

After WhatsApp, now FB may filter content

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BENGALURU: Facebook is considering a Germany like arrangement to filter and review content that could be seen as problematic or lead to violence in India. The social media giant is engaged with various agencies, including the likes of Arvato, that filter as well as remove content on behalf of Facebook, people aware of the matter said.

This comes at a time when the Indian government is drafting laws that can enable it to ask social media companies to remove content within a short period before rumours can lead to violence. Facebook and Arvato work together in Germany with regards to the NetzDG law that enforces removal of inappropriate content within 48 hours, failing which the government can impose hefty fines.

According to a tech-legal expert, it will be crucial to follow what the government will define as objectionable as such posts need to be taken off quickly. Over the past year, social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter are facing the issue of misinformation & fake news, rumours and hate speech spreading speedily on their platforms. After the Cambridge Analytica controversy, Facebook has been under severe pressure from the Indian government too as it fights a major perception battle in the US and Europe for not having done enough to stop bad actors from using its social network site to spread misinformation.

Facebook is considering outsourcing for sanitisation of its platform in the run-up to the 2019 general elections, which is important given the rough year it has had so far. “These discussions will develop further before a final decision is taken. But this is one of their (Facebook’s) top priorities as the government here is planning new laws for social media platforms,” a person aware of the matter said.

An Arvato spokesperson said, “As a service provider, we do not talk about possible contracts. Please contact the relevant Facebook press office directly.” An email followed up with multiple calls and messages to a Facebook India spokesperson did not elicit any response. While Facebook has its own set of guidelines for scanning various posts once reported, recent challenges in India are forcing it to consider new measures that will be time-efficient. Nishith Desai Associates partner Vaibhav Parikh said, “The Indian IT Act allows courts to order removal of certain content from a social media platform and tools like artificial intelligence (AI) are at work for major tech companies.”