# Grantees keep in step with digital media trends

**O**ver the past year, digital media has seen significant changes in news consumption patterns. News accessed via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are increasingly dominating the landscape.

In keeping with this global trend, our Grantees have been proactively stepping up their social media presence. There is a realisation that a significant segment of consumers on the



Presence on Social Media

Facebook 92% — Twitter 85% — Instagram 69% — Whatsapp Group 46%
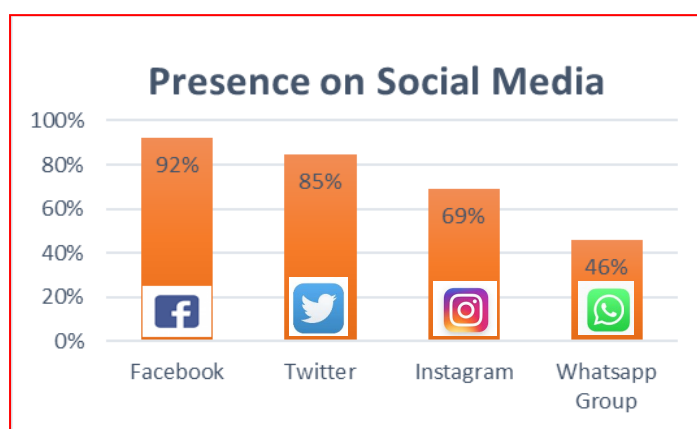
internet use social media for sharing news and that this is a platform that needs to be keenly explored.

Around 92% of our Grantees have a Facebook presence while 85% have Twitter handles. This demonstrates a heightened awareness of distributed news. Taking note of the increased usage of mobile phones for accessing news, our Grantees are meeting the challenge to take their content to the mobile platform.

# The Business of Fake News

At the same time, the deliberate distortion of news stories through posts on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and even by newspapers and TV channels, has dented the credibility of the Indian media.

Slanted stories, gossip and rumour-mongering have always been part of the media equation in India. But for over a year now India has witnessed a new phenomenon altogether – a proliferation of websites as well as social media links that spread falsehoods and pass off hoaxes as news.

The medium of choice for fake news perpetrators is WhatsApp, as it has more than 1.2 billion users globally, with more than 200 million in India alone. WhatsApp's advantage is that it does not require users to set up accounts and messages are confined to groups and can even be encrypted for privacy.

The fact that WhatsApp groups usually comprise people known to each other and generally accepting of each other, makes it



10,155 people like this.

Namo Supporter
Sponsored

पेज लाइक करके सर्जिकल स्ट्राइक का समर्थन करें

अबकी बार पाकिस्तान पार

लाइक करें

Namo Supporter
Politician
10,155 likes

even more effective for those disseminating fake news. Facebook, on the other hand, can tackle fake news a little better because its users have their own accounts, making it easier to track offenders.

Many of the fake stories go viral because they advance a 'nationalist' majoritarian agenda. As mainstream media lacks the will, skill, and resources to call-out fake stories, most of the initiatives in India to combat fake news are undertaken by younger, more technologically alert, individuals.

In the past few months, a few sites dedicated to exposing and confronting social media 'hoaxes' have emerged; their future development should be of much interest.

**For fake news sites, money matters—P3**

# Some key trends: Social media drives distribution

IPSMF Grantees are steadily working out news dissemination strategies centred on emerging digital media trends. We have sought to capture some of the key trends below. The charts alongside, demonstrate our Grantees' readiness to stay on top of the curve.

## Social media as source of news

Facebook has emerged as the most important network for finding, reading/watching, and sharing news. YouTube is also a key platform while Twitter remains an important tool for journalists, politicians, and heavy news consumers, in particular. WhatsApp, though, is emerging as one of the platform delivering the most striking results.



