The Menace of Fake News

What is the issue?

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- With the advent of new age digital and social media, fake news has literally pervaded all spheres of life.
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- Given the political, social and economic ramifications, there is a need for some uniform guidelines and policy in this regard.
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What is the concern?

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- Fabricated and manipulated content are increasingly gaining ground in India.
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- This is certainly leading to the possibility of potential violence, hatred and is impacting the social fabric in many ways.
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- The advent of fake news is not new or recent, but its potential of reach has magnified with new online platforms and applications.
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- The rise of digital and social media is amplifying the effect of the menace of fake news.
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- Notably, in recent days, isolated cases in different States for sharing false content through messaging and other social media platforms were booked.
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- On some occasions, the Internet has been shut down by the government on the pretext of inciting violence and to stop the spread of misinformation.
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What drives this trend?

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- **Lack of regulation** - The online platforms, unlike the mainstream media, do not fall under comprehensive regulation.
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- A number of online news/information portals are being set up due to the lack of proper entry barriers.
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- The lack of binding rules and the ability to keep owners and editors private, offers a larger scope for wrongdoing in case of online platforms.
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- Also, despite researches and investigations on fake news, credible information on the creators and the intention behind it is still untraced.
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- **Communal polarisation** - The growing polarisation of society on ideological lines has made the job of spreading fake news easier.
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- Contrarily, the spread of hatred inducing content among leaders/groups of the opposing ideologies, further deepens the prevailing communal hatred.
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- **Reach** - In the past, communal violence in India was more a localised affair.
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- However, in recent days it is extensively being triggered through the Internet on a much larger scale.
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- The online and mobile platforms serve like nodal agencies distributing unverified information.
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- **Gains** - Spreading false news is becoming a way to make advertising money through click baits.
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- In India, numerous sites are being set up to commercialise fake news with click bait headlines.
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- Users are enticed with multiple link pages to click and continue reading making the content go viral.
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What should be done?

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- The online platforms for content distribution should create systems to filter

fake news.
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- Users creating hate content and sharing it can be booked under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
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- But the challenge is the sheer expanse of the Internet and the anonymity it grants to the users and creators of fake news.
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- So, regulations like compulsory registration of details of editors, publishers and physical address of the registered entity could be brought, for digital media outlets.
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Source: The Hindu

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