



ARTICLE: FAKE JOURNALISM – AN ERA OF APPEALING TO MAJORITY

“In this era of fake news and paid news artificial intelligence is more and more used as a political tool to manipulate and dictate common people, through big data, biometric data, and AI analysis of online profiles and behaviours in social media and smart phones. But the days are not far when AI will also control the politicians and the media too”

- Amit Ray

Fake news or Sloppy Journalism can be defined as the misinformation in the country which is spread either through the traditional media, i.e. word of mouth or through the digital forms of communication - social media clickbait rumours, memes, edited videos, unverified advertisements, etc. Fake News in India has become a grave issue since last few centuries as it has the potential to result in violence, riots and mob lynching. The major example can be cited here is of 2018 where a group of 20 people was killed as a result of misinformation transmitted through social media¹.

INTRODUCTION

The News Channels and the Social Media are spreading news which is basically high on emotions and low on facts and is unfortunately igniting hatred among sections of societies. Since last few centuries, the country has entered a phase where the deception revolves around identity and emotion rather than the instrumental facts which are scientifically verified. The debunked news has shifted its focus to cultural and religious elements which appears suspicious to viewers and are harder to verify. For example, news was spread by AajTak² in 2015 in which it stated that a Fatwa has been issued in Saudi Arabia that men can eat their wives if hungry. This screamingly fake news was criticized in a satirical column

¹ Indo-Asian News Service, “Lot of Misinformation in India spreads on WhatsApp”: US Expert, NDTV (September 15, 2018, 1:32 AM), <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/fake-news-politicised-misinformation-more-common-in-india-us-expert-1916786>

² Alt News Desk, *India Today's AajTak runs a fatwa as news that was declared fake by India Today's DailyO 18 months ago*, ALT NEWS (April 13, 2017, 6:57 PM), <https://www.altnews.in/india-todays-aaj-tak-runs-fatwa-news-declared-fake-india-todays-dailyo-18-months-ago/>



by a Moroccan blogger³ and was further quashed in 2015 by 'Daily O' for circulating such fake stories. On 30th August⁴, 2017, news was circulated by Republic TV that Jama Masjid of Delhi or Masjid-i- Jehan Numa, which is one of the largest mosques in India, is in dark due to non-payment of electricity bills over four crores. The news originated from numerous Hindutva handles and postcard were among the top fake news sources. The news reporters, who immediately snooped outside the house of Imam Bukhari, counted his cars and recorded their video but did not ask him whether the mosque is usually lit at night and at what time the lights are normally switched off at night.

Misinformation travels through different modes of media and more often in the form of video clips which ignites physical reaction, fear and sometimes disgust. In December, 2019 when the government passed Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) the Supreme Court of India asked the Central Government of India to broadcast the aims, objectives and advantages of the CAA in order to eliminate the clickbait which was being disseminated on the issue. On this, the Counsel for the Government stated before the Apex Court that about 95% protestors have no knowledge about the CAA and due to debunked news they feel that the law will take back their citizenship. According to Indian intelligence report⁵, it was found that around 5000 social media handles from Pakistan were actively participating in spreading fake and false propaganda on Citizenship Amendment Act by the help of deep fake videos and to overcome this 15,000 social media mediators were appointed to work overtime to identify the fake news on CAA being spread on Twitter, Facebook, etc.

MISINFORMATION DURING COVID-19

³ Daily O, *Men can eat their wives if they're hungry? Fake Saudi fatwa goes viral*, DAILY O (October 29, 2015, 11:00 AM), <https://www.dailyo.in/variety/mad-saudi-fatwa-men-can-eat-their-wives-if-theyre-hungry/story/1/7054.html>

⁴ Alt News, *Fake news on Jama Masjid's electricity bill starts on social media, Republic TV takes over*, NEWS LAUNDRY (August 31, 2017, 5:00 PM), <https://www.newslaundry.com/2017/08/31/republic-tv-jama-masjid-fake-news>

⁵ IANS, *Around 5000 Pak social media handles spread fake news on CAA*, OUTLOOK INDIA (December 16, 2019, 9:30 PM), <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/around-5000-pak-social-media-handles-spread-fake-news-on-caa/1687209>



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Fake news was used as a handy weapon at the time of 2019 Indian General Elections⁶ where WhatsApp played a pivotal role in spreading the misinformation. The misinformation was weaponised and spread like forest fire. Consequently, Facebook went up removing nearly one million accounts a day including those who were spreading misinformation and fake news before the elections.

The situation got even worse at the time of COVID-19 pandemic where the Indian News Channels were seen adding communal colour in their news. The world was grasp under the deadly clutches of the COVID-19 pandemic but the fake news was still spreading and the people are having blindfold belief in it. The news was circulated that around 9000 people participated in the Tablighi Jamaat⁷ Conference in Delhi Nizamuddin and many of the attendees travelled to various parts of the country. It was then reported that nearly 3000 corona virus cases reported during that time were either people who attended the Tablighi gathering or those who came in contact with them. The incident proved to be a feed for several media houses to communalize a global pandemic. A bombardment of hoax news targeting Muslim Community for the pandemic also followed suit, both by social media users and mainstream media. With the hashtags like #CoronaJihad and #BioJihad the pandemic took the form of a hate campaign against the minority community⁸. People's trepidation of coronavirus and existing religious tensions further charged Islamophobia in the country.

