




THE
23
WATTS

Truth be told!



Decoding the Prevalence of Fake News amongst Delhi Youth



12000+ responses

16 colleges

17 - 25 yrs

Delhi - NCR

Gen Z

♂ ♀ ♀



FOREWORD

*"The greatest story ever told,
is in fact, the greatest story ever sold."*

In a world of digital natives, smartphones are our umbilical cord. We scroll, read, consume, and absorb content in the same capacity we live, breathe and eat. The online world is now a privileged reality. A reality we can unsee or be away from but not ignore at all. And in this infinite world of social media feeds, Genzers (the second youngest generation, born between 1997 and 2012), are at the forefront of online news consumption. Yes, more than half of those who consume and share stories, news, and views online are under 25 years old - google it, it's not fake news!

Born into technology and raised with information at their fingertips, Generation Z is redefining political movements, religion, pop culture, national events, and more. They

- filter information as easily as applying filters on Instagram feeds with the attention span of a fruit fly. Change is the only constant in their lives. But are they as woke as they claim to be? Do they authenticate the information they share on WhatsApp group chats? Do they fact-check data before posting it on their Instagram stories or making bold statements on (X) Twitter? As a PR+++ agency, we were curious to find answers.

Through The 23 Watts Insights Studio, we wanted to understand, IRL, this shifting focus. The core of our effort is to map and mine the minds of the loud and proud Gen Z, to understand the lasting shift in news consumption - and the spread of misinformation.

Come, find out more! 

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and The Big Fake

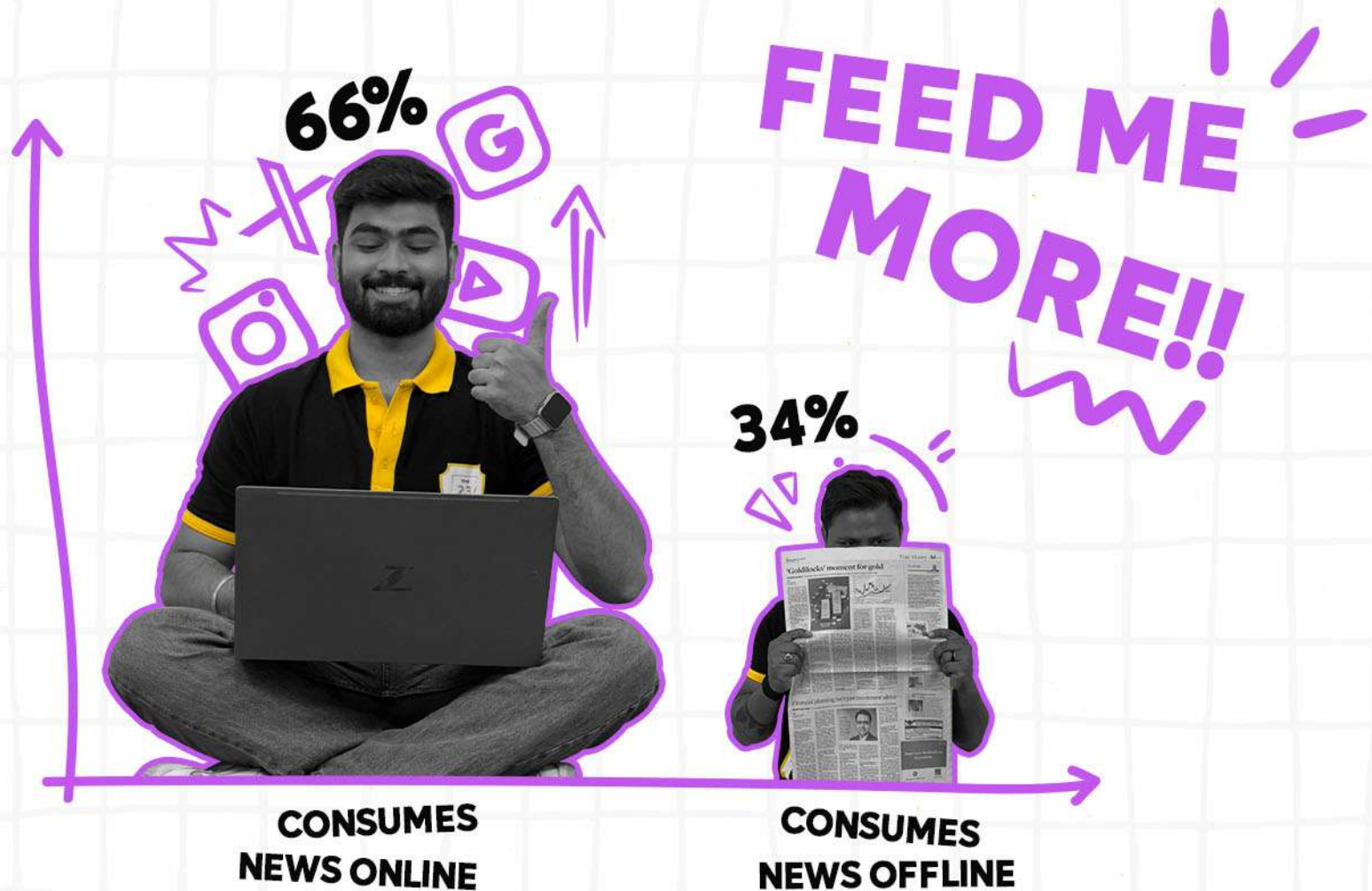
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SEE YOU
ONLINE

SEE YOU ONLINE



More than $\frac{2}{3}$ of respondents we spoke to, rely on online news and platforms - YouTube, Instagram, messengers, online articles - for news consumption.