Reach via WhatsApp

- Using WhatsApp: 46%
- Yet to implement: 54%
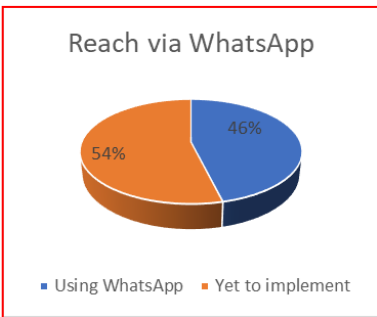
One of our grantees, *The Better India (TBI)*, has built an in-house technology bridge with WhatsApp that enables it to build a community of readers and broadcast content to the members. As we write, *TBI* has close to 70,000 subscribers on WhatsApp to whom short videos, links and images are sent every day. According to TBI, in terms of numbers, WhatsApp is proving to be the most engaging platform, where it is seeing over 90% delivery rates (content being delivered to the target) and more than 75% content consumption rates (target audience viewing content).

Apart from WhatsApp, Bluetooth is being used to deliver content. Entities such as *Gaon Connection* and *CGNet Swara*, have put technology to good use and encouraged citizen journalism in media-dark areas of India. They have touched the lives of people in rural Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and brought their stories into a wider public conversation.

## Impact on 'branded' news

The growth of news accessed and increasingly consumed via social networks, portals and mobile applications could possibly lead to established news brands being noticed less. This is creating a level playing field for all journalistic efforts, irrespective of size or affiliation. In keeping with this trend, close to 75% of our Grantees are actively using social media branding to increase their reach and keep the target audiences engaged.

## Non-traditional revenue streams

Most consumers in India are still reluctant to pay for general news available online. Yet, the experience of *The Wire* in generating donations as a key revenue stream and that of *The Ken* with its subscription-based paywall is very encouraging. *The Ken* has seen its monthly user base rise 86% since January

### EXISTING AND POTENTIAL REVENUE STREAMS

| Grantee | Ads | Subs | Donations | Syndication | Feature Sponsor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Not-For Profit** | | | | | |
| The Wire | Green | | Blue | | Green |
| IndiaSpend | | | Blue | | |
| CGNet Swara | | | Blue | | |
| EPW | Blue | | | Blue | |
| The Caravan | Green | | Green | | |
| Samachara | | | Green | | |
| **For Profit** | | | | | |
| The Better India | Blue | | | | Blue |
| LiveLaw | Green | | | Green | |
| Swarajya | Blue | | Blue | | |
| WTD News | Blue | | | Green | |
| The NewsMinute | Blue | | | | Blue |
| The Ken | | Blue | | | |
| The Gaon Connection | Green | | | Green | |

2017, despite being a subscription-based model, which shows that readers in India are ready to pay for in-depth and well-researched storytelling.

## Smartphone usage



Mobile Apps

- Yes: 38%
- No: 62%
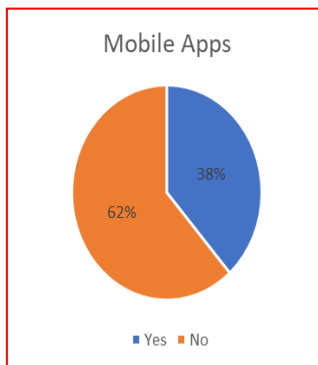
Smartphones are increasingly becoming the device of choice for news and updates. Smartphone usage has risen sharply, while computer usage for the same purpose is falling. As the chart shows, 38% of our Grantees have launched an application to reach out to the growing number of mobile-only readers. Many of them actively post their stories, along with pictures on Instagram as well.

## Defined audience base

Our interactions with existing grantees as well as other applicants clearly point to great awareness and understanding of their audiences enabling them to offer content that is relevant and of specific interest to their readers.

## Focus on the 'product'

Grantees have also been focusing on the news product they offer with the realisation that packaging is as important as editorial content. This means that they need to have a product mindset and think as much about the user experience as the articles they publish.

They are also conscious that audiences become more loyal when they feel that the content is tailored to their needs. As a result, readers also tend to get more involved with the content they receive.

