the *New Nation*, which later picked up the story, realised the Onion was not a genuine news site. Both have now apologised to their readers for not checking the story.

“We thought it was true so we printed it without checking,” associate editor Hasanuzzuman Khan told the AFP news agency.

“We didn’t know the Onion was not a real news site.”

One might have imagined the “quote” that Onion.com attributed to Neil Armstrong might have been sufficient to have alerted an editor to what was really going on:

“It only took a few hastily written paragraphs published by this passionate denier of mankind’s so-called ‘greatest technological achievement’ for me to realize I had been living a lie,” said a visibly emotional Armstrong, addressing reporters at his home. “It has become painfully clear to me that on July 20, 1969, the Lunar Module under the control of my crew did not in fact travel 250,000 miles over eight days, touch down on the moon, and perform various experiments, ushering in a new era for humanity. Instead, the entire thing was filmed on a soundstage, most likely in New Mexico.”

The power of such satire is that it highlights the real shape of the debate: despite the ease with which most “proofs” have been debunked over and over again, still the conspiracy theories continue to draw adherents. And, of course, some “hoaxers” are unlikely to be convinced by any evidence, [even the](#)



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[recent photos of the landers](#) sent back by the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter — for them, it all just becomes part of the conspiracy.

For a public with a well-earned cynicism of government officials and their agendas, sometimes it is hard to maintain a proper discernment. In the midst of the Internet echo chamber and with a spoon-fed media that eagerly swallows whatever the proper official voices tell them, getting at the truth behind the daily news means eschewing both a naïve surrender to the voices of authority and a senseless simplification that merely denies *everything* that one hears as part of one conspiracy or another.

It would be easy to laugh off the mistake made by the *Daily Manab Zamin* and the *New Nation* if not for the ease with which the junk science of environmental extremism and the collectivist twaddle of Obamanomics are portrayed in our own media as unvarnished, undeniable truth. If there is a lesson in the story of the the Onion's "Moon hoax," it is the the need for discernment and being willing to do the hard work of learning the facts behind the news so that one can make up one's own mind.

— Photo: NASA



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