SEE YOU ONLINE

Recently, the whole of **GenZ**
was Googling...

Symptoms of cervical cancer...



**AFTER THEIR FEED
WAS FLOODED
WITH THE NEWS OF
POONAM PANDEY'S "DEATH"**

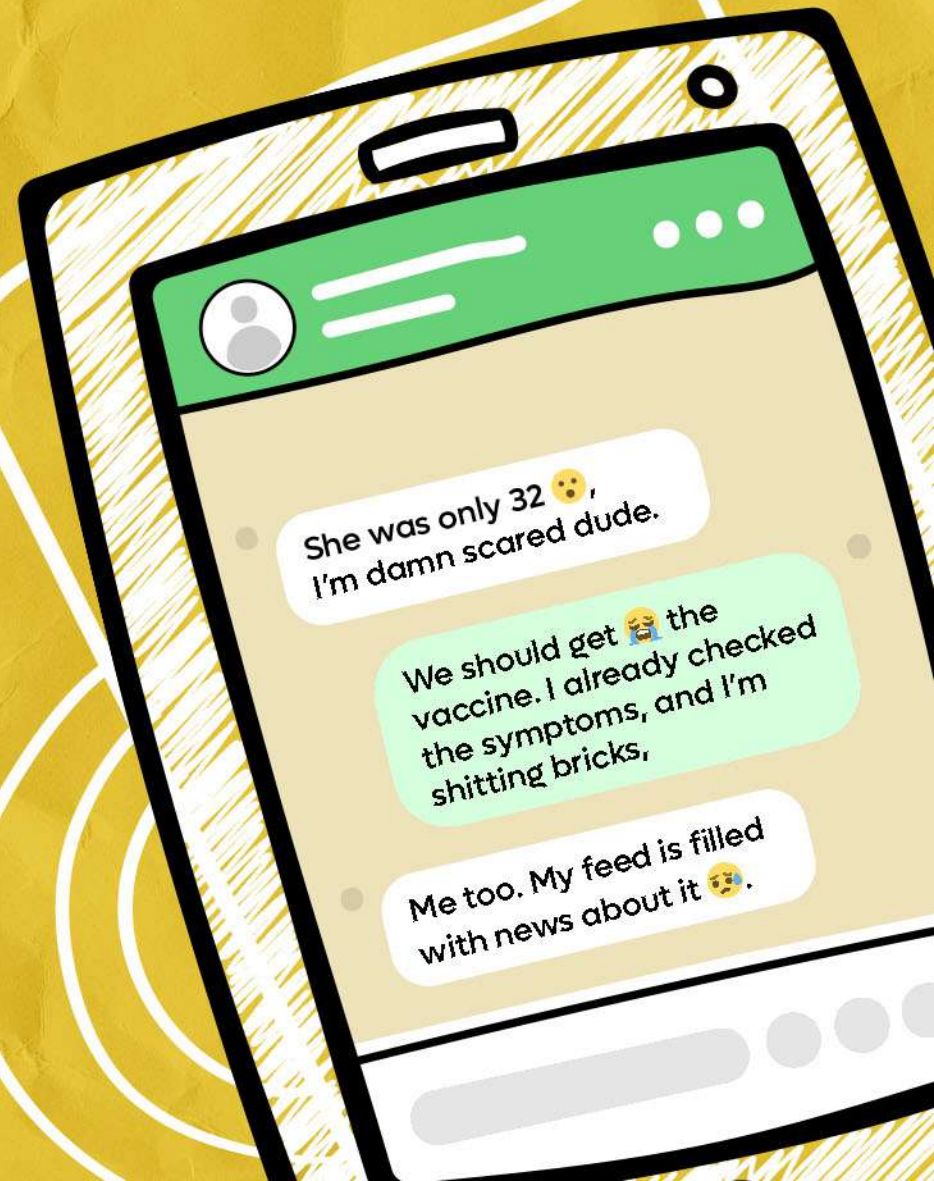


SEE YOU ONLINE

These were a few of the many messages around Poonam Pandey's 'untimely demise.' The internet and WhatsApp were filled with RIP Tweets, Messages of Disbelief and Confused comments with the loss hitting closer to home.

Moreover, lunch table conversations included grief associated with losing lives to cancer alongside the rise of cervical cancer among conventionally younger women. And we don't need to tell you about the spikes on social media that day.

(cue: our fellow "new age" digital agency).



