

Fake News and Other Lies

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Cartoon interpretation

Topics: Fake news • social media

This cartoon interpretation is written in American English.

¹ Jeffrey Koterba's cartoon shows a dark-haired boy with wooden legs, a hat, and a bow tie as he lies on his stomach. His nose is very long and, most notably, is not human. It looks instead like the branch of a tree, and it branches off into many other branches – some small, some big. The main tree branch has the word “disinformation” painted on it. Hanging off its left side are two intertwined branches – one reads “fake news” and the other reads “propaganda.” Hanging off the right side of the main branch is a branch reading “conspiracies.” A thought bubble below the boy says “But all I did was hit the ‘share’ button ... a lot.”

² The boy in the cartoon is obviously Pinocchio, and he is drawn to look like the Pinocchio from the Disney film of the same name (this would explain why the phrase “with apologies to Disney” appears below Koterba's name). Pinocchio is a wooden puppet brought to life by magic whose nose grows when he tells a lie. The version here says he didn't tell a lie; he just shared other people's lies on social media. The consequences for him look to be even worse than they would have been had he just told a lie in person. His nose has not only grown longer, it has become a twisted and heavy collection of branches – so heavy that they've knocked him to the ground.

³ For as long as the internet and social media have existed, people have shared rumors, gossip, and falsehoods online. Things like fake news and propaganda, however, have become more and more present over the past few years. During Donald Trump's presidency, for example, the conspiracy group QAnon grew online, spreading lies about liberal plots to abduct and sacrifice children. Claims of voter fraud online, helped along by Trump himself, helped spread the idea that the last U.S. election was “stolen,” which led to thousands of people storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. The more recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has also come with online propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Photos of executed Ukrainian civilians are labeled “fake” by Russia; an injured woman in a viral photo is called a “crisis actor.” And throughout it all, Russia and its online supporters maintain that they are only freeing Ukrainians from Nazis. It is not a war, they say, but a “special military operation.”

⁴ Koterba's cartoon should make anyone pause before clicking the ‘share’ button. Fake news and disinformation, when spread far enough, can have real-life consequences. The past few years have proven that. One lie shared online can often go farther than one lie shared in person. ‘Pinocchio,’ it seems, would have been a very different film if Pinocchio had had a Facebook account.

⁰⁻² **bow tie** (,bəʊˈtaɪ) Fliege – **most notably** (ˈnəʊtəbli) insbesondere – **to branch off** s. verzweigen – **intertwined** (,ɪntəˈtwʌɪnd) ineinander verschlungen – **conspiracy** (kənˈspɪrəsi) Verschwörung – **thought bubble** Gedankenblase – **wooden puppet** Holzpuppe – **twisted** verdreht – **to knock to the ground** h.: zu Boden reißen
³⁻⁴ **rumors** Gerüchte – **gossip** Klatsch – **falsehood** (ˈfɒlshʊd) Unwahrheit – **presidency** Präsidentschaft – **liberal plot** Komplott linker Kräfte – **to abduct** (æbˈdʌkt) entführen – **to sacrifice** (ˈsækrɪfaɪs) opfern – **claim** Behauptung – **voter fraud** Wahlbetrug – **to execute** (ˈeksɪkjʊ:t) hinrichten – **to label** bezeichnen – **to knock to the ground** h.: zu Boden reißen



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