Concerns with WhatsApp Fake News

What is the issue?

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During fragile situations in India WhatsApp is being used as a tool to spread fake news.

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What are the reliable features of WhatsApp?

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- WhatsApp messages are encrypted end-to-end, a feature that is great from the perspective of privacy of users.
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- It ensures only sender and receiver can read and see what is sent, and nobody in between.
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- This feature helps messages, photos, videos, voice messages, documents, status updates etc. from falling into the wrong hands.
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- In India number of monthly active WhatsApp users in February 2017 was 200 million which was exponentially greater from August 2013, when it was just 20 million.
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- The messaging application is being used more and more by rural and older populations, who are often new to the internet and less tech-savvy.
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How WhatsApp is being misused in India?

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- The problem of fake news and misinformation being spread via WhatsApp is not exclusive to India, It has become a trend across the globe.
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- During emergency situations like protests, communal violence, disasters

etc.WhatsApp is most widely used as a medium to spread rumours about the incident.
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- It is also being used by political parties in favour them and for spreading anti-religious sentiments.
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What are the challenges in containing WhatsApp fake news?

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- WhatsApp works in a way that is fundamentally different from Facebook and Twitter.
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- In the latter, it is comparatively easier to check fake news and prevent the spread of misinformation.
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- Posts on Facebook can be viewed by the friends of a user, since WhatsApp messages are encrypted end-to-end it is impossible locate the origin of the message source.
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- Fake news messages aremostly shared on groups, where one might not have the contact of the person who has shared the message saved on phone.
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What measures can be taken?

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- As of now there is no apparent solution or even a proper diagnosis of the problem which WhatsApp poses for law enforcement agencies, and society at large.
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- The spread of fake news through WhatsApp is something cannot be controlled directly, this puts the responsibility of stopping spread of misinformation on citizens and the media.
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- People need to be told that messages on WhatsApp can be dangerous and false information can be spread by people looking to create trouble.

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- Public figures and authorities need to stop sharing messages they receive on WhatsApp.
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- From its part the messaging app should also issue disclaimers stating that messages can be false.
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Source: The Indian Express

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