SEE YOU ONLINE

FAKE NEWS! PREDOMINANTLY

focuses on public figures

It seems like fake news is the opium of the masses in the 21st century. From Politics/Politicians to Public Figures, a whopping **57%** of respondents claim to be hoodwinked by news around them.

But here's the kicker - it's not random, the spread of Fake News has an agenda (we'll get to that later) and it doesn't discriminate - *Even God is not spared.*

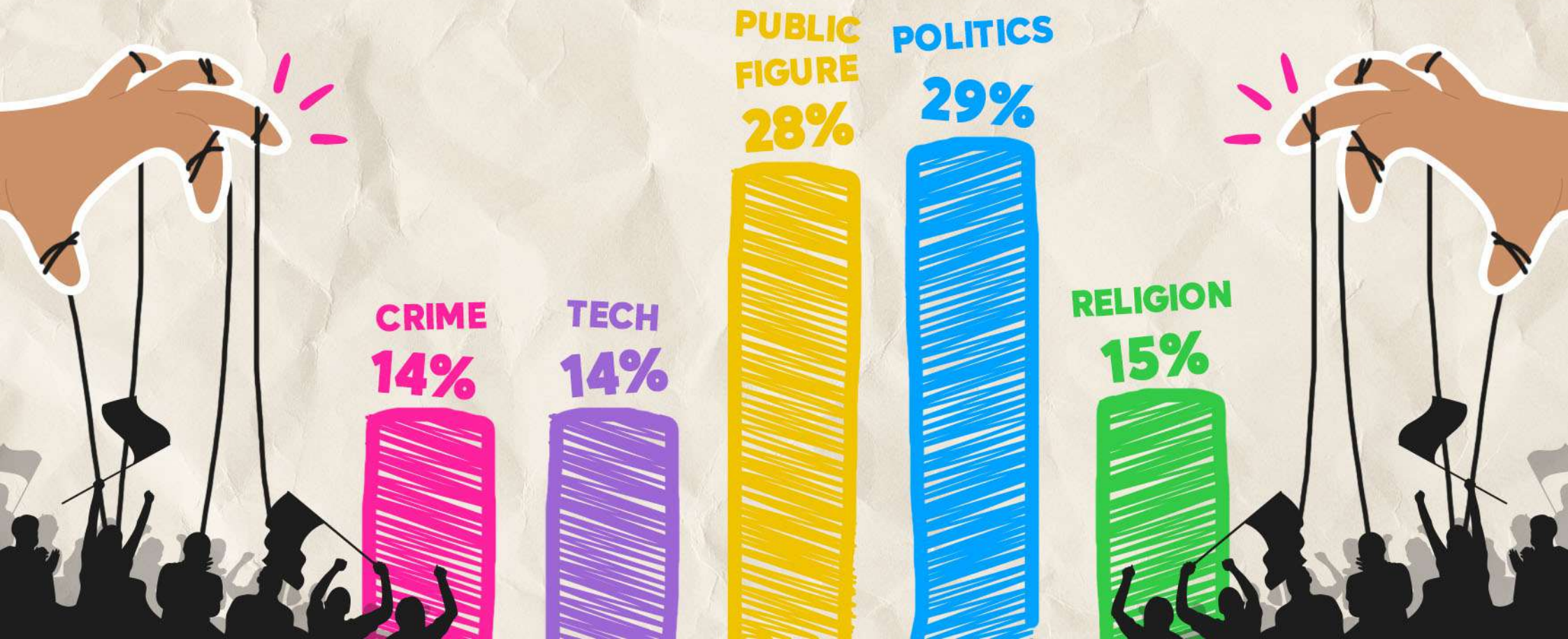


SEE YOU ONLINE

Religion comes a distant third with **15%** respondents receiving fake forwards and news about it.

And it's tech for tat, as **14%** talk about receiving 'first ever' or promises on how 'this tech could change your life' in the world of artificial intelligence.

Our take: This is one area where a little bit of skepticism (read: being 'Woke') wouldn't hurt!

