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Fooled by 'The Onion': 9 Most Embarrassing Fails

China's state paper gleefully picked up a farce about Kim Jong-un being named Sexiest Man Alive. From 'The New York Times' to ESPN, more outlets that have been fooled by the satirical site.

Duped!

For 24 years, farcical periodical turned website The Onion has billed itself as America's Finest News Source—if by “finest,” you mean “satirical,” “winking,” and, most of all, “fake.” The sharp lampooning of the day's sociopolitical news is worthy, hilarious entertainment, but not even The Onion's best stories are as amusing as when legitimate news organizations and high-profile people mistake its satirical features for real news.

Such was the case Tuesday when China's state paper's website, People's Daily Online, gleefully reported The Onion's farcical crowning of North Korea's Kim Jong-un as the “Sexiest Man Alive.” And People's Daily wasn't alone in thinking that the satirical publication was seriously arguing that the Dear Leader is hunkier than the likes of Ryan Gosling and Channing Tatum. South Korea's Korea Times also picked up the fake report.

The news agencies can take some comfort, however, in the knowledge that they are in the good company of an ESPN broadcaster, a Louisiana congressman, and even the venerable Gray Lady herself, The New York Times. Here's a look at the best Onion gotcha moments.

China's People's Daily Convinced Kim Jong-un Is Sexiest Man Alive

The fact that Kim Jong-un does not, in fact, have abs to rival Matthew McConaughey's, the manly build of Will Smith, or piercing eyes like Ian Somerhalder apparently did not make The Onion's joke coronation of the diminutive Dear Leader as Sexiest Man Alive seem suspect to China's People's Daily Online. Not only did the publication report the news as legitimate, it built a 55-image slideshow commemorating the great honor. South Korea's Korea Times, to its credit, was at least slightly less exuberant in its reporting of the story.

Iranian Media Fooled by Fake Poll

Iran's state-run news agency Fars News seems to have an inflated opinion of its president, as it repurposed (see: essentially plagiarized) a farcical Onion piece reporting the outlandish results of a fake Gallup poll. The article reports that “77 percent of rural Caucasian voters...would much rather go to a baseball game or have a drink with Ahmadinejad than spend time with Obama.” Not only that, the invented

poll cheekily reports that 60 percent of the rural whites said “they at least respected that Ahmadinejad doesn’t try to hide the fact that he’s Muslim.”

The New York Times Tricked by Mock ‘Tiger Beat’ Cover

Anyone who followed Barack Obama’s first presidential campaign knows how seriously he courted the... tween vote? Of course, he never did such a thing, which is why it was so funny when The Onion created a mock Tiger Beat cover on which Obama beamed alongside the Jonas Brothers and Vanessa Hudgens and revealed, “I sing in the shower.” The New York Times, however, took the cover to be the real deal, and reported in an article profiling Tiger Beat that included a detail about how the cover helped Obama’s popularity surge with the younger set. Embarrassingly, the paper was forced to issue a correction upon learning the Obama cover was fake.

ESPN Announcer Bamboozled by Made-Up Profile

ESPN’s famously combative Stephen A. Smith furrowed his brow even more dramatically than usual after reading a fictional profile of him entitled, “Stephen. A. Smith Thinking Son Is Finally Ready for the Sex Argument.” Upon learning of the fabricated story, Smith went on a Twitter rant about the Onion’s “despicable lies,” marveling at “how folks try to tear cats down.” Someone was, clearly, not in on the joke.

Louisiana Congressman Falls for ‘Abortionplex’ Hoax

The lede to The Onion’s “Planned Parenthood Opens \$8 Billion Abortionplex” is so magically satirical and sarcastic that it’s positively gobsmacking that anyone took it for truth: “Planned Parenthood announced Tuesday the grand opening of its long-planned \$8 billion Abortionplex, a sprawling abortion facility that will allow the organization to terminate unborn lives with efficiency never before thought possible.” Seriously, \$8 billion?! “Abortionplex?!” The whole idea of conveyor-belt speed abortions?! And yet, Rep. John Fleming (R-LA) took the bait hook, line, and sinker, posting about the outrageous story on his Facebook page.

