

**Dear Friends and Partners,**

**We Wish you a Merry Christmas & Happy New Year.**

**Make the season bright with joy, peace, love, and hope. May your 2019 be bright and beautiful!**

We are happy to share with you another new initiative of COVA titled “#CHECKIT” to address and counter Fake News by enabling people to understand the phenomenon of Fake News, develop capacity to decode suspect news, and perhaps for the first time, utilize platforms with mass outreach like religious congregations, educational institutions and community networks to propagate and caution lakhs of people about the debunked versions of the Fake News items in circulation and that could otherwise lead to social harm and violence if left unchallenged and unexposed.

The Report appended below contains Links to PPTs and Presentations on themes covered in the Training Viz. Understanding the Phenomenon of Fake News, Harvesting and Decoding Suspect News, Strategies and Techniques for Online and Offline Propagation of Decoded Fake News to caution people etc.

We invite you to understand the phenomenon of Fake News and learn to counter it even as you read the Report!!

**COVA**  
**#CHECKIT**

**An Initiative to Delegitimise Fake News**

**Report of**

**#CHECKIT TechCamps’ 2018**

**Hyderabad & Mahbubnagar**

**Theme: Enabling Youth to Recognise and Counter Fake News**

Organised by:

**COVA**

With Support from

**British Deputy High Commission, Hyderabad.**

COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) has started a new Project titled ‘#CHECKIT’ to address and counter Fake News. The program aims to sensitize and educate people to delink the perceived legitimacy of all printed word and broadcasted messages and properly verify the

veracity before accepting and more importantly forwarding it to others, especially on social media platforms.

The #CHECKIT Program's unique approach is to partner with Faith Groups, Educational Institutions, Newspapers, TV Channels and organizations working with communities to leverage their outreach to thousands of people on a regular basis to propagate about the phenomenon and dangers of Fake News. These Partners will be encouraged to speak and publicize about the decoded statements, photos, videos etc- that will be shared with them by the #CHECKIT Team - to expose Fake News at a mass level and prevent its continued circulation.

Though Groups dedicated to fact check and debunking fake news decode thousands of fake news items on a regular basis, they do not have an adequate mechanism for mass propagation of the debunked material. As a result, members of the public are not aware of the decoded Fake News Items and so continue to believe in and propagate the Fake News received.

[Click here for the Concept Note of #CHECKIT Program.](#)

As part of the #CHECKIT Program COVA, with support from the British Deputy High Commission, Hyderabad organized One-Day Training Programs under the title #CHECKIT TechCamps on 24th and 25th November 2018 in Hyderabad and Mahabubnagar districts respectively. 57 selected participants from both places were trained in identifying, harvesting and decoding Fake News. The participants were from different occupational backgrounds like Faith Leaders, IT Professionals, Social Activist, Media professionals, students, and concerned citizens. The theme for the training program was "Enabling Youth to Recognizes and Counter Fake News'.

## Schedule of Hyderabad #CHECKIT TechCamp 2018

S. NO	TIME	EVENTS
1.	09:00-09:30am	Registration & Tea
		<b>Inaugural Session</b>
2.	09.30-09:40am	Welcome Note by Diksha Alok, COVA & Self-Introduction of Participants
3.	09:40-09:45am	Objectives of the #CHECKIT Program
4.	09:45 – 09:55	Address by Sister B.K. Anjali, Brahma Kumaris
5.	09.55-10:10am	Inaugural Address by Chief Guest Mr. K. Srinivas Reddy, Editor, Telangana Today
6.	10:10-10:12am	The vote of Thanks by Naseer Siddique, COVA
		<b>Business Sessions</b>