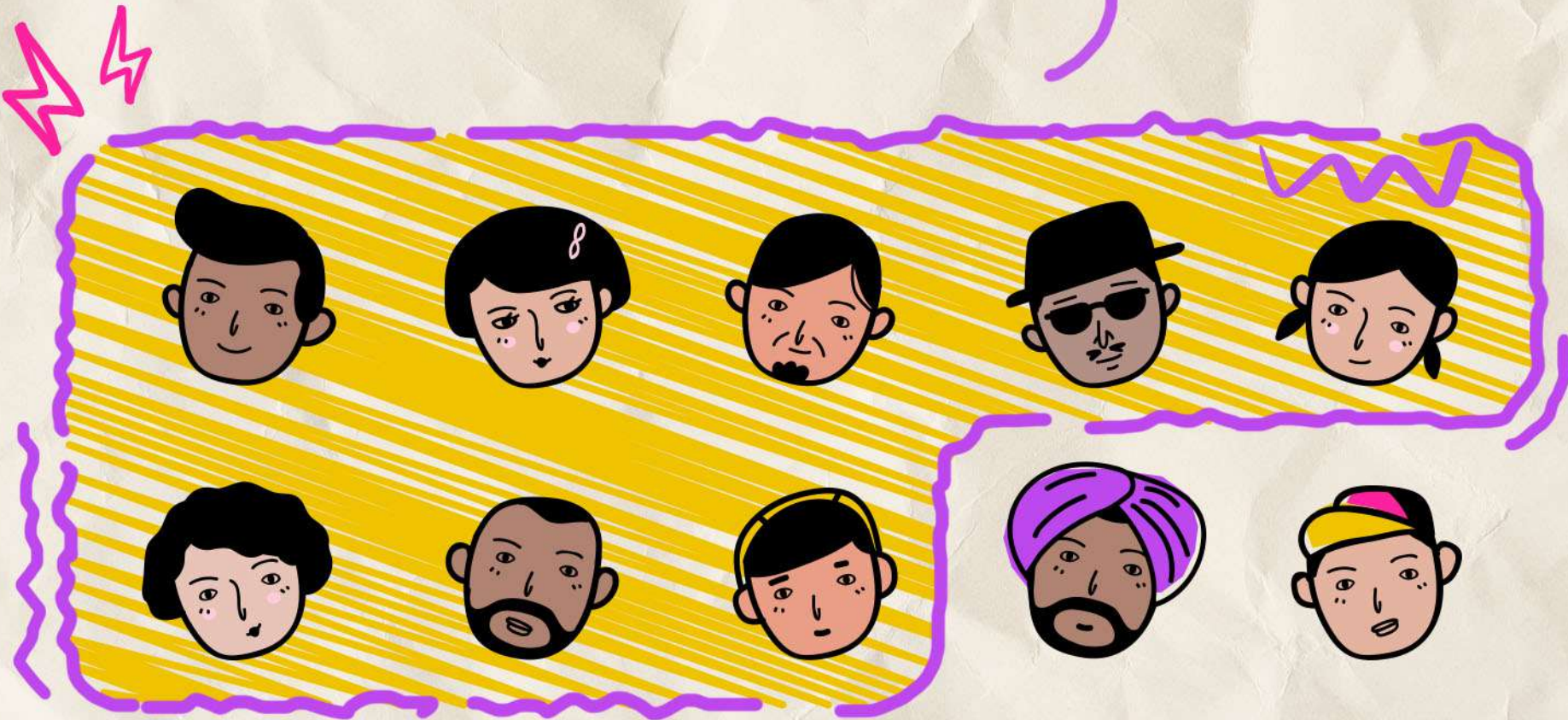


IT'S A
MATCH



IT'S A MATCH

When Reality **MET REMIX**



8 in 10 respondents changed their perception and opinions about an event and entity influenced by **FAKE NEWS**.

IT'S A MATCH

◀ *Rewind to 2020*

A year that is unlikely to be wiped off anyone's memories. The year that brought two epidemics to our lives- COVID 19 and Fake News.

Fear of the unknown in our lives was layered with dollops of fake news around everything COVID 19. So much so that we put our as well as the lives of our loved ones in danger.

A majority of respondents have unfortunately fallen prey to such claims via news, with their perception going with the flow, with what was being fed.

#AntiVaxxers
#CoronavirusRemedies
#NoMeatNoCoronavirus
#GoCorona



IT'S A MATCH

TRYNA
PLAY US? 

WhatsApp Lynching

The Icarus of India fell. Fell to the deepest, darkest dungeons, if ever there were any, with misinformation spread through Whatsapp. Fake videos that hurt religious, communal, and societal sentiments led to brutal attacks and lynching by mobs.



IT'S A MATCH



Morphed tweets

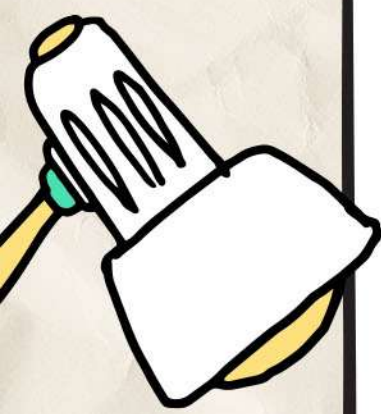


Hate comments




Death threats

Actress Rhea Chakraborty had to face it all after her alleged boyfriend, Sushant Singh Rajput, died tragically in June 2020. The allegations that the actress was responsible for his death death, sparked social media debates around how she should be behind bars.



The buck didn't stop there. This celebrity suicide/murder case became another breeding ground for misinformation. So much so that several fake accounts were identified for spreading images of the supposed corpse. The Mumbai Police even stated that its cyber unit had identified several fake accounts on social media platforms from various countries in Asia and Europe seeking to discredit their ongoing official investigation.