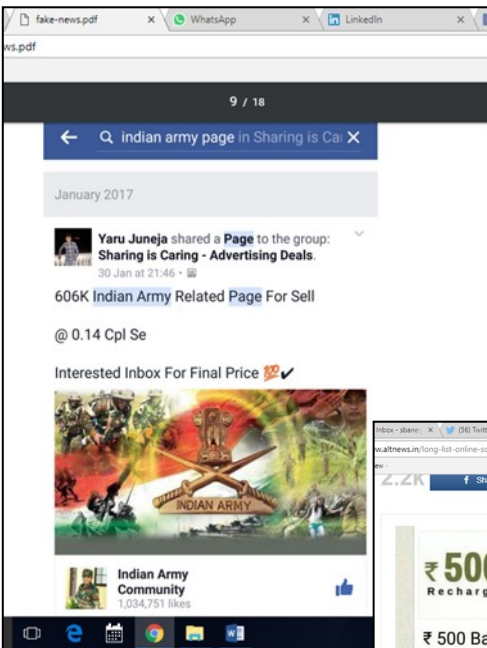## Video content as a differentiator

Convergence of mediums on a single platform has now become the norm. While more than 60% of our Grantees have adopted videos and are using online news videos to attract and retain users, a majority of readers still display a preference for text as they find reading news quicker and more convenient.



MULTIMEDIA PLATFORMS

- Video: 61%
- Audio: 8%
- Text Only: 31%
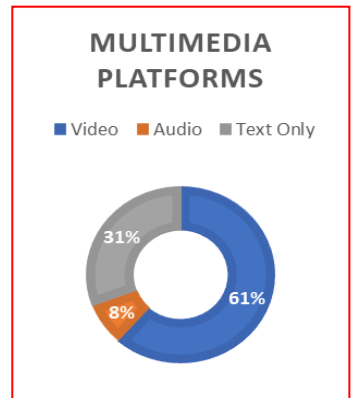
# For fake news sites, money matters

In India, ideology, alone, does not drive generation of fake news. In fact, commercial interests are a bigger factor. Quite a few of the fake news sites have well organised teams and run full-fledged operations that generate huge revenues. While we have tracked such sites, naming them would not be prudent. However, it is useful to understand their modus operandi.

One such site is run by a 12th grade student – where he posts patently fake news and hopes to take it viral. Sometimes, even other bigger sites in the genre fall for his fake news. The promoter admits that his stories are at times completely concocted. His main motive is to earn money via clicks, and he uses several strategies to divert traffic (see box above).

## Strategies To Create Traction

**Facebook traffic** is the main attraction for these websites. Many fake news sites have created multiple Facebook pages which share links from their websites. Thematic pages like - Celebrities, the Army, 'Hot Desi Girls' etc, are much in demand. There is even a Facebook group that specialises in trading such pages.

**Create a Facebook group:** Members of this group who share the site's links are paid for generating traffic. Pages promoting the site's content are given a UTM Code that is appended at the end of the link prior to sharing the post. This UTM code in turn is tracked via Google Analytics to determine the number of visitors to a particular page.

Some lure good **content writers** to the world of blogging with a promise to help them earn at least $1000 a month.

One strategy to bump up 'likes' is to sponsor a post on the page by spending a small amount of money and provoking 'likes' through statements such as "If you support surgical strikes, like this page", "If you are a true Hindu, like this page", and so on..
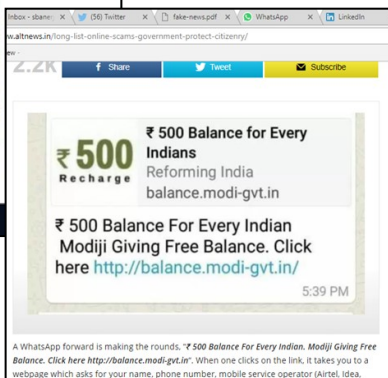
Once these pages cross a certain threshold of 'likes', they are traded with various websites, including fake news websites, for a negotiated amount. Fake news websites then push their content to these pages. Sometimes, instead of buying pages, they pay page owners up to Rs 70-100 for every 1000 visitors that a page can send to their site.

