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Satire as Confirmation Bias: *South Park* Meets *The Simpsons*

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The Source Project: Disinformation and Naivete

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Satire and Disinformation

An analysis of the animated comedies of *South Park* and *The Simpsons* reveals the ways that satire has the potential to spread disinformation. As two of the most popular animated satirical comedies, they hold the potential to possibly influence viewers, which is why it is important to analyze how prone they are to disinformation. It is important to explore this topic, with my sections consisting of different episodes or productions from both *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, so we can promote awareness of different places disinformation can stem from, not just within media. By adding satire into the category of disinformation, particularly when it comes to confirmation bias, through the means of animated shows, it extends this field of studies. Finally, as it will be shown throughout this poster, we are able to differentiate how, based on the structure and style of their political satire, *South Park* and *The Simpsons* are when it comes to the possible spread of disinformation through confirmation bias.

I. *South Park* Content and Disinformation

- **Confirmation Bia**s: When people view certain content that may support their own beliefs and ideologies, so they take it as evidence to support said concepts.
- "**South Park Republicans:**" Term coined by Andrew Sullivan that refers to the growing trend of conservatives taking the humor and ideas given off from *South Park* to either create or confirm their own political ideologies and agendas.
- "**ManBearPig:**" An episode of *South Park* that heavily satirizes left-leaning politician Al Gore and his advocacy for climate change awareness, portraying it as something nonexistent and imaginary while converting Al Gore as annoying and desperate for attention. Throughout the episode, Throughout, Al Gore raves about how the fictional ManBearPig is causing the destruction of Earth and whines about how he is "super-cereal" ("ManBearPig:" *South Park*).
- **Partiality of satirized politics**: *South Park* has a tendency to over satirize and target the left-leaning ideologies and celebrities much more than the other wing, paving the way for the existence of "South Park Republicans"
- **Section Takeaway:** The given nature of the satirical humor from *South Park*, with it holding a favorable tendency against a particular side of the political spectrum, has led to existence of "South Park Republicans" through their own confirmation bias. This makes the spread of disinformation from this show to be inherently more plausible.

II. *South Park* Production Style and Disinformation

- *6 Days to Air*: A documentary that goes over the production style of *South Park*, where they film the course it takes to create one episode, the particular one being "HumanCentiPad."
- **Production time:** *South Park*, as of the filming of the documentary, only takes 6 days to create one episode, from start to finish. This is compared to other popular shows, such as *The SImpsons*, which takes 7-9 months to create an episode, making the show rush their production with little research being done about what they satirize, adding to the proneness of spreading disinformation. (*6 Days to Air*)
- **Ideology of Creators:** Trey Parker and Matt Stone, when it comes to creating *South Park*, have a tendency to simply just make fun of whatever and whoever they want when it comes to creating content. This means it can appear that they are simply making content for the sake of doing so, without any regards for what damage it may lead to in terms of disinformation.
- **Section Takeaway:** In conjunction with the Section I, the production style and ideology behind the show, with it being an extremely rushed process without regard the the content their producing, making it susceptible to spreading disinformation more easily.

III. The Balance of *The Simpsons*

- "**Sideshow Bob Roberts:**" Episode of *The Simpsons* where the town of Springfield is holding a mayoral election between a Republican and a Democratic candidate, in which each political side happens to be evenly satirized. Sideshow Bob, a convicted murderer running for the Republican side, goes up against Democrat Mayor Joe Quimby, an openly corrupt mayor who constantly takes bribes and the audience is compelled to feel he does not care for the people of Springfield ("Sideshow Bob Roberts:'" *The Simpsons*.
- **Balance of Satire:** Throughout the show, each party is criticized and satirized by the show in what can be concluded as an even amount. Because of this, it can be determined that there would not be as large amount of a confirmation bias, as not one party is being directly targeted.
- **Style of the Show:** In comparison to *South Park*, *The Simpsons* production style happens to be much longer, along with their content being less vulgar and thus more digestible for most audiences which choose to view it. Its given nature and the topics that it chooses to satirize creates a show that most people would not have indignations about, and are able to enjoy without the content being misinterpreted and then conveyed as disinformation.
- **Section Takeaway:** Due to the formative process behind creating episodes of *The Simpsons,* with the satirization of politics and topics being more equal and then digestible, it is able to prevent the potential spread of disinformation more effectively.

Picture taken from Season 21 Episode 8 of *The Simpsons*, "O Brother, Where Bart Thou?" where *The Simpsons* satirize *South Park* by using their own characters dressed as characters from *South Park* placed in a quintessential setting of said show. https://www.disneyplus.com/video/82a1a502-53a6-4c94-be36-3db8a55d12a3.

Recap

- **General Takeaway:** Throughout this poster, it was discussed how the use of satirical comedy, in animated shows in particular, hold the potential to spread disinformation through the given concept of confirmation bias.
- **Section I:** As seen within various episodes of *South Park*, with "ManBearPig" serving as the prime example, the creators of the show have a tendency to over satirize people and ideas with more left-leaning ideologies, which in turn caused the rise of "South Park Republicans" through their own confirmation bias.
- **Section II:** Then with their accelerated production style and the creators own ideology, the constant pumping of content which really holds no regards for what is targeted, makes it more susceptible for spreading disinformation.
- **Section III:** When it is then compared to *The Simpsons*, with their satirized politics being much more equal and seen as less extreme, it can be conferred that certain shows hold more potential, such as *South Park*, to spread disinformation due to the nature of their content.

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