

ARE LAW AND TECHNOLOGY A SOLUTION TO FAKE NEWS?

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

Fake news and its associated social problems have been a major concern and the Indian government has been attempting to bring in several legal amendments to deal with its creation, propagation and effects. Social media companies, too, are investing billions of dollars into technological solutions such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify fake news and its proliferation. Are these the best solutions to solve a problem as old as humanity or is there any other effective solution?

Looking at statistics on the justice delivery system in India, the legal system needs to become more robust before it can be considered an effective solution. Further, the formulation of laws in themselves do not prevent a wrong action.

Also read | [Fact and fiction in a fake news epidemic](#)

When Timnit Gebru, former co-lead of Google's ethical AI team, made an unceremonious exit, [the MIT Technology Review identified the key aspects of her unpublished paper](#) that had caused a stir within Google. In summary, to train large AI models, massive computing power and energy is required and this has been expanding since 2017, along with an ever-increasing carbon footprint. The *Technology Review* stated that the 'Transformer' model, as on January 2019, used 6,56,347 kilowatt-hour (kWh), producing a carbon footprint of 6,26,155 lbs of CO₂ equivalent at a cloud computing cost between \$9,42,973 and \$32,01,722 for a single training of the AI model. These models have to be trained multiple times before they become usable. Further, since the models tend to use text already present on the Internet, there is a tendency for the AI to reflect strong negative human biases. The numerical values highlight the cost on the environment and the remote possibility of access to already deprived sections of society.

Fake news is disinformation that has no basis in reality, but is presented as fact. Being designed to manipulate both the intellect and emotions of a person, it can evoke strong emotional reactions in its reader, which could sometimes result in violence. Statistics from social media websites show that fake news generates much higher engagement among readers than real news. While digital networks have contributed to the exponential proliferation of fake news, this is not really a new phenomena.

In an experimental study conducted among first-year undergraduate History students, who were given some historical content, it was found that novice learners made claims that did not have supporting evidence, were either inaccurate or unrelated.

Also read | [What mechanism do you have against fake news, Supreme Court asks Centre](#)

India's diversity is its strength, but also the source for numerous conflicts that have persisted over the decades. These conflicts, being rooted in historical claims around politics, culture and religion, will intensify if the historical assumptions and data behind related fake news are not contextually analysed and challenged. The problem is aggravated with the decline in history learning programmes worldwide. While the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum has elements of historical thinking, State boards are primarily focused on the memorisation of content.

The Constitution of India provides a long-term solution under [Article 51A \(h\)](#), which says, “It shall be the duty of every citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.” While the National Education Policy, 2020, captures the needs of the nation, it unfortunately misses out on historical thinking.

Historical thinking is the set of thinking skills required for learning history or doing history and is content agnostic. It consists of concepts like points of view, evidence, validity and reliability of the source, contextualisation, and corroboration, apart from other skills. Historical thinking skills can also be applied to a diverse set of domains such law, forensic science, politics and research, and dealing with the real world problem of ‘fake news’.

In the case of fake news, a person would have to be able to read a piece of news, examine the source for bias and ascertain whether the claims being made are factual with data or whether they constitute deliberate misinformation. Since fake news is designed to appeal to emotion, it becomes all the more important that a person is skilled at interrogating evidence, contextualising the information and corroborating it with alternate sources. If historical thinking has such widespread application, why is it missing from active public discourse and in the education system?

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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