

No, Steve Jobs Isn't Alive in Egypt; Stop the Conspiracy Before It Spreads



By Alex Berezow — August 28, 2019



Credit: Sheshesheqwerty/Reddit [1]

Elvis is still alive. Osama bin Laden is still alive. Paul McCartney is dead. These are just a handful of the conspiracy theories involving the alive/dead status of various famous people. Now, we can add Steve Jobs to the list.

A [photo](#) [1] posted on the social media site Reddit has gone viral and was picked up by various media outlets. The man in the photo, barefoot and presumably Egyptian, does indeed look an awful lot like Mr. Jobs. Alas, the real Steve Jobs is dead. He died from pancreatic cancer in 2011.

But there are several serious points worth making about this episode:

1) It appears as if the photo was posted on Reddit as a joke. Reddit has its own (sort of twisted) culture, and sarcasm features prominently on the site. The photo of the Steve Jobs doppelgänger came with the headline "Steve Jobs hiding in Egypt after faking his death." That is almost certainly meant to be sarcastic, poking fun at the multitude of conspiracies involving celebrity deaths mentioned above.

2) Jokes can spiral out of control. While it is difficult to imagine how a "Steve Jobs is actually alive" hoax could become menacing, other hoaxes have caused actual, real-world problems. Consider the Facebook event "[Storm Area 51, They Can't Stop All of Us](#) [2]." Area 51 is an Air Force base in Nevada where conspiracy theorists claim that the U.S. government is hiding proof of aliens. The page claims that the government can't stop everyone, especially "[i]f we naruto run, we can move faster than their bullets." (For the uninitiated, Naruto is a Japanese anime ninja.)

The page is quite obviously a joke, but a lot of people aren't laughing. More than 2 million people

agreed to show up outside Area 51. Even if only 1% of them came (for the alien festival that is now planned), where exactly are they going to go? Area 51 is in the middle of nowhere. The *Washington Post* [reports](#) [3]:

[A]ny total in the thousands will pose logistical challenges in a place as small and rural as Rachel. A prominent notice on the town's website warns festivalgoers of the limited infrastructure. "There is no gas and no store. ... We expect cell service and the Internet to be offline," the note reads. "Credit card [processing] will not work, so bring enough cash."

The always humorless government also isn't laughing. The *LA Times* [wrote](#) [4] that the creator of the Facebook event "got a visit from the FBI, the Air Force has warned it is ready for anything, and rural Lincoln County, Nev., is preparing to declare a state of emergency."

3) The media doesn't serve the public's interest. If the media truly cared about being a responsible source of information for the public, the Steve Jobs doppelgänger photo would not be a story. By providing it news coverage, however, the photo has gotten far more publicity than it otherwise would have. Even if the media point out that's it a hoax, they have inadvertently provided fuel to actual conspiracy theorists who live for this sort of thing.

4) That's not good because Americans are [incredibly susceptible to conspiracy theories](#) [5]. And some of the conspiracies we believe are very dangerous, such as vaccines causing autism or the "Pizzagate" conspiracy that led to a shooting. Though the Steve Jobs "conspiracy" is rather benign, it simply adds another ingredient to our conspiratorial culture.

It would be very interesting if researchers examined how conspiracy theories are born. (My guess is that many of them start as jokes.) Perhaps that could help us stamp them out before they take on a life of their own.

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Links

[1] https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/cv9tnn/steve_jobs_hiding_in_egypt_after_faking_his_death/

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/events/extraterrestrial-highway-area-51/storm-area-51-they-cant-stop-all-of-us/448435052621047/>

[3] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/08/12/he-got-million-people-say-theyd-storm-area-now-hes-planning-an-alien-festival/>

[4] <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-21/area-51-storming-nevada-ufo-aliens>

[5] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/02/19/fifty-percent-of-americans-believe-in-some-conspiracy-theory-heres-why/>