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Doctored Political Videos And Social Media

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A doctored video featuring House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was shared widely online this week. Amanda Carpenter, author of *Gaslighting America*, tells NPR's Scott Simon how easily disinformation spreads.

SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

Is it real or altered? Rudolph Giuliani, President Trump's personal lawyer and former mayor of New York, posted a video of Nancy Pelosi online that was manipulated to alter her speech in a way that made her appear to slur. She had not. He later removed that video. President Trump posted a different video that isolated a few stumbles in her speech. It is still online. Amanda Carpenter joins us. She's a former communications adviser to Texas Senator Ted Cruz and author of the book "Gaslighting America."

Ms. Carpenter, thanks so much for being with us.

AMANDA CARPENTER: Thanks for having me on.

SIMON: Is this a difference without a distinction - the doctored video versus one that

just isolates a few moments?

CARPENTER: Well, no as long as it has the same effect. I mean, we talk about whether Trump cares about whether something is altered or real when he's trying to make a point. No, he does not. We've seen this happen time and time and time again. This goes back to the birtherism conspiracy. This time, it just happens to be a video. And the problem, especially with these videos, is that many people can't tell it was manipulated. And in this case, with Nancy Pelosi, it wasn't changed that much. She does stutter a little bit when she talks, but it was exaggerated in a way so that she looked foolish. And once it's out and about and elevated by a president or prominent members of his team, you can't unring that bell.

SIMON: Are we in a new age where videos and, for that matter, audio can be doctored?

CARPENTER: We're not in a new age where video and audio can be doctored. That has happened. What's new now is that the Internet, as we now know, is the No. 1 way that people get information. And the problem is that the Internet doesn't have an editor. The Internet doesn't care about whether something is credible or not. The people who are in charge of powerful networks - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram - only care about engagement - click, click, click, click. And so there's no incentive to take it down because no one is held responsible for content that is false.

SIMON: Explain. I guess, I'm not holding you responsible for it, but we certainly have interviewed people who have cited a questionable video or another and said to them, look; that's not true. They often refuse to believe that.

CARPENTER: Ultimately, I think we will get to a place where we will have to authenticate videos. Someone will have to independently verify things. We're not there yet right now. And the only reason that we know the Nancy Pelosi video was fake is because she is so high profile that someone independently looked at it, right? You

know, it would be great if Facebook made people signify that something is parody or manipulated in some way from the original when they posted it. But they're so reluctant to do anything that would put any burden on anyone from posting content that it's going to take a lot of pressure.

SIMON: I have to ask you about your time with Senator Cruz's campaign as his communications adviser. Donald Trump, then the - the candidate notably said I'm going to read a quote. "His father" - meaning Senator Cruz's father - "was with Lee Harvey Oswald prior to Oswald's being, you know, shot. I mean, what was he doing with Lee Harvey Oswald shortly before the death, before the shooting? It's horrible." Senator Cruz now supports President Trump. Is this conciliation just enabling the president to float nonsense in the public mind?

CARPENTER: At this point, the Republican Party is Trump's party. And, you know, Senator Cruz is in a very tough position. Donald Trump used smears in the National Enquirer to damage Cruz's candidacy. But that's not the first time that Trump made things up.

SIMON: Who do you want to hold responsible - the campaigns, the politicians themselves, the platforms over which this stuff is generated?

CARPENTER: I think that social networks - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter - absolutely have an obligation. But ultimately, it is our fault that someone like Donald Trump gets the highest office in the land by peddling rumors, conspiracies and hoaxes. That is on voters to hold accountable. And a lot of people stayed home in 2016 thinking Hillary Clinton would win. That didn't happen. And so if it happens again in 2020, it is our fault.

SIMON: Amanda Carpenter - her book "Gaslighting America: Why We Love It When Trump Lies To Us" - thanks so much for being with us.

CARPENTER: Thank you so much.

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