

# Facebook Content Controversy

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Accused of favouring ruling party politicians to protect business interests in its biggest market, social media platform Facebook is staring at a full-blown public relations crisis in India. The controversy around the social media firm erupted after the US daily Wall Street Journal reported that Facebook had allowed ruling Bharatiya Janata Party leaders to get away with sharing hate content.

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**The latest controversy has surfaced as Facebook and its messaging platform WhatsApp have emerged as a key tool for political communication and propaganda.** Facebook has taken a severe brand hit around the world over recent months—and over the past few years. If more and more consumers around the world bear the brunt of the company's frequent policy mishaps, the once-positive aura of Facebook will only continue to sour. Facebook claims it uses a combination of artificial intelligence and reports from people to identify posts, pictures or other content that violate its standards.

The controversy has also reached the Parliament's privileges committee and the issue is set to be raised by opposition parties in the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament. Facebook and the other dominant internet firms variously **claim they are both platforms and media firms—and take full advantage of the positive liability shields offered** to these kinds of entities while not being subject to the regulatory requirements faced by platforms or media firms.

Facebook, with over 280 million users, and WhatsApp with over 400 million users, **enjoy extensive reach and penetration in India but the firm hasn't been able to curb hate content.** In June, hundreds of advertisers in US pulled the plug on

advertising on Facebook asking the platform to curb hate speech after the killing of George Floyd under the #BlackLivesMatter campaign. The business model underlying Facebook is responsible for instigating one social harm after the next. This has everything to do with the **company's commercial imperative to hoard as much data and consumer attention as it can, and monetize all of it by designing algorithms that profile people and manipulate the media experience.**

Facebook will be unable to control the seemingly negative image and publicity in India until it makes changes to its core product to **address issues of hate speech and misinformation.** In a complex market like India, the parameters have drastically changed as the sheer number of online users and the skills required to spread vile content has increased multifold over the years. The problem of hate speech and misinformation in India needs to be seen from the volume perspective as well.

Facebook may be facing the same issue in the US, but in India, the problem is magnified a hundred times over because of the **user base as well as multiple local languages which make the spread of such content even more serious.** None of this seems to have any bearing on Facebook's business plans in India. The company recently **invested \$5.7 billion in the digital arm of Reliance Industries and is also expected to receive permission to launch a payments service on WhatsApp.**