

Faux News

*There's good news and bad news,
and now there's false news that's
fun and entertaining*

Mahafreed Irani

On the Internet, *Pagal Patrakar* is a popular Indian journalist. The Facebook page for his news web site boasts a fan base of more than 1,06,700 readers and a Twitter following of more than 40,000 people, including politicians Shashi Tharoor and Omar Abdullah.

The celebrated writer's stories include the exclusive story of the man who sued deodorant makers Axe because he was unable to attract even a single girl and also a special feature on Indian cricketers who took 'performance-reducing drugs on the West Indies tour'.

But unlike most journalists who swear by the truth, this one clearly announces that he has 'no reliable sources'.

Pagal Patrakar writes for the web site *FakingNews.com* and specialises in the genre of news satire.

"I started it to mock sensational and irresponsible journalism," says *Pagal Patrakar*'s real world avatar, Rahul Roushan.

The Delhi-based IIM-A graduate satirizes a situation using the age-old tools of irony, sarcasm and hyperbole to "highlight any absurdity or hilarity that otherwise might not be visible or apparent".

And just like *FakingNews*, the

stuff like cricket and Bollywood," says Shah who refrains from subjects that "may hurt a section of the audience and/or communities".

But the most enjoyable posts are the ones that have a mix of both reality and make-believe such as an image created by *FakingNews* of Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati's Facebook wall that has Rahul Gandhi and Amar Singh teasing her.

Roushan says posts that are popular often get picked up by the mainstream media. For example, *Pagal Patrakar*'s 'Axe' story was inadvertently reproduced in several newspapers, and even the foreign press. This, even after the site clearly has a disclaimer that reads: 'Content of this web site, unless categorized as 'Editorial', is a work of fiction'.

And while most of these satirists will not shy away from parodying almost anybody; whether politician or Bollywood star, their main targets are generally mainstream media.

"Most of the news you see on TV today is vague and untrue," says the editor of *thescooptimes.com* and who only wants to be known by his online handle of NewsMan BaBa. "I have most fun parodying the indiscriminate sensationalism we see on television news channels nowadays."





Former journalist Rahul Roushan runs a news satire web site, Faking News, where he takes a dig at politicians, celebrities and the media

interweb has spawned a host of similar India-based web sites that spoof local current affairs, mock *desi* politics and take digs at the Indian media.

They have dedicated sections that serve up stories from every beat – be it business, sports, international news or Bollywood gossip.

Sites such as *theunrealtimes.com*, *thescopetimes.com*, *sunkey.co.in*, *news-that-matters-not.com*, and *mindry.in* are run by news junkies—some of whom are media students and former journalists themselves—and who spend their time looking for the most talked-about news stories, only so that they can create spoofs out of them.

Take the trio behind Sunkey (which is eccentric in Hindi), for instance. They scour news websites, watch screaming news anchors, and track trending topics on Twitter to make sure they have enough to spoof.

“The topics we select have to be newswy,” says Harsh Singh who created the site in March this year along with Vineet Singh and Mahendra Yadav, his classmates from management school. The three collaborate online via Facebook private messages to discuss story ideas.

“When we can’t find any hot topic or trend, we write on general

Similarly, Roushan of Faking News first started with a news satire blog in 2008 as a reaction to the falling standards of television journalism.

“I also wanted to explore The Onion-style news in India,” says Roushan who currently is the only full-time writer on the blog and accepts articles from a team of six regular contributors.

He is looking forward to the next few years as he intends to set up a FakingNews office soon.

International appeal

Indian news satire web sites are in their infancy and their stories and style still leave a lot to be desired. Most of these, however, take inspiration from international satire properties such as The Onion (www.theonion.com) that was launched in 1996 and today boasts over 7.5 million unique visitors every month. Listed below are a few other international satire sites worth checking out:

- www.private-eye.co.uk
- www.slashnot.com
- www.sportsPickle.com
- www.Realcelebritynews.com