7.	10:12-11:00am	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Session:</b> Introduction to Fake News Overview- History- Types- Objectives for Spreading Fake News – Illustration of some Fake News Examples of different Types with their Impact <b>By Prasheel Anand Banpur</b>
8.	11:00-11:15am	Tea Break
9.	11:15-12:00pm	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Session:</b> Harvesting Suspect News and Decoded Fake News- Strategies and Techniques- With Hands-On Exercises: Connecting to FB Pages, Websites twitter accounts etc. for suspect news and decoded versions. <b>By Moinuddin Ali Khan</b>
10.	12:00-01:00pm	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Session:</b> Introduction to Basic Principles and Tools for Decoding Fake News- Videos and Photos- Reverse Image Search and others <b>By Moinuddin Ali Khan</b>
11.	01:00-01:45pm	Lunch
12.	01:45-02:30pm	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> Hands-On Session on Decoding Fake News <b>Trainers for Hands-On Session:</b> Prashant, Moinuddin, Prasheel, Gowtham, and Diksha.
13.	02.30-02.45pm	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Session: Group Presentations by Participants:</b> 1. All 5 Groups to Make PPTs on the Decoding they have done 2. Each group to get 3 minutes for Presentation through PPT only and one minute for clarifications <b>Moderation:</b> Gowtham Uyalla
14.	02:45-03:30pm	<b>6<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> Psychological Reasons for creating Fake News and its impact on People. <b>By Dr. Keshav Rao Devulapally</b>
15.	03:30- 03:45pm	Tea Break
16.	03:45-04:15pm	<b>7<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> <b>Brain Storming:</b> Online Propagation of Decoded Fake News: Strategies, Techniques, and Platforms to be provided by Participants. Online Demonstration of suggestions/options. <b>Moderation:</b> Prasheel Anand Banpur
17.	04:15-04:30pm	<b>8<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> <b>Brain Storming:</b> Avenues and Techniques for Off-Line Propagation of Decoded Fake News. <b>Moderation:</b> Gowtham Uyalla
18.	04:30-04:50pm	<b>9<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> Interactive Session on Technical Clarifications: Trainers Panel <b>Moderation:</b> Prasheel Anand Banpur, Moinuddin Ali Khan, Prashant Damarla
19.	04:50-05:10pm	<b>10<sup>th</sup> Session:</b> Reflections by 5 Participants from different backgrounds - Faith Leaders, Journalists, Activists, Youth, and Concerned Citizens.

		<b>Moderation:</b> Moinuddin Ali Khan
20.	05:10- 5:25pm	Online Feedback from Participants
		<b>Valedictory Session</b>
21.	05:25-05:35pm	Address by Guest of Honor: Mr. Omim Debara, Member, Executive Committee, COVA
22.	05:35-5:55pm	Valedictory Address by Chief Guest: Mr. Andrew Fleming (British Deputy High Commissioner, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh)
23.	05:55: 6:00pm	Concluding Remarks & Vote of Thanks by Diksha Alok

**A similar schedule was followed at Mahbubnagar.**

### **Profile of the Trainers of #CHECKIT TechCamp 2018 in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar.**

- **Siddhartha Vookoti**- who describes himself as a curious explorer of the world is a software engineer working in the field for over 2 decades. He is the founder of HoaxorFact.com, one of the first groups of India dedicated to debunking Fake News.
- **Moinuddin Ali Khan**- An engineering graduate, with over two decades of experience in software development, projects management, business systems, and management training.
- **Prasheel Anand Banpur**- A Research Scholar in Communication Studies from the University of Hyderabad with over 13 years of experience spanning corporate, academic, and applied communications. His research papers are published in national and international journals.
- **Prashanth Damarla**- An engineering graduate had worked for more than 5 years in web development is a professional content writer and currently specializes in Fake News debunking. He is a key debunker at HoaxorFact.com
- **Dr. Keshav Rao Devulapally**- An Eminent Psychiatrist specializes in various sub-specialties which include alcohol de-addiction, drug de-addiction, tobacco de-addiction, depression, psychological counseling, and psychometric tests.

Links to PPTs on the topics covered during the TechCamps are given in the Section on Business Sessions below.