THE GEN Z AREA

Self-aware



Opinionated



Ambitious



Woke



Sure, they have main character energy but let's be real, the urge to push the button and/or be the first to share or comment, has them second guessing themselves

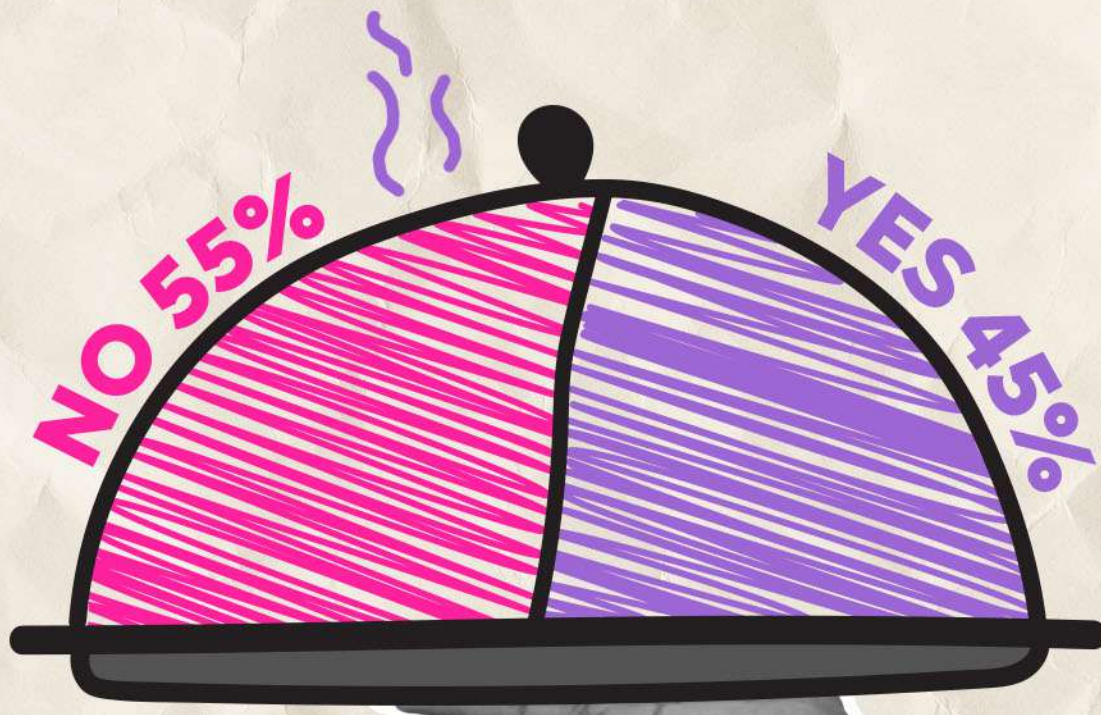
- Generation Z is truly a hot mess.

THE GRAY AREA

FASTEST **FINGER** FIRST



A majority of the respondents, **55%** claimed to not have shared fake news.



**NEVER
HAVE I
EVER...**



THE GOBY AREA

WHY DO THEY SHARE?

These young ones can be as extra as Poo in K3G, or as Innocent as Rancho from 3 Idiots, but when it comes to sharing their life's anecdotes, they are surely the fastest finger first. **The question remains - why?**



LIGHTS,
CAMERA,
SHARE!

Belief in the information authenticity

39%



Lack of time to verify

27%



Emotional response

20%



Desire to share breaking news

14%



More than $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents that shared Fake news did so as an emotional reaction and desire to share something that is breaking. While, as humans, we are inherently social beings, loneliness has been a growing epidemic globally. The paradox of sharing moments and memories and of creating them is driving the Genzers to share news on the go, and in the moment.

