

# KOO APP: SIGNING UP, PRIVACY CONCERNS, AND MORE

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: IT, Internet and Communications

The Koo logo

In the past week, as the stand-off between the Centre and Twitter over content regulation peaked, Union Minister Piyush Goyal took to Twitter to invite his followers to connect with him on Koo. "Connect with me on this Indian micro-blogging platform for real-time, exciting and exclusive updates," he tweeted. Other prominent figures followed up with similar announcements, including Electronics and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who has a verified profile and over 5 lakh followers on the app.

With a yellow bird as its logo, Koo is an India-made micro-blogging platform that is similar to Twitter. It aims to facilitate participation of Indians on the internet in their mother tongue, and supports five languages currently – English, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu. Support for Bangla, Gujarati, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, and Assamese is in works, according to their official website. It can be accessed via website or mobile, or via an app version available for Android and iOS. Unlike Twitter which has a cap of 280 characters per tweet, Koo allows you to use up to 400 characters. Apart from text, it supports audio and video recording, and sharing of pictures and web links.

The app, launched in March 2020, is founded by Aprameya Radhakrishna and Mayank Bidawatka, both MBA graduates from India. It was among the winners of the government's 'AatmaNirbhar App Innovation Challenge' last year, and was praised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his monthly radio show 'Mann Ki Baat'.

The platform recently raised \$4.1 million from a clutch of investors, including an entity backed by former Infosys CFO Mohandas Pai, Accel Partners, Kalaari Capital, Blume Ventures and Dream Incubator. According to media reports, one of its investors includes a Chinese venture capital firm Shunwei Capital. However, Radhakrishna has stated that the group is a "single digit shareholder" and will be "exiting fully."

Once you download the app from Google Play or App Store, you can select your preferred language and register a new account with your phone number. An OTP will be sent to your phone. After the OTP verification is completed, your account will be set up and you choose a username, upload a profile photo and provide a short bio as desired.

Subsequently, you can follow other users, like their posts, comment on them or share them on Facebook or WhatsApp. Apart from ministers, officials and government departments, media houses like News18, CNBC, and Republic TV too have set up official accounts on the app. However, Prime Minister Modi is yet to set up a Koo account.

As Koo's user base surged, ethical hacker Robert Baptiste, who goes by Elliot Alderson on Twitter, raised concerns around the security of the data collected by the app.

"The app is leaking the personal data of users: email, dob, name, marital status, gender," he wrote on Twitter.

Baptiste shared a redacted screenshot, allegedly of an app user, to illustrate that it is possible to

access a user's personally identifiable information (PII), including date of birth. Protecting PII is a core value of data privacy, considering how even seemingly innocuous scraps of data can be stitched together to identify or impersonate a person.

However, Koo co-founder Radhakrishna refuted the allegation, and claimed that the details visible are those shared by the user on the profile page.

"Some news about data leaking being spoken about unnecessarily. Please read this: The data visible is something that the user has voluntarily shown on their profile of Koo. It cannot be termed a data leak. If you visit a user profile you can see it anyway," he wrote on Twitter.

Elliot Alderson rebutted this, and shared a screenshot of a profile page on the app, asking "Where do you see her dob? Her gender? Her marital status?"

Radhakrishna responded with his email ID, and wrote: "We're attempting to do something for our country, India. All help is appreciated. If you want to help out in this journey of ours please write to me on ar@kooapp.com and we can take a look at all the feedback you have. Thanks!"

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From breaking news to in-depth reportage and analysis, the micro-blogging site has emerged as a one-stop destination to consume news.

The app, Josh, is one of several home-grown short-video platforms that have sprung up since India blocked the wildly popular TikTok in June amidst a border crisis with China.

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