### **#CHECKIT TechCamp, Hyderabad: 24th November 2018**

The one-day training program was inaugurated by Chief Guest Mr. K. Srinivas Reddy, Editor of Telangana Today and Sister B.K. Anjali from Brahma Kumaris. While highlighting the present scenario in India, Mr. Srinivas explained how media is tackling the issues of fake news and how as an individual, everyone should feel accountable for the information they pass onto others.' Sister B K Anjali spoke about the need for restrained behavior of an individual and how a member of society by just following three simple ethical rules can prevent the spread of

misinformation. The rules include do not lie, do not backbite and do not say negative things about anyone. We all should come together and join the mission of curbing fake news.'

Also, present Ms. Nalini Raghuraman, Political Economy Advisor at British Deputy High Commission, Hyderabad, emphasized the need for involving youth in spreading awareness in countering fake news. She said that the issue of fake news is of high priority in these times and the British Deputy High Commission was happy to partner with COVA on this initiative that connected people from different occupational backgrounds including religious leaders vide the #CHECKIT program.



**UK in Hyderabad** @UKinHyderabad · Nov 23  
Day-long workshop on 'Enabling youth to recognise and counter fake news' began today with an interactive session with @KSriniReddy @TelanganaToday & Sister Anjali from #Brahmakumari and our youth participants @COVANetwork #Hyderabad #Checkit



*@UKinHyderabad Twitter handle of British High Commission of Hyderabad shared about the #CHECKIT TechCamp*

## Business Sessions

**Session I** started with the introduction of the phenomenon of Fake News and its variances. It highlighted the interest or reasons behind creating such content and forwarding could either be to deliberately spread disinformation and create mischief in society or innocently without knowing that it is Fake News and understanding the negative consequences it could create.

**Session II** discussed the strategies and techniques of harvesting Fake News by checking the popular websites; one which creates Fake News and other which works toward decoding and debunking Fake News. In the hands-on exercises that followed, the participants were asked to connect to their social media handles and look for suspect news.

[Click here for PPT' of Session II](#)

**Session III** covered the basic principles and tools for decoding fake news. Basic decoding of text, photos, and videos by using Google search, reverse image search, and other websites were demonstrated in the session.

[Click here for PPT' of Session III](#)

**Session IV** encouraged all the participants to use the techniques learned in the previous session to decode five news samples. All the participants on an individual level got involved in the process and successfully decoded many samples given within short times.

**Session V**, all participants gave presentations on how they decoded each news samples given to them.

**Session VI** of the day discussed the Psychological Reasons for creating Fake News and its impact on people.

[Click here for PPT' of Session VI](#)

**Session VII & VIII** were given for brainstorming to enable participants to explore and identify strategies, techniques, and platforms for online and off-line propagation of decoded version of Fake News.

Participants came up with interesting ideas and suggestions for online propagation.

- Sharing of materials related to fake news and a decoded version of fake news in the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis.
- Make a short audio/visual videos on the effects of fake news for propagation on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram
- Create blog posts linking real fake news to decoded ones.

Strategies and ideas for Offline Propagation that emerged from the Brain Storming Session by the Participants are as follows:

- Faith leaders in their weekly sermons in Satsangs, Mosques, and Churches etc. Can speak about Fake News.
- Educational Institutions like Schools, Colleges, and Universities can organize lectures and demonstration sessions on Fake News.
- Posters showing decoded Fake News items can be displayed in places of worship, educational institutions and public places to generate mass public awareness in the most cost-effective way.
- Participants of the #CHECKIT TechCamps' can give lectures and become trainers on Fake News for Faith Groups, Educational Institutions, and community outreach organisations.
- Advocacy can be undertaken for the inclusion of lessons on Fake News as part of the curriculum at all levels.
- Mainstream Media like Newspapers can provide dedicated daily or weekly sections on the phenomenon of Fake News, its examples and the specific damages caused by different Fake News Items.
- TV Channels can carry a One Minute Capsule at the end of the Prime Time News Bulletin showing on current Fake News and its decoded version.
- Readers can be asked to share Suspect News that the Media Houses can then share with groups dedicated to decoding and publish/broadcast the decoded versions for information of the public and to prevent further propagation of Fake News.
- Mass-Based organisations like NGOs, Trade Unions, and Federations of Self Help Groups etc. can orient their staff and volunteers to speak about the phenomenon of Fake News and its specific examples with their respective constituencies with whom they interact regularly.