U.S. Capitol Police Sprung Into Action by Tweets

#Fail. Last September, The Onion skewered the budget fight in Congress with a story on its website called “Congress Takes Group of Schoolchildren Hostage.” In a misguided attempt to promote the story on Twitter, the site’s official social-media account then began posting fake breaking-news alerts: “BREAKING: Witnesses reporting screams and gunfire heard inside Capitol building.” That was followed by, “BREAKING: Capitol building being evacuated. 12 children held hostage by group of armed congressmen.” While the tweets were not as typically funny as The Onion’s usually are, one should still remember that the 140-character posts are still coming from a fake news site. Nonetheless, the U.S. Capitol Police were forced to investigate the startling tweets and issue an official press release about its efforts.

Bangladesh Papers Hoodwinked by Neil Armstrong Article

It only took 40 years, but dedicated conspiracy theorists finally cracked Neil Armstrong, according to The Onion, which made up humorous quotes from the legendary astronaut in which he confesses that a YouTube video that a moon-landing denier forced him to watch convinced him that he had never really stepped foot on the moon. “Instead,” he says in the article, “the entire thing was filmed on a soundstage, most likely in New Mexico.” It would be a jaw-dropping development—if it were real—and thusly two major Bangladesh publications, The Daily Manab Zamin and The New Nation, reported Armstrong’s denial. Later, they were forced to admit, “We didn’t know The Onion was not a real news site.”

Fox Nation Taken for Ride by Obama Email

Count Fox News’s opinion website, Fox Nation, and its readers among those not familiar with the Peabody Award-winning spoof journalism being done by The Onion. In 2010, Fox Nation excerpted several paragraphs from The Onion’s satirical piece, “Frustrated Obama Sends Nation Rambling 75,000-Word Email,” eliciting a flurry of flabbergasted and derisive comments from the site’s readers. Perhaps shamed by the ensuing reports mocking Fox Nation for taking The Onion’s piece post seriously, the site quickly took the article and its comment thread down.

California Town Confused by Fake Study

“Study Finds Every Style of Parenting Produces Disturbed, Miserable Adults,” read one Onion headline in 2011. How many live in California? The article cited a fictitious study conducted by the very real California Parenting Institute—without the center’s blessing—alarming a large number of local residents who began flooding the research center with concerned emails and phone calls. “I’m totally aware that it’s satire, but it’s spreading through the Internet and people’s blogs and where it’s coming from is getting left off and it’s looking like a news story,” said CPI’s executive director. Added a colleague, “We even had parent educators who work here say, ‘When did we do a study?’” A clarifying press release from CPI soon followed.

The original article



Kim Jong-Un Named *The Onion's* Sexiest Man Alive For 2012 [UPDATE]

[News](#) • [North Korea](#) • [Lifestyle](#) • [ISSUE 48•46](#) • Nov 14, 2012



The Onion is proud to announce that North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong-un, 29, has officially been named the newspaper's Sexiest Man Alive for the year 2012.

With his devastatingly handsome, round face, his boyish charm, and his strong, sturdy frame, this Pyongyang-bred heartthrob is every woman's dream come true. Blessed with an air of power that masks an unmistakable cute, cuddly side, Kim made this newspaper's editorial board swoon with his impeccable fashion sense, chic short hairstyle, and, of course, that famous smile.

"He has that rare ability to somehow be completely adorable and completely macho at the same time," *Onion* Style and Entertainment editor Marissa Blake-Zweibel said. "And that's the quality that makes him the sort of man women want, and men want to be. He's a real hunk with real intensity who also knows how to cut loose and let his hair down."

Added Blake-Zweibel, "Ri Sol-ju is one lucky lady, that's for sure!"

With today's announcement, Kim joins the ranks of *The Onion's* prior "Sexiest Man Alive" winners, including:

- 2011: Bashar al-Assad
- 2010: Bernie Madoff
- 2009: Charles and David Koch (co-winners)
- 2008: Ted Kaczynski
- 2007: T. Herman Zweibel

The Onion's commemorative "Sexiest Man Alive" issue will be available on newsstands everywhere this Friday and contains a full 16-page spread on Kim.

UPDATE: For more coverage on The Onion's Sexiest Man Alive 2012, Kim Jong-Un, please visit our friends at the [People's Daily](#) in China, a proud Communist subsidiary of The Onion, Inc. Exemplary reportage, comrades.