GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 659
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 05.02.2020

FAKE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

659. DR. T. SUMATHY (a) THAMIZHACHI THANGAPANDIAN:

Will the Minister of Electronics & Information Technology be pleased to state:-
(a)   whether the Government has any data on the number of fake social media accounts operating in the country and if so, the details thereof;
(b)   whether the number of fake social media accounts has increased in the last three years and if so, the details thereof; and
(c)   whether these accounts are used to spread rumors, fake news and misinformation on social media platforms and if so, the details thereof and the steps taken by the Government in this regard?

ANSWER
MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI SANJAY DHOTRE)

(a)   and (b): Cyber space is a complex environment of people, software, hardware and services on the Internet. The borderless cyberspace coupled with the possibility of instant communication and anonymity provides a possibility to create fake accounts on social media platforms. Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology does not maintain data pertaining to fake social media accounts.

(c): The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 has provisions for removal of objectionable online content. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011 notified under this section requires that the intermediaries, which includes social media platforms, shall observe due diligence while discharging their duties and shall inform the users of computer resources not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share any information that is harmful, objectionable, and unlawful in any way. Also, section 79 of the Act provides that intermediaries are required to disable/remove unlawful content as and when brought to their knowledge by appropriate government or its agency or through a court order.

Further, section 69A of the IT Act, 2000 empowers Government to block any information generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above.

Government has taken several steps to address the challenges of misinformation and rumors spreading via social media platforms. These, *inter alia*, include:

(i)   Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) as well as Police are in regular touch with various social media platforms to address the issues of removal of objectionable content as well as spread of fake news, misinformation/disinformation on Internet.
(ii)   Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued a number of advisories which include advisory on cyber-crime prevention and control dated 13.01.2018 and also an advisory on incidents of

lynching by mobs in some States fueled by rumors of lifting/kidnapping of children dated 04.07.2018.

(iii) MeitY through a program, namely, Information Security Education & Awareness (ISEA), has been creating awareness among users highlighting the importance of following the ethics while using Internet and advising them not to share rumors/fake news. A dedicated website for information security awareness (https://www.infosecawareness.in) provides all the relevant awareness material.

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