

WHATSAPP GETS WATCHFUL

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If you are a part of multiple group chats on WhatsApp, you might want to check if they are still around, and more importantly, that none of them has an ugly name. The Facebook-owned messaging app has recently taken to banning users globally if they are found to be part of group chats with malicious or suspicious names, in some cases permanently. WhatsApp, which was recently in the eye of a spyware storm, has been under pressure for a while to address the problem of its platform being used to spread ill will.

In 2017, a string of mob lynchings and other killings was traced to rumours related to organ harvesting and child abduction that spread through the app. Among other things, the strict new policy is aimed at curbing child exploitation. WhatsApp said on its official blog earlier this year that the service relies on end-to-end encryption and advanced machine learning to identify—without accessing any messages—and ban users circulating “Child Exploitative Imagery”.

However, what might qualify as “malicious” or “suspicious” remains unclear. Child pornography is easy to spot. But other messages and posts that do society damage are not so easily identifiable by the name of a group chat. Some chats have bizarre names just as pranks. While WhatsApp could argue that it has no way of seeing what actually gets passed around on chats, since all data is encrypted end-to-end, we should not have the absurdity of truly dangerous stuff getting away even as harmless names get busted. But then again, some action is better than none.

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