

**Second Reading of the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill  
(at the Parliament sitting on 8 May 2019)**

**Mr Louis Ng Kok Kwang (Nee Soon):** ... Second, the Ministry has said that the Bill does not cover satire or comedy. However, this exclusion is nowhere to be found in the Bill. It is not uncommon for satire or comedy to exaggerate or invent facts by intention. At the same time, online falsehoods have sometimes been perpetuated, for instance, by state actors in the guise of comedy. Can the Minister elaborate on how satire and comedy will be excluded from the law?

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**The Minister for Law (Mr K Shanmugam):** ... And Mr Louis Ng's question on satire and comedy. By definition, once it talks about fact, then it excludes satire and comedy. That is how the law operates. Say this is fact and falsehoods, the Act applies to falsehoods, then satire and parody is excluded. I gave some examples yesterday about how parody can be converted and put out as fact. That is a separate scenario. I do not think the Member is talking about that.

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**The Minister for Law (Mr K Shanmugam):** ... Falsehoods can help people earn large sums of money and have political impact. In the US, an American named Paul Horner set up at least 20 fake news websites. Some used deceptive URLs. It tricked readers into thinking that they were mainstream sources like ABC News or CNN. He was prolific. He used his websites to publish fake stories, stoke partisan engagement, claimed that they were satirical, said he assumed people would fact-check. But many did not, and they were fooled. Some examples of his falsehoods: during a Government shutdown, President Obama used his own money to keep open a government-funded Muslim culture museum. Fox News reported the story as a fact, before retracting it. False article: protestors were paid to protest against Mr Trump; re-tweeted by the Trump campaign; 20 million Amish people had committed to vote for Mr Trump, turned up in Google News, had 750,000 page views in two days. ...

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Falsehoods today travel easily and widely across multiple platforms. In 2017, a news article that a Russian aircraft had managed to electronically disable a US warship was posted on a Russian state-controlled news site. The article used a parody that had been published a few years before and presented it as truth. You can see how it is not just the labels that matter. People can be made to believe that parody is, in fact, true. So, you need to look at the material objectively.

So, this slide, designed to glorify Russia, undermine confidence in the US Navy. In two days, it was picked up by mainstream outlets in the US and Europe. You can see how it spread. ... In less than seven days, cross-posted on dozens of news sites and their social media pages, catered to different countries and demographics. Fox News' version was shared over 27,000 times. The Sun's version was shared over 10,000 times. ...

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