The Business Session ended with the reflections given by participants coming from different walks of life. Safina Amin, a student of Deccan Medical College said, 'I will share the information

and knowledge I learned in the workshop with my friends and family and make them aware about the importance of accurate news.’ She concluded by observing that **‘Overall, a great experience.’** Echoing his sentiments, another student from Bhavan’s Vivekananda Junior College, Sai Sagar said, **‘it was a phenomenal session’.**

The programme finally concluded with the Valedictory Session. The Chief Guest Mr. Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, appreciated the initiative of #CHECKIT and said, people from different walks of life get affected by misinformation or Fake News. An initiative like #CHECKIT can be a counter to such mindset which tries to misguide people.



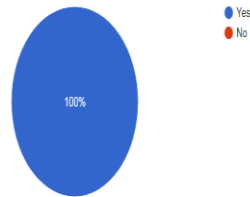
*British Deputy High Commissioner for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Mr. Andrew Fleming shared about #CHECKIT TechCamp on his twitter handle @Andrew007Uk.*

Also present at the Valedictory Session was the Guest of Honor and Member of the Executive Committee, COVA, Mr. Omim Debara. While addressing the participants he spoke about the scope of the initiative towards addressing and countering Fake News and emphasized the importance of such an initiative in contemporary time.

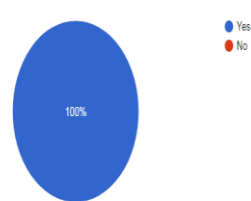
At the end of the Valedictory Session in the formal Vote of Thanks, COVA acknowledged the cooperation and support of the Guests, Participants, Trainers, COVA Staff, and Venue maintenance staff. Special thanks were addressed to Adv. Mahmood Ali Saheb for providing the fully equipped Ramanuja Chary Conference Hall at Maheshwari Complex, Hyderabad for conducting the program free of charge.

Online Feedbacks from Participants of Hyderabad reflected the very positive attitude towards the initiative of addressing and countering fake news. When asked- Do you want to become a Partner of #CHECKIT? And do you want to collaborate to start #CHECKIT Programme in your organization/Institution/community? Most of the #CHECKIT participants replied by saying yes.

Do you want to become a Partner of #CHECKIT?

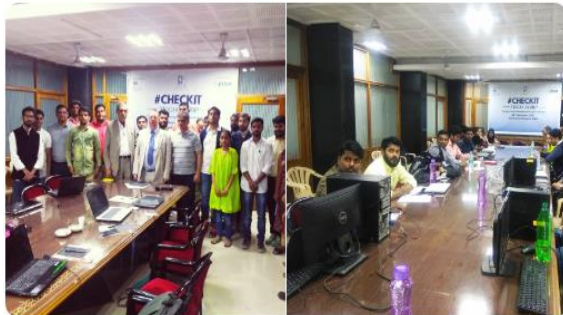


Do you want to Collaborate to start #CHECKIT Program in your Organization/Institution/Community?



**Hadif Nisar** @hadif\_nisar · Nov 24

Thank you team @COVAnetwork and @UKinIndia for facilitating the wonderful #CHECKIT workshop on decoding and debunking #fakenews. CC: @Andrew007Uk @UKinHyderabad



3 replies 13 likes



**sai sagar** @iasragas · Nov 24

Today at the #Checkit tech camp conducted by @COVAnetwork @UKinHyderabad it was a very informative and phenomenal session. Managed to click a quick picture with @Andrew007Uk at the end of the sessions.