Another incident where the mainstream media used the pandemic to spread hatred regarding the minority community was when a huge crowd of migrant workers gathered at the Bandra Railway Station⁹ in Mumbai on 14th April, 2020, after PM Narendra Modi's proclamation of the extension of the lockdown. Though there were similar assemblies in

⁶ Billy Perrigo, *How Volunteers for India's Ruling Party are using WhatsApp to fuel fake news ahead of Elections*, TIME (January 25, 2019, 7:48 AM), <https://time.com/5512032/whatsapp-india-election-2019/>

⁷ Ayan Sharma & Chahak Gupta, *Audit of bigotry: How Indian media vilified Tablighi Jamaat over coronavirus outbreak*, NEWS LAUNDRY (April 27, 2020, 11:45 AM), <https://www.newslandry.com/2020/04/27/audit-of-bigotry-how-indian-media-vilified-tablighi-jamaat-over-coronavirus-outbreak>

⁸ Billy Perrigo, *It was already dangerous to be Muslim in India. Then came the Coronavirus*, TIME (April 3, 2020, 5:27 PM), <https://time.com/5815264/coronavirus-india-islamophobia-coronajihad/>

⁹ Shailaja Bajpai, *How not to report: A lesson from Republic TV, Times Now, ABP covering Bandra migrants*, THE PRINT (April 16, 2020, 10:44 AM), <https://theprint.in/opinion/telescope/a-lesson-from-republic-tv-news-times-now-abp-bandra-migrants/402641/>

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Surat, the news channels focused individually on the Bandra incident. Moreover, channels like News Nation, India TV and ABP were fixated on why the crowd assembled near a Masjid at the station, even when the Masjid played no role in the gathering. The migrants who were hungry and needy just wanted to go to their hometowns but unfortunately, the media was desperate in finding a non-existent religious angle.

LAWS ON FAKE NEWS IN INDIA

There is no such specific codified law against fake news or fake journalism in India. There is free publication of news under Article 19 of the Constitution which guarantees Freedom of Speech but still there are few provisions from the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Information Technology Act (IT Act) and the Disaster Management Act which controls the effect of fake news in India to an extent. These provisions are as under-

1. **Section 66 D of Information Technology Act-** “Whoever, by implies for any communication device or PC resources cheats by personating shall be punished with the detainment of either description for a term which may stretched out to three years and will likewise be at risk to fine which may reach out to one lakh rupees”.
2. **Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act-** “Whoever makes or circulates a false alarm or warning as to disaster or its severity or magnitude, leading to panic shall be punished with the imprisonment which may extent to one year or with fine”.
3. **Section 505 (1) of the Indian Penal Code, 1860-** “Whoever by making, publishing or circulating any statement, rumour or report which may cause fear for alarm to the public, or to any section of the public shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years, or with fine or with both”.
4. **Section 153 of Indian Penal Code-** “Whoever harmfully, or wantonly, by doing anything which is illegal, gives provocation to any individual proposing or realizing that it will generally be likely that such provocation will cause the offense of rioting to be committed, shall, if the offense of rioting be committed in consequence of



such provocation be punished with imprisonment of either portrayal for a term which may reach out to one year or with fine or with both and if the offense of rioting be not committed, with detainment of either description for a term which may stretch out to a half year or with the fine or with both”.

5. **Section 499 and 500 of Indian Penal Code**-“Whoever, by words either spoken or intended to be read, or by signs or by visible representations, makes or publishes any imputation concerning any individual intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm the reputation of such individual is stated, aside from for the situation hereinafter expected to defame that individual and whoever defames another will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may stretch out to two years, or with fine or with both”.

CONCLUSION

Government took certain efforts to control the social media rumours from spreading such as Internet Shutdowns, linking Aadhaar to social media accounts and conducting public education initiatives to make the population more aware of the fake news. In Kannur, Kerala, the Government conducted fake news classes in government schools. The Government there has come up with a new initiative, ‘Satyameva Jayate’, across 150 government schools for students from classes 8 to 11. The programme aims to generate the spirit of Article 51 (A) (h) of the Constitution with the objective to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform in children in the nascent stage of their development while also upholding the national motto of ‘Satyameva Jayate’. The programme focuses on how to identify fake news, how to verify the news and how to look for credible sources of information. Moreover, websites such as BOOM and Webqoof, the fact-checking websites have collaborated with Facebook and the Quint respectively are not only controlling the spreading of fake news but also states the actual fact of the story.

Therefore, to stop fake news one should review the source of the news, study the news in details, check about the author, date of the news and ask the expert or fact-checking website to know whether the news is true or false.



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Thus, it can be concluded that-

“Choose to scrutinize every information you get, because some people say things that mislead you and some media houses if not all are brought to push and publish certain agendas”.

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Date: 03.07.2022