The fight against fake news is a massive effort and perhaps mainstream media should earmark its resources to combat the menace. Until then, the initiatives that have already taken off need to be supported.

## Combating Fake News

**AltNews.in** - Ahmedabad-based start-up; run by Pratik Sinha; fact-checks viral stories, photographs and videos; calls out stories in media that may be based on fake news.

**SM Hoax Slayer** - run by Mumbai-based Pankaj Jain; combats misinformation.

**FactChecker.in** - initiative of The Spending & Policy Research Foundation, verifies claims/statements made by public figures or government reports.
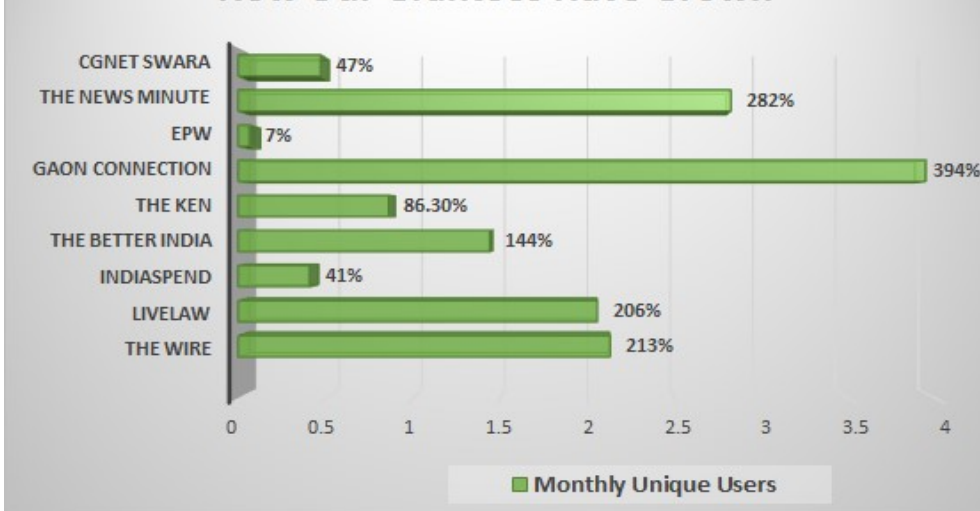
**Boomlive** - run by PING Digital Network

**Hoaxorfact.com** - checks for scams, viruses, deceptions, misconceptions, misbeliefs, and unfair hoaxes and rumours.

**Check4Spam** - run by Shammath Olliyath; a verification site that focuses on internet-rumours, promotions and political hand-outs/stories.

## TIMELINE OF GRANTS

| MEETINGS | NAME OF GRANTEES |
|---|---|
| 2017-18 – 1 MEETING | Swarajya, The Caravan, Samachara, The Wire (Urdu and Marathi) |
| 2016-17 – 7 MEETINGS | The Better India, LiveLaw, Gaon Connection, EPW, WTD News, The News Minute, The Wire (Hindi), The Ken |
| 2015-16 – 5 MEETINGS | IndiaSpend, The Wire, CGNet Swara |
| **TOTAL COMMITMENT – Rs 15.05 Cr** | |

## How Our Grantees Have Grown

| Grantee | Monthly Unique Users (% growth) |
|---|---|
| CGNET SWARA | 47% |
| THE NEWS MINUTE | 282% |
| EPW | 7% |
| GAON CONNECTION | 394% |
| THE KEN | 86.30% |
| THE BETTER INDIA | 144% |
| INDIASPEND | 41% |
| LIVELAW | 206% |
| THE WIRE | 213% |

■ Monthly Unique Users

## *The Wire* gains support for fighting fake news

IPSMF Grantee *The Wire* has been at the forefront of the fight against fake news. They called out several 'big' fake news stories and received appreciation from readers and the media fraternity as a whole, some of whom reproduced or followed the stories.

