

SOCIAL SELF-REGULATION

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The Supreme Court of India wants the government to evolve guidelines to regulate social media in view of its increasing misuse. There is no denying that social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have given voice to people. They no longer take to the streets to register their protests. With the click of the mouse, they can participate in a country's socio-political debates, even influence outcomes. Social media has made democracies more boisterous, widened conversations, and acted as a lightning rod for dissent. However, these redeeming facets of the social media appear to be getting undone by mischievous posts.

The speed and reach of social media has meant that subversive rumours and fake news get aired with impunity. This has resulted in serious law and order problems. In India, this phenomenon has assumed dangerous proportions. Fake news on WhatsApp has led to lynchings and communal flare-ups in many parts of the country.

No doubt, this menace needs to be curbed. The apex court wants the Centre to put in place a mechanism to track down originators of fake news, rumours and objectionable material such as pornography. The court's directive poses the government a dilemma. For one, too stringent a policy of policing social media could violate the individual's right to privacy. For another, it's not easy to force Facebook Inc., the owner of WhatsApp, to give up on the app's unique selling proposition to the user of complete end-to-end confidentiality. If WhatsApp messages can neither be decrypted for scrutiny nor traced to their origin, the government's best option would be to run a vigorous campaign advising people on how to spot and reject fake news. Social media calls for social self regulation.

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