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Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative

Fake News

Why in news?

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Pakistan's Defence Minister recently threatened Israel with a retaliatory nuclear attack, in response to a fake news report that the Israelis had said they would use nuclear weapons against Pakistan if it sent ground troops to Syria.

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What is fake news?

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Fake news is a deliberate creation of factually incorrect content to mislead people for some gain and is becoming an increasingly serious problem.

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What is click bait?

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- Clickbait is a web content that is aimed at generating online advertising revenue at the expense of quality or accuracy.

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- It relies on sensationalist headlines/thumbnail to attract click-throughs and to encourage forwarding.

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- The headlines typically aim to exploit the "curiosity gap", providing just enough information to make readers curious, but not enough to satisfy their curiosity without clicking through to the linked content.

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Why is fake news harmful?

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- Everyone with an Internet connection and a social media presence is now a content generator.

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- Access to the web at all times on mobile platforms has raised expectations for real-time news and constant entertainment. This coupled with competition among websites and social media platforms has resulted in the proliferation of 'clickbait'.

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- With platforms such as Facebook, that have hundreds of millions of users, news, fake or otherwise, spreads rapidly.

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- While the news may be fake, its impact is real and potentially far-reaching.

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- A recent study from the Pew Research Center found that approximately two-thirds of Americans felt 'fake news' had caused a "great deal of confusion" over current affairs.

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- A man fired an assault rifle in a pizzeria in Washington, D.C. after reading online that it was involved in a child trafficking ring linked to Hillary Clinton.

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- The abundance of fake stories during the U.S. presidential elections has raised concerns about their impact on election results.

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- This has set alarm bells ringing in Europe where several countries are about to go to the polls

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- In India, a fake story said there was a GPS tracking chip embedded in the new Rs.2,000 note.

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How should it be tackled?

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- Germany is considering imposing a €500,000 fine on Facebook if it shares fake news.

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- Italian regulator has asked European countries to set up an agency to combat fake news.

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- The danger is these instruments to identify fake news **could curb free speech and opinion.**
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- Therefore such **regulation should come from within.**
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- Social media and news organisations can regulate themselves at different levels through rigorous internal editorial and advertising standards.
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- Industry-wide measures, such as adherence to a charter of standards on fake news and imposition of fines on organisations falling short of these, could be done.
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- The broad contours of what constitutes fake news need to be defined.
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- News and social media companies have a moral responsibility to ensure that they do not, directly or deliberately misrepresent the facts to their audiences and pass them off for news.
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- Also, web users should clearly understand the **difference between a facts and opinions.** For example, climate change is a proven fact. It is not an opinion that a person can choose to believe.
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- More importantly they should **rely upon on news organisations** with facts and sources, for information regarding issues (or simply news for that sake), ranging from Jallikattu to Nuclear Warfare, rather than mixing up the role of social media with it.
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