1 reply 10 likes

*Above are the #CHECKIT Twitter posts of #CHECKIT TechCamp 2018 Hyderabad participants Hadif Nisar(left), a student of the University of Hyderabad and Sai Sagar(right), a student of Bhavan's Vivekananda Degree College.*

Nabila Mulla, a student of Sangam Laxmibai Girls Junior College says, 'the #CHECKIT TechCamp was very useful for me as well as the society. It encouraged me to harvest and decode fake news. Immediately after attending the camp I started decoding fake news by Reverse Image Technique in Google and Tineye.com. It taught me a lot within a short period of time. This camp is working for a social cause, which attracted me to it.'





Above are the #CHECKIT Twitter posts of #CHECKIT TechCamp 2018 Hyderabad participants Nabila Mulla, a student of Sangam Laxmibai Girls Junior College

## Media Coverage of #CHECKIT Tech Camp 2018, Hyderabad @TelanganaToday

### ‘Spreading fake news a disorder’

CITY BUREAU  
Hyderabad

Those actively propagating fake news could apparently be those suffering from some mental illness, remarked noted psychiatrist, Dr. Keshav Rao Devulapally.

Participating in a one-day training programme on fake news organised by COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) and British Deputy High Commission here on Saturday, he said, "Fake news is not a new concept and has been prevalent for quite a long time. There have been instances where people were killed on the suspicion of practising black magic".

#### Various reasons

Rao said people propagate news for various reasons and pointed out that some do it as an act of revenge, others for psychological gain and some of them could be having anti-social personality disorders too. "People mostly believe fake

news as it fits into their belief system," he quipped.

COVA in association with British Deputy High Commission has started a new project titled CHECKIT to address and counter fake news. The program aims to sensitize and educate people delink the perceived legitimacy of all printed word and broadcasted messages and properly verify the veracity before accepting and more importantly sharing it with others, especially on social media platforms.

#### One-day training

The one-day training program which was inaugurated by K Srinivas Reddy, Editor, *Telangana Today* had about 30 selected participants from different occupational backgrounds including faith leaders, IT professionals, social activists, media professionals, students and citizens.

Andrew Fleming, the British Deputy High Commissioner delivered the valedictory address.

## #CHECKIT TechCamp, Mahabubnagar: 25th November 2018

The #CHECKIT TechCamp in Mahabubnagar on 25th November 2018 followed the same Program Schedule and had the same resource persons as the Hyderabad TechCamp. The programme was inaugurated by Chief Guest Mr. VenkataRao, Joint Collector of Mahabubnagar District of Telangana State and the Guest of Honor was Mr. Nagendra Swamy, Executive Director of VIP (Villages in Partnership), and Mahabubnagar. Mr. Nagendra Swamy of VIP spoke about the issues related to fake news affecting people of different sects in Mahabubnagar particularly. Mr. VenkataRao, speaking of fake news, urged people not to fall for any misguided information as the election is approaching. While emphasizing on correct information as a legal right he said we all should exercise our right of getting correct information in order to make an opinion. We should be informed citizens to use our right to vote to choose our Leaders.'



The Business Sessions covering different aspects of Fake News were carried out in the same way as in Hyderabad TechCamp. Total of 33 participants from a different occupational background in Mahabubnagar decoded all the five news samples given to them in groups. While presenting, participants shared about 'how they decoded the suspect news with Reverse Image Technique, and learned about exploring and harvesting fake news websites and social media handles'

The programme concluded with the Valedictory Address by Chief Guest Mr. Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. While addressing the participants he said, 'It is nice to see such young and enthusiastic people coming on Sundays and attending the session on fake news. With this commitment, I am certain Mahabubnagar has a new cadre ready to debunk Fake News.'