THE GIBBY AREA

M M

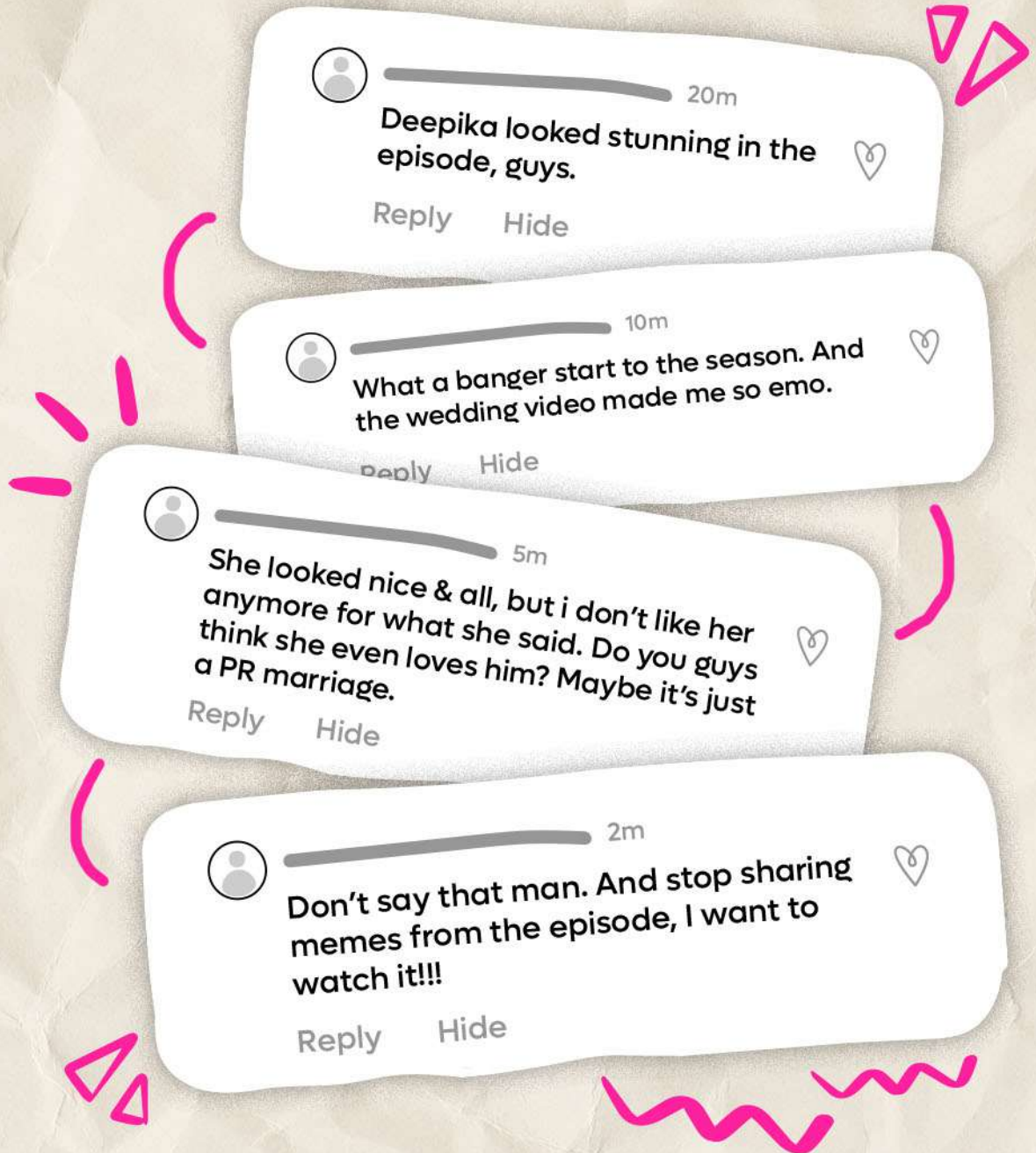


20m
Deepika looked stunning in the episode, guys.
Reply Hide

10m
What a banger start to the season. And the wedding video made me so emo.
Reply Hide

5m
She looked nice & all, but i don't like her anymore for what she said. Do you guys think she even loves him? Maybe it's just a PR marriage.
Reply Hide

2m
Don't say that man. And stop sharing memes from the episode, I want to watch it!!!
Reply Hide



THE GREY AREA

People change, seasons change & preferences change, But what doesn't change is the anticipation of every new season of our beloved reality talk show - yes, no points for guessing here - it's Koffee with Karan.

All thanks to social media and Bollywood enthusiasts, what has changed overtime though, is how deets from every episode make their way into our feeds before we know it! You can laugh at Karan Johar all you want for overusing the word **"conjecture"**, but it's because of social media that these conjectures are spread without any verification of validation. Gen-Z thrives on the tea, and the urge to re-share the latest meme based on nothing but sensation.



Our respondents don't go by the age old adage, "Where there's fuel, there's fire".

They are themselves the fuel, with nearly 14% agreeing to sharing unverified sensationalized news, followed by 20% who share news based on emotional biases.

