

# SIMPLE 'DOUBT BUTTON' MAY HELP WHATSAPP CURB FAKE NEWS

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For the study, the researchers experimentally evaluated the effect of different corrective on-platform messages on the persistence of common rumours among over 5,000 social media users in India | Photo Credit: [V V KRISHNAN](#)

Adding a simple "button" to express doubt in reference to claims made on WhatsApp posts, or enabling users to easily flag statements as problematic, unreliable or groundless may help the platform cut the spread of misinformation, suggest the results of an India-focused study.

"Similar to the 'like' functions that exist on other platforms, it would be technically very easy for WhatsApp to add 'red flag' or '?' emoji buttons that users can easily click on next to contentious posts," said the study by researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, Leiden University, IE University.

"Such a strategy would be entirely compatible with the encrypted nature of the platform, as 'red flags' need not be reported or investigated by the platform, but merely used to communicate to other users that a variety of opinions exist among participants to the thread," it added.

Countering the spread of misinformation among Indian users of the Facebook-owned platform is a huge challenge as WhatsApp cannot see the content of the messages due to the end-to-end encryption feature, which allows only the sender and receiver of the messages to view the content.

WhatsApp's efforts to reduce the spread of fake news has included limiting of the number of forwards to five, besides other measures such as running awareness campaigns on dangers of fake news on various platforms.

Some of the measures followed after reports of dozens of deaths linked to rumours spread on WhatsApp emerged in India.

"Our findings suggest that though user-driven corrections work, merely signalling a doubt about a claim (regardless of how detailed this signal is) may go a long way in reducing misinformation. This has implications for both users and platforms!," one of the study authors, Sumitra Badrinathan from the University of Pennsylvania in the U.S., said on Twitter.

For the study, the researchers experimentally evaluated the effect of different corrective on-platform messages on the persistence of common rumours among over 5,000 social media users in India.

"Our main analyses above overall suggest that exposure to a fact-checking message posted by an unidentified thread participant is enough to significantly reduce rates of belief in a false claim," said the study funded by Facebook.

"If anything clearly emerges from our results, it is the fact that any expression of incredulity about a false claim posted on a thread leads to a reduction in self-reported belief," it added.

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