**'End of Quota' in private colleges sold as Yogi's 'anti-corruption' move:** The story exposed how the right-wing PR machinery and certain sections of the media have been working in overdrive to give Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath an image makeover since his appointment.

**BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra 'falls' for fake news, again:** In another instance of how fake news instigates immediate outrage on social media, *The Wire* revealed how BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra fell prey to a fake story by the Times of Islamabad website on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' programme. *The Wire* tracked the entire timeline of how the fake story was circulated on social media.

### *The Ken*'s story leads to PIL

*The Ken* spoke to senior executives from three large Indian pharmaceutical companies that have a majority market share in some of the price-controlled drugs – all of whom agreed that in the last three years, price regulation has affected them only marginally. They said they want to abide by the law but IPA's Dilip G Shah has taken the conflict very personally. This story became a part of a PIL filed by a Vadodara-based citizen's advocacy group called Low Cost Standard Therapeutics.

# Grantees focus on farm sector distress

The agrarian crisis in India is deepening with every passing day. From demand for waiver of loans to the menace of bad seeds and manipulative cartels, the farmers are clamouring for solutions.



### Nikkei Asian Review follows *IndiaSpend*'s story of farm loan waivers

As demands for farm-loan waivers grew across six states--after Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra wrote off loans worth Rs 36,359 crore and Rs 30,000 crore respectively– *IndiaSpend* analysed the demands and found that India faces a cumulative loan waiver of Rs 3.1 lakh crore ($49.1 billion), or 2.6% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016-17. The story was a reference point for discussions around farmer distress, and was quoted in many pieces, including this report in the *Nikkei Asian Review*. Karnataka waived farm loans worth Rs 8,165 crore a week later.

### Farmers get compensation for bad seeds

This April, *Gaon Connection*'s community journalism programme, Swayam, came across some farmers of Bakshi Ka Talab near Lucknow who incurred heavy losses due to the supply of defective cauliflower seeds. Swayam's team raised this issue and finally, the authorities stepped in to help the farmers. The State Horticulture Department investigated the matter and proper compensation was paid to the affected farmers.

### When the nation could not feel the pulse

Investigations by the income tax department indicate that the sudden spike in the prices of particular pulses in 2015 was a consequence of the formation of international and Indian cartels of traders. These allegations are denied by the players concerned. Reports prepared by tax officials that are being disclosed for the first time, indicate how the pulses trade in the country has been prone to manipulation, reported *EPW*.

## Report draws attention to lake

*The News Minute* reported on the pathetic condition of an important local water body in Hyderabad, which started frothing due to sewage and and animal waste dumped in it. Following this, minister K Tarak Rama Rao of the Telangana government directed the department to visit the lake and control the contamination.

## Electricity restored in villages

Kamalabad, a village with 3000 residents, was in complete darkness for two weeks because of a broken transformer. It was re-stored after one of the local community journalists from *Gaon Connection*'s Swayam project ran a story on the issue.

Stories reported by *CGNet Swara* from Mauje Savaria village in the West Champaran district of Bihar helped restore electricity in this region. The locals of this region were tired of chasing officials for the same. Reports by *CGNet* built pressure on local authorities who were forced to act.

## Organic farmers earn more

*The Better India*'s story on TruTrade, which helps farmers switch to organic farming to cater to growing consumer demand, has helped the company receive incremental orders worth Rs 1,83,271. As a result, TruTrade has been able to pay an additional premium of Rs 27,491 to the farmers.

## Triple talaq case details

*LiveLaw* undertook an exhaustive coverage of the hearing on triple talaq before the Constitution Bench. Comprehensive reports of day-to-day hearings were released. It also published every document filed in the case, from petitions to final argument notes, by the contending parties.