THE GREY AREA

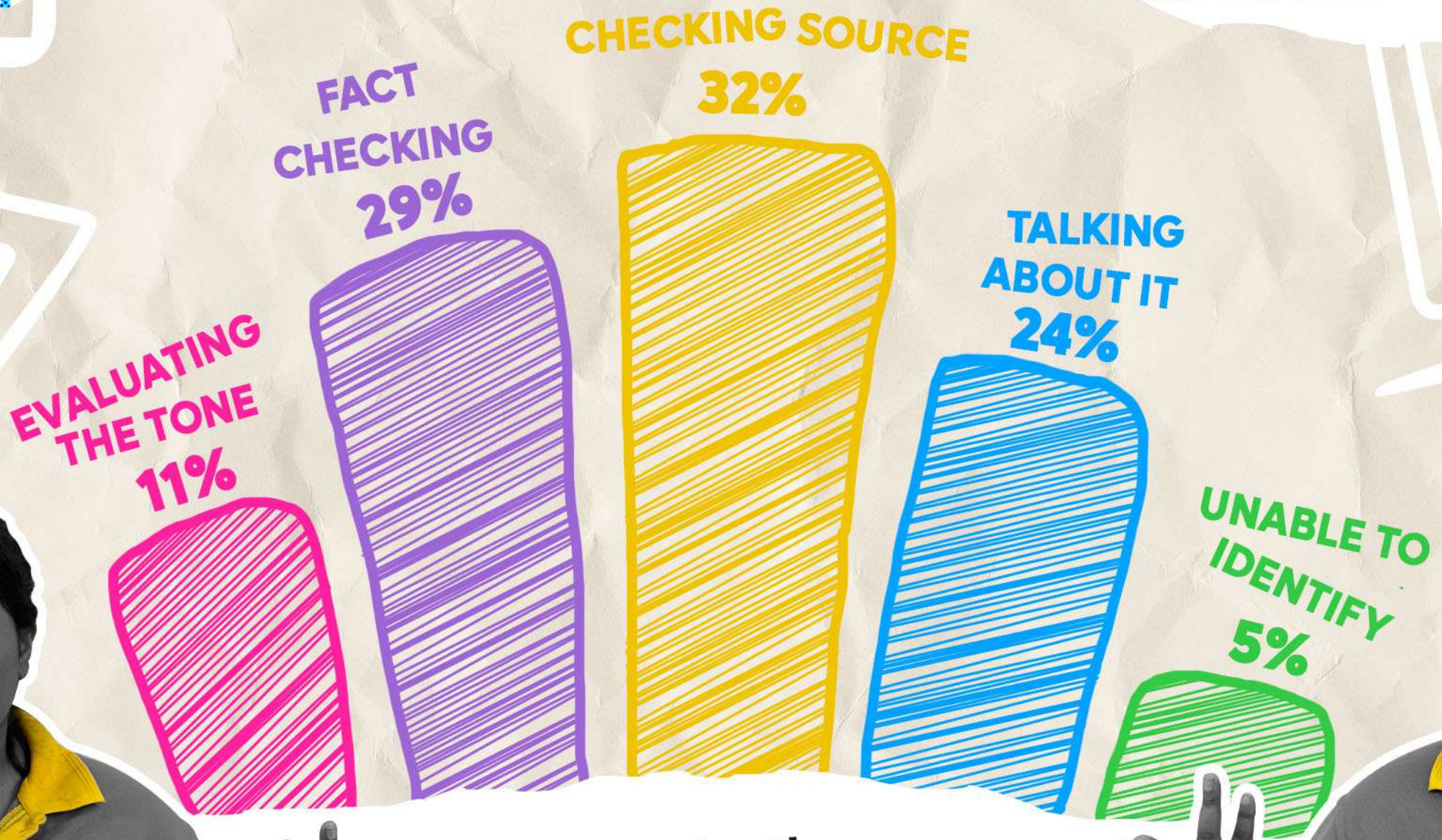
DELULU is the **NEW SOLULU**



95% of the Gen Z population claims that they try to authenticate news.



THE COPY AREA

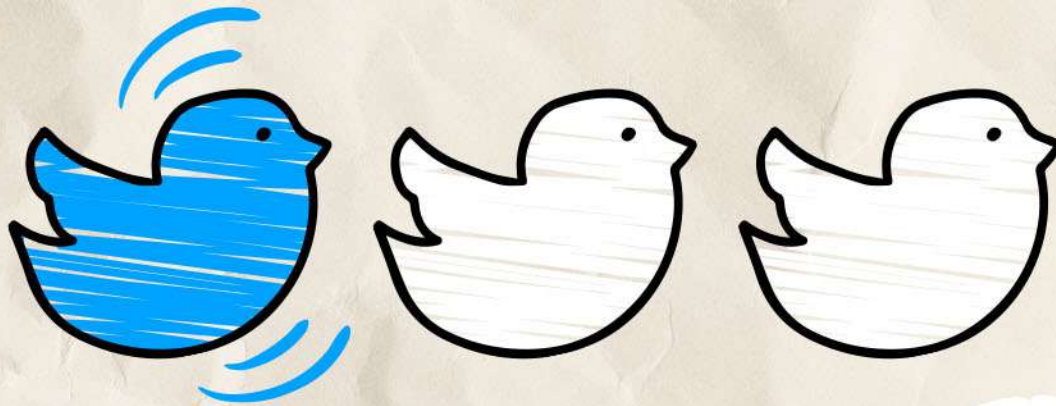


How do they
AUTHENTICATE?



THE GREY AREA

The youth of the capital city of the country where the risk of disinformation and misinformation was ranked highest, resort to checking the source's credentials and expertise before believing or forwarding a piece of information.



Almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents claim to check the source of the news they are reading before believing in it.

What fuels the fire of misinformation is also the traditional and new media outlets on platforms like the **big and bold X**. The blue canary had successfully spread its wings across Delhi youth, but since its infamous takeover in 2022, the site has become a BIG and bold red flag. Nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Delhi Gen Z rely on platforms like Instagram and X to consume daily news and what they get in return is a daily dose of misleading claims, celebrity gossip and conspiracy theories. As a generation, they set themselves up for disappointment by hopelessly chasing and believing bumble bees and canary birds. No cap!



And while many see too much news on an everyday basis, a good 29% authenticate their news feeds through fact-checking websites.



FOR REAL
FOR REAL

FOR REAL FOR REAL FOR REAL

If only this was a command that we could savor.