The Guest of Honor Mr. Venkata Reddy, Director of Vagdevi Junior College said, a program like #CHECKIT should be appreciated and encouraged. People from all backgrounds should take part in such a program and learn. We are looking forward to more such TechCamps' in the future.'

At the end of the Valedictory session in the formal Vote of Thanks, COVA appreciated all the Guests, Participants, Trainers, COVA Staff, and Venue maintenance staff. Special thanks were given to Mr. Venkata Reddy, Director of Vagdevi Junior College for providing the College Conference Hall in Mahabubnagar and helping us in all the arrangements.

The Online Feedback from Participants at Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar showed the urge to learn more. Throughout both the programs, the participants were really active and shared their experience of encountering fake news in their day-to-day life. When asked, do you want to contribute to #CHECKIT? If yes, then how? Most of the students and social activists said we would want to go ahead with the Propagation of Decoded Fake News by giving Training to others on how to decode fake news so that people will be aware of its consequences.

Do you want to contribute to the #CHECKIT? if yes then click what is applicable. you may click on more than one options given below:



Aymen Naseer the student of Medical College, while asked about his opinion of the overall programme of #CHECKIT TechCamp, he said- '**Hands Down the Best TechCamp I have ever attended.**' Praveen Kumar, Faculty of JPN College, Mahabubnagar offered that he is going to train others at his workplace and stop the spread of fake news. Another participant from ECO Club, Raja Naik, and Social Activist spoke that he will practically show to the communities as to what is real and what is fake, about the news they receive.

### **Pledge undertook by participants of #CHECKIT TechCamps' 2018 in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar:**

At the end of the #CHECKIT TechCamp in Hyderabad and Mahbubnagar, the participants signed the pledge form agreeing to transform the attitude of people on Fake News, endeavor to increase public awareness and harvest suspect news proactively and check its veracity. All the pledge points try to prevent deliberate use of social media to spread antagonism, hate, and violence in society and secure cyberspace for peace.

## #CHECKIT PROGRAM

### Pledge by Partners

To Address and Counter the Menace of Fake News

We the Partners of the #CHECKIT Program do hereby Pledge that:

**1 We shall strive to transform the attitude of people so that they:**

- Receive all printed messages and broadcasted images (especially on social media) with caution
- Check their veracity before accepting their validity
- Exercise extreme caution before forwarding messages and material received through social media to others to prevent propagation of Fake News

**2 We shall endeavor to increase public awareness through:**

- Lectures and discussion in educational institutions, congregations of Faith Groups and with members of mass based organisations
- Preparation and display of posters and other such information material in different public places including places of worship and educational institutions
- Reach out to Newspapers and TV Channels to leverage their outreach to lakhs of readers on a regular basis to propagate about the phenomenon and dangers of Fake News through dedicated columns and broadcasts

**3 We also undertake to harvest Suspect News proactively and check its veracity by:**

- Decoding the material received on our own through the training received and propagate the findings widely through social media and channels of Offline propagation
- Forward the Suspect News material received to specialist groups dedicated to decoding Suspect News and propagates the findings widely to enlighten people about facts.

**And above all to prevent deliberate use of social media to spread antagonism, hate and violence in society and secure cyberspace for peace**

