

“False Information in Social Media - The Emerging Menace of Mob Lynching”

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ABSTRACT

The advent of digitalization, the social media platforms have become a major source of information for the people. In this digitally developing period finding authentic and reliable information have become hard because the users are unable to differentiate the original from the fake. It is important to realize that social media is no longer only for connecting with friends and sharing funny forwards but has become a platform to share updates and information of current/daily affairs along with opinions about the current social, political and religious status of the country on the whole.

India is a secular and liberal country which provides its citizens with the choice to express their opinions in any aspect with certain reasonable restrictions. However, it has been found that this freedom is sometimes misused and false information is being published with the aim to instigate a lynch mob against a person/s. While the people have a right and duty to raise their voice against injustice, it is necessary for them to understand that they are not to take law and order into their hands under any conditions.

Keywords: False information, social media, lynch mob, killing, law and order.

INTRODUCTION

Lots of things you read online especially in your social media feeds may appear to be true, more often than not the information are not true. False information is news, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers. Usually, these stories are created to either influence people’s views, push a political agenda or cause confusion and can often be a profitable business for online publishers. The internet and social media have made it very easy for anyone to publish content on a website, blog or social media profile and potentially reach large audiences. With so many people now getting news from social media sites, many content creators/publishers have used this to their advantage.

False information can be a profitable business, generating large sums of advertising revenue for publishers who create and publish stories that go viral.

A Lynch Mob is one of the outcome as a result of False Information which is received by means of social media or news. Basically, A lynch mob is an angry crowd of people who want to kill someone without a trial, because they believe that person has committed a crime. Over the years, India has faced a wide range of cases wherein a certain false information has lead to killings by way of Lynch Mob.

The paper aims to critically analyse false information which plays a vital role in initiating a lynch mob mentality which has the potential to lead to killing of innocent people who are not legally convicted or under trial.

Types of False Information

There are differing opinions when it comes to identifying types of false information. However, when it comes to evaluating content online there are various types of false or misleading news we need to be aware of.

These include:

1. Click bait These are stories that are deliberately fabricated to gain more website visitors and increase advertising revenue for websites. Click bait stories use sensationalist headlines to grab attention and drive click-through to the publisher website, normally at the expense of truth or accuracy.
2. Propaganda Stories that are created to deliberately mislead audiences, promote a biased point of view or particular political cause or agenda.
3. Satire/Parody Lots of websites and social media accounts publish fake news stories for entertainment and parody.
4. Sloppy Journalism Sometimes reporters or journalists may publish a story with unreliable information or without checking all of the facts which can mislead audiences.
5. Misleading Headings Stories that are not completely false can be distorted using misleading or sensationalist headlines. These types of news can spread quickly on social media sites where only headlines and small snippets of the full article are displayed on audience newsfeeds.
6. Biased/Slanted News Many people are drawn to news or stories that confirm their own beliefs or biases and fake news can prey on these biases. Social media news feeds

tend to display news and articles that they think we will like based on our personalised searches

LYNCH MOB

In today's day and age Social Media plays a major role in providing news and information relating to anything and everything ranging from religion to politics to laws to fashion. Hence, the chances of anyone being a victim of false information is very high and likely to lead to a lynch mob.

In India, the spreading of false information on social media has led to various unprecedented crisis. Lynch mobs in India are often prejudicial against minority communities and superstitions which involve the sacrifice of live humans which they consider to be an unforgivable crime and hence sought to taking justice into their own hands rather than wait for the law to give an official verdict.

One such case of heinous menace of mob Lynching came to light or existence after the 2015 Dadri incident where in the deceased, a 52 yr old was killed by a mob of villagers for the suspicion of slaughtering of a cow but later on it was found that the deceased and his family was not storing beef for consumption. Later this trend grew into abundance through the misinformation shared and spread through social Medias almost 16 lynching took place within 2 months based on a rumor spread on child lifters and on cow slaughter in various parts of India.

The Honorable Supreme Court has requested the Parliament to consider enacting a new law against these "Horrendous acts of mobocracy" which sternly deal with mob lynching and cow vigilantism, warning that such incidents may rise like a "Typhon-like monster" across the country.

