



Community Notes Programme Against Fake News

For Prelims: [Meta](#), [Election](#), [Deep Fake](#), [Jana Gana Mana](#), [Press Council Act, 1978](#), [News Broadcasters Association](#), [Information Technology \(IT\) Act, 2000](#), Community Notes Programme, User-Generated Context.

For Mains: Issues related to fake news, social media regulation in India

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, has scrapped its **3rd-party professional fact-checking** programme and **replaced** it with a **Community Notes programme** similar to **X platform** (formerly Twitter).

- Meta said that fact-checking organisations had behaved in a **partisan way** and added that the **Community Notes programme** would face **fewer biases**.
- Experts warn that replacing fact-checkers with a community-based network could lead to **increased fake news and misinformation in India**.

What is a Community Notes programme?

- **About:** It is an **initiative of X**, aimed at combating misinformation and enhancing content quality through **user-generated context**.
 - It **empowers users** rather than relying solely on centralized moderation teams.
 - Community Notes was first **piloted** as a programme called **'Birdwatch' by Twitter in 2021**.
- **Function:** Users provide notes on posts that need **clarification or additional context**.
 - Notes are **visible** only when a diverse group **agrees on their accuracy and usefulness**.
- **Algorithmic Review:** A **rating system** ensures that only the most **balanced and widely supported** notes appear publicly. This helps **mitigate bias and ensure fairness**.
- **No Editorial Oversight:** Unlike traditional fact-checking or moderation, the notes are **not edited or curated** by platform employees but are entirely community-driven.

Professional Fact Checkers

- **About:** Professional fact-checkers are **individuals or organizations** that **verify public claims** to **combat misinformation** in the digital age.
 - Meta collaborates with **11 independent**, certified fact-checking organisations covering content in **15 languages in India**.
- **Key Characteristics:** Professional fact-checkers are **trained, independent, and non-partisan**, using **evidence-based** methods and **ethical codes** for transparent claim verification.
- **Prominent Examples:** International ones include **PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and Snopes**,

while India-specific platforms are **Alt News, Factly, and Boom Live.**

What are the Concerns Regarding the Community Notes Programme in India?

- **Vulnerability to Misinformation:** Without professional fact-checkers, **untrained users** may struggle to identify biases and misinformation.
 - Without oversight, **political or biased content** may dominate, misleading large sections of the population.
- **Shifting Responsibility to Users:** User-flagged content may experience **delays in addressing misinformation** as companies **shift responsibility to the public**, resulting in **inconsistencies** and the potential **spread of false information.**
- **Ideological Bias:** Without neutral fact-checking, content may **skew politically**, contributing to **manipulation and polarization**, especially in politically charged environments that may enforce **majoritarian views.**
- **Financial and Technical Challenges:** Losing support from platforms like Meta could **limit fact-checkers' scope**, weakening **fight against misinformation** and leaving gaps in content verification.
- **Diversity and Context:** India's **cultural and political diversity** makes community-based fact-checking challenging, as interpretations may vary.
 - Complex issues may require **professional expertise** to interpret accurately, which users may not provide.

Why is Fact-Checking Essential?

- **Fair Journalism:** Fact-checking ensures **media credibility, fosters transparency, and combats misinformation**, especially on social media, by correcting false claims and ensuring accurate news.
- **Political Integrity:** Fact-checking ensures **election integrity** by combating misinformation and **verifying political claims** to prevent misleading the electorate.
- **Technological Innovations:** The rise of **deep fakes, viral rumors, and manipulated media** requires professional journalists to investigate and verify content.
- **Accountability:** By scrutinizing and exposing **exaggerations or falsehoods**, fact-checkers ensure that those in power are held to high standards of truthfulness.

Popular Examples of Fake News from India

- **Muzaffarnagar riots** of 2013 caused by fake video fuelled communal passions
- UNESCO has declared '**Jana Gana Mana**' best national anthem in the world (WhatsApp)
- **GPS tracking nano chip** in 2000 Rupee notes (Nov 2016)
- A Indian politician used photo of Russian streets to show **LED-electrification of Indian streets**
- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) annual report used a picture of **Spain-Morocco border** to show Indian border floodlighting

What are Challenges in Tackling Fake News?

- **Lack of Legal Definition:** Most countries (including India), including those with robust free speech laws, **lack a clear legal definition of fake news**, complicating efforts to regulate it effectively.
 - A study found that **false information spreads 70% more quickly** than accurate news on social media platforms.
- **Balancing Regulation and Free Speech:** Efforts to curb fake news often risk being perceived as **censorship**, leading to **controversies** over freedom of expression and **content moderation practices.**

- **Passive Re-sharers:** A significant number of users **unknowingly share unverified content**, amplifying misinformation without malicious intent, which is harder to address with punitive measures.
- **Platform Accountability:** Social media platforms have limited accountability due to **safe harbor protections** making it challenging to hold them liable for user-generated content.
- **Language and Regional Diversity:** India, with over **22 official languages** and **hundreds of dialects**, faces unique challenges in combating fake news, as a **BBC study (2019)** revealed that misinformation often **spreads faster in regional languages** than in English or Hindi.
- **Rise of Deepfakes:** According to **Deeptrace Labs (2019)**, the number of deepfake videos online **doubled every 6 months**, with **96% related to disinformation or exploitation**.
 - **Deepfake** tools are now **widely accessible**, lowering the barrier for malicious actors.

What are Provisions to Tackle Fake News in India?

- **Press Council of India (PCI):** The **Press Council Act, 1978** allows the PCI to **censure or warn media outlets** for spreading fake news or professional misconduct.
- **News Broadcasters Association (NBA):** The **NBA** is a self-regulatory body that ensures **better control** over the quality and accuracy of content aired on **private television news channels**.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC): Sections 153 and 295 of the IPC (Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita)** can be invoked to deal with fake news that incites **violence, communal unrest, or insults religious sentiments**.
- **Defamation Laws:** Defamed individuals can file a case under **IPC Section 499**, with criminal defamation under **Section 500** carrying up to two years of imprisonment.
- **Section 66 in IT Act, 2000:** The **Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000** penalizes cybercrimes such as **identity theft (Section 66C), cheating by impersonation (Section 66D), privacy violations (Section 66E)**, transmitting obscene material (Section 67) etc.

Way Forward

- **Multilingual Moderation:** Develop **AI-driven tools** for detecting **fake news in regional languages and dialects**. Collaborate with **linguists and local fact-checkers** to improve monitoring of regional content.
- **Platform Accountability:** Social media platforms like **Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp** must ensure accountability by investing in **strong moderation systems** to prevent the spread of **fake news**, especially during elections.
- **Ethical Journalism:** Implementing **stringent editorial guidelines, independent audits of content**, and holding journalists accountable for spreading fake news are crucial for maintaining trust in the media.
- **Public Awareness:** Governments and NGOs can run awareness campaigns to educate the public on the **dangers of fake news** and the importance of **verifying information**, helping reduce misinformation spread.
- **Media Literacy Programs:** Introduce **media literacy and critical thinking** as part of **school curricula** to cultivate a generation of **responsible digital citizens**.

Drishti Mains Question:

What are the challenges India faces in implementing effective fact-checking mechanisms, and how can these challenges be addressed?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. In India, it is legally mandatory for which of the following to report on cyber security incidents? (2017)

1. Service providers
2. Data centres
3. Body corporate

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. What do you understand about the concept of “freedom of speech and expression”? Does it cover hate speech also? Why do the films in India stand on a slightly different plane from other forms of expression? Discuss. **(2014)**

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