

# As fake news takes over Facebook feeds, many are taking satire as fact

Robert thought hard about the exact number of Syrian refugees he wanted to place in Native American reservations.

He originally had decided on 50,000 but thought that sounded too believable. It needed to be more ridiculous. So he wrote his headline:

## U.S. to House 250,000 Syrian Refugees at Navajo, Standing Rock Indian Reservations

Of course, that isn't true in the slightest. But on Facebook, a lie can go around the world before the truth has even been posted.

Robert considers himself a satirist. A glance through his site, *Real News Right Now*, indeed shows a light, if perhaps too subtle, touch of humor.

Of course, that means not everyone got the joke. Fox News's Sean Hannity was soon parroting the 250,000 refugees claim. Soon, so was Donald Trump.

Robert is 34 and works in hospitality in Washington. "I make a little bit of money each month through ad revenue, but it all goes toward the site's upkeep and promoting my articles through various social media platforms," he said.

### Nouns

- **coverage** une couverture [média<sup>tique</sup>]
- a **glance** un coup d'œil
- **hospitality** les métiers de l'accueil
- **upkeep** la maintenance

### Adjectives

- **obvious** évident(e)
- **pumped out** produit(e) en masse
- **savvy** calé(e), malin (maligne)
- **tricked** trompé(e)
- **worrisome** inquiétant(e), préoccupant(e)

### Verbs

- to **distort** [the truth] déformer [*la vérité*]
- to have a **side job** occuper un second emploi
- to **parrot** [sth] répéter bêtement [*qqch*]
- to **take off** prendre de l'importance

"This is more of a labor of love for me than a profitable enterprise."

He said he counts his site as satire, like the better-known *the Onion*.

But the boundary between satire and real news is a vast grey area. Distributed – largely on Facebook – alongside deliberately false stories and partisan coverage, whether pumped out to suck up advertising revenue or for ideological reasons, it might not be immediately obvious to some that

30 *Real News Right Now* is satire.

Facebook has a serious fake news problem, a major contributor to what has been called the "post-truth" era.

There is no satirical value, for example, in the story "Taylor Swift SHOCKS Music Industry: 'I voted for Trump'". But the 35 fact that it was a complete fabrication didn't stop the story from being widely shared across Facebook and accruing more than a quarter of a million views in three days.

Even the most savvy news consumers can be tricked this way. For his part, Robert said that it was "worrisome" to him 40 when people take the satire written on *Real News Right Now* as fact. "I don't take any joy out of that. I wish people would fact check me."

"The ones that seem to take off, that people seem to believe," he said, "are the ones I find most unbelievable."

Nicky Woolf, theguardian.com, 17 Nov. 2016

### Other

- in the **slightest** pas le moins du monde
- **widely** largement