Some major cases of mob lynching due to spread of fake news like forest fire in every part of the country are:

- In the Dhule district of Maharashtra five people were killed on the suspicion of belonging to a gang of child lifters as a certain video based on child lifters was spreading in that area. Later on the same day in district of Sonitpur in Assam a mentally distrubed women was thrashed and tortured by the villagers.
- In different districts of Tripura three cases of Mob lynching occurred and was reported for the suspicion of child lifting. The victims were a women, a hawker and a official hired to fight the person involved in spreading of such rumours and gossips
- Another instance were in Aurangabad two men were attacked by the villagers who were influenced by fake news that was circulated in social media.

- A transgender on May 28 in the state of Andhra Pradesh was attacked by a group of 500 people on the suspicion of being a child lifter.
- In the state of Tamilnadu two were attacked believing them to child kidnappers. One being a man aged 60 years who was tortured , beaten to death and was finally hung from a bridge. The other victim was attacked based on a fake message but she did no harm but had just distributed foreign chocolates to children.

It is important to ensure that the citizens should be aware that they need to approach the state authorities like Police in case they find any inconsistencies in the society under any circumstances and let the law and order act upon such inconsistencies rather than taake it upon themselves to serve justice.

LEGISLATIONS AND PROTECTION

Rumours are a lethal weapon that affects the morale of the people. The Law enforcement agencies have power under law to take legal action against anyone who spreads rumors about the virus and causes a state of panic among the general population. Even though ,at present ,India does not have a specific law to deal with menace of fake news but we still have existing legal provisions under Indian Penal Code,1860 etc which can be invoked incase of misinformation. Legislations and its protection has been considered to been a greater turn on this issue. Which made imposing penalties on all people who eventually creates or spread fake news.

INDIAN PENAL CODE,1860

Section 505(1) of Indian Penal Code,1860:The punishment for making, publishing or circulating any statement, rumour or report which may cause fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public. Which imposed with Imprisonment which may extend to 3 years or fine or both.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACT ,2000

Section 66D of the Information Technology Act: Whoever, by means for any communication device or computer resource cheats by personating. Imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine which may extend to one lakh rupees.

This is a critical time for wider informed engagement on the subject, and the weeding out of all posts propagating false information and rumours. It means an action-oriented approach where social media platforms — identified as ‘intermediaries’ under the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2008 — need to step up to the plate and remove such content without waiting for law enforcement or judicial reference.

Social networks provide us with an ideal platform for keeping up to date with the latest information from across the world. However, social networks such as Twitter and Facebook are also proving to be a fertile ground for spreading fake news which reaches a large number of people in a short span of time. The main aim of this research paper is to determine the most common features of fake news on social networks. The results of this study will later on be used for an eventual task of building a model for automatic detection of fake news. We studied over 40 research papers on fake news on social networks and analysed a dataset containing over a million public tweets labelled as spam and non-spam tweets to extrapolate common aspects. We classified the aspects of fake news on social networks into three categories, listing the most prominent aspects in each category.

False information is not new, however it has become a hot topic since 2017. Traditionally we got our news from trusted sources, journalists and media outlets that are required to follow strict codes of practice. However, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information and news with very little regulation or editorial standards.

Google and Facebook have announced new measures to tackle fake news with the introduction of reporting and flagging tools. Media organisations like the BBC and Channel 4 have also established fact checking sites. While these are welcome developments, digital media literacy and developing skills to critically evaluate information are essential skills for anyone navigating the internet and especially for young people..

The vast amount of information available online and rise in fake news highlights the need for critical thinking. Children need to develop critical thinking from an early age. This is a key skill for young people to develop as they enter into third level education and prepare themselves for the workplace.

CONCLUSION:

While digitalization is a necessary evil, the citizens need to take the law and order seriously and understand the seriousness of their actions and reactions. One small false information can lead to a huge scandal which may or may not result in a lynch mob. It is the duty of every citizen to check the authenticity of any information before reposting or telling it to others.

There is still a possibility that the information published cannot be cross checked, in such a case the citizens are to inform the appropriate authority which is usually the local police who will take action in accordance with the law rather than creating a mob to tackle the suspect without proper procedural investigation. No person is to be convicted of an offense until and unless they are officially convicted by the court of law.