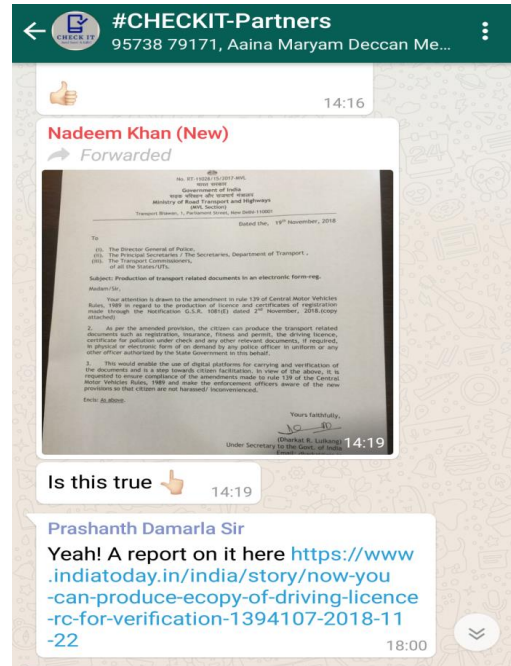
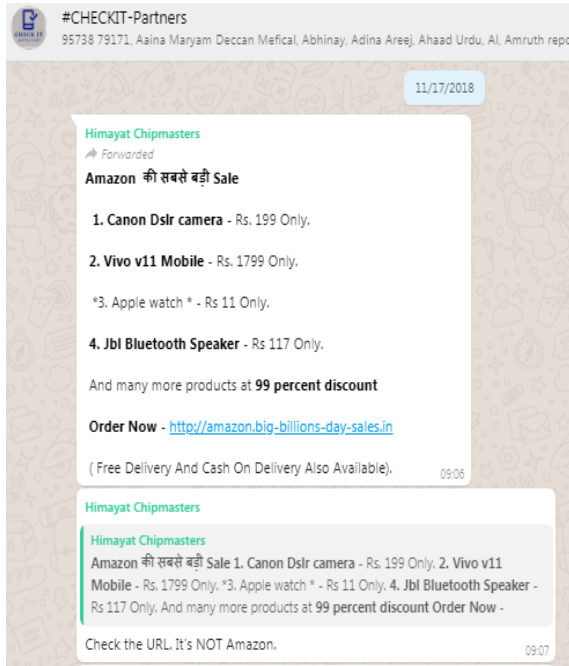
## Formation of WhatsApp Group with Participants as Partners

As part of the program, a WhatsApp group named ‘#CHECKIT Partners’ have been created by #CHECKIT team. The group consists of 84 participants from the TechCamps at Hyderabad and Mahabubnagar. The group has been created to facilitate the action or activity of these:

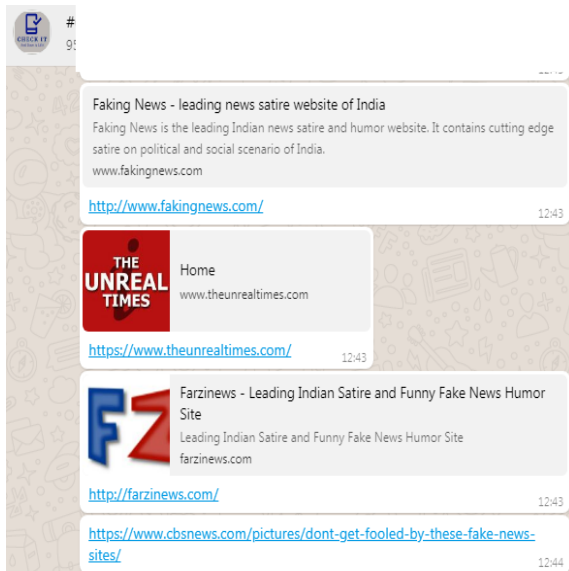
- The members of this Group are encouraged to share any Suspect News they come across from any groups or platforms in social media.
- The #CHECKIT team forwards all such posts received for decoding to recognized fake news decoders who have agreed to partner with COVA.
- The experts then involve in the process of decoding, and after checking its veracity, they share back the news
- Finally, the decoded versions of the news are shared with the members of the Groups for onward propagations and also with Faith Leaders for larger propagation through online and offline platforms including religious congregations, educational institutions,

community networks etc., thereby achieving the core objective of the #CHECKIT Program.

Here are the screenshots of some content posted in the WhatsApp group:



(Right) Suspect News posted by Partner along with the decoded version. (Left): Suspect news shared by partner and its decoded version shared by the expert



(Left) Some fake news generating websites shared by a partner. (Right) The suspect news decoded by a TechCamp participant.