Big question

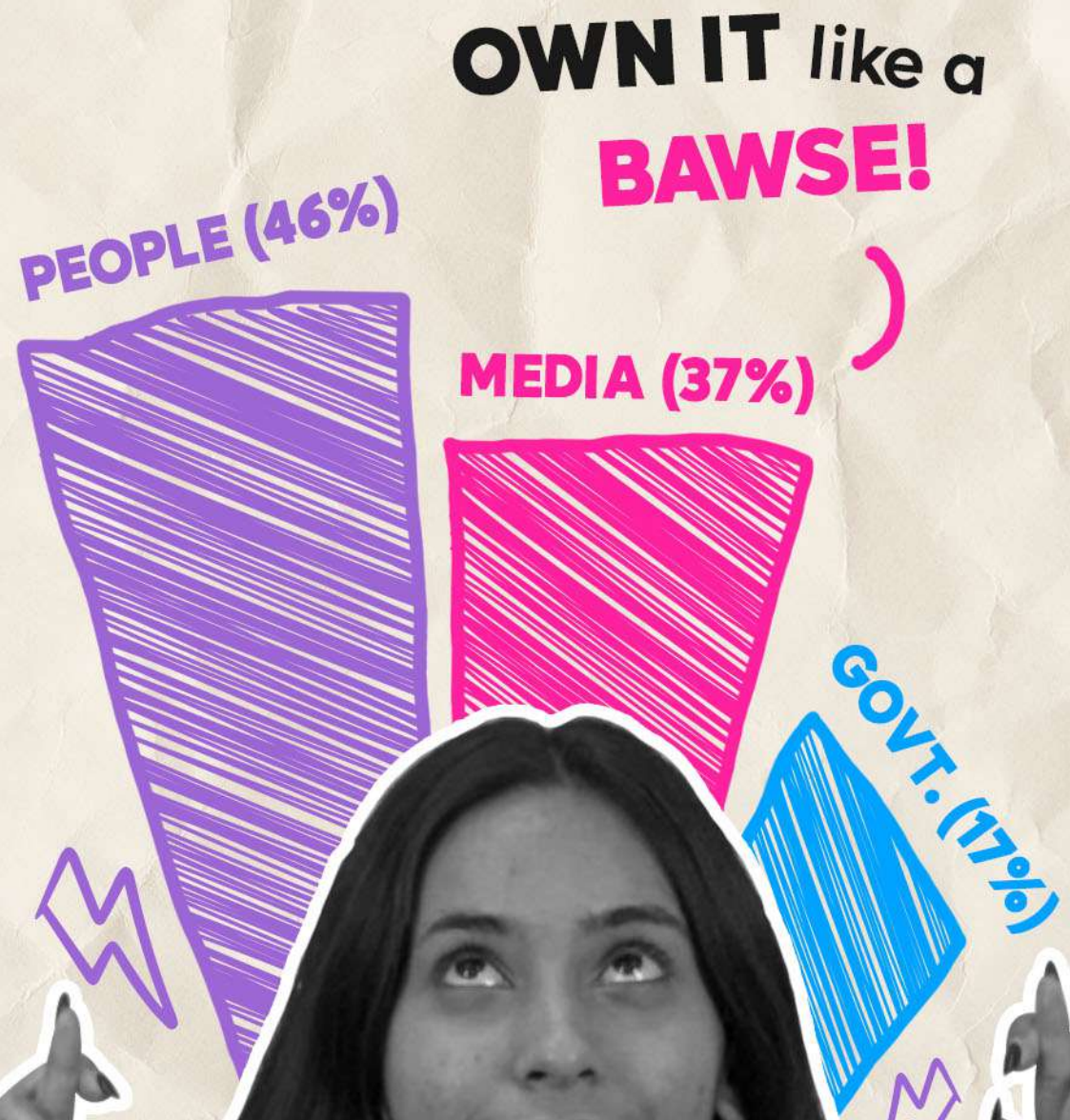
Who today is responsible for the mighty prevalence of fake news in our lives? Brands who so desire that conversation. Or is it the marketing and digital firms that underestimate the audiences' understanding? Or is it the over-inundated smartphone user, ready to consume and share every piece of content for sheer entertainment value?

Who's responsible for the spread of MISINFORMATION?

46% of respondents took the higher ground and took responsibility for their role in the of misinformation,

While 37% blamed the mildly regulated and always mushrooming media.

Interestingly, only a mere 17% pointed to the government for not addressing fake news.



OWN IT like a **BAWSE!**



FOR REAL FOR REAL FOR REAL

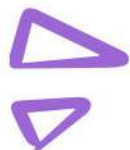
Can the government
DO MORE?



NO (11%)

YES (89%)

**ADDING SOME
TEA TO Accountability**



That being said, a whopping **89%** said that the Government can do more if it so wishes, to control the fake news epidemic.



FOR REAL FOR REAL FOR REAL

Govern them **MORE**

**STRICTER
POLICIES**

48%



**REPRIMAND
& PUNISH**

21%



**DRIVE
AWARENESS**

16%



**INSTITUTE
FACT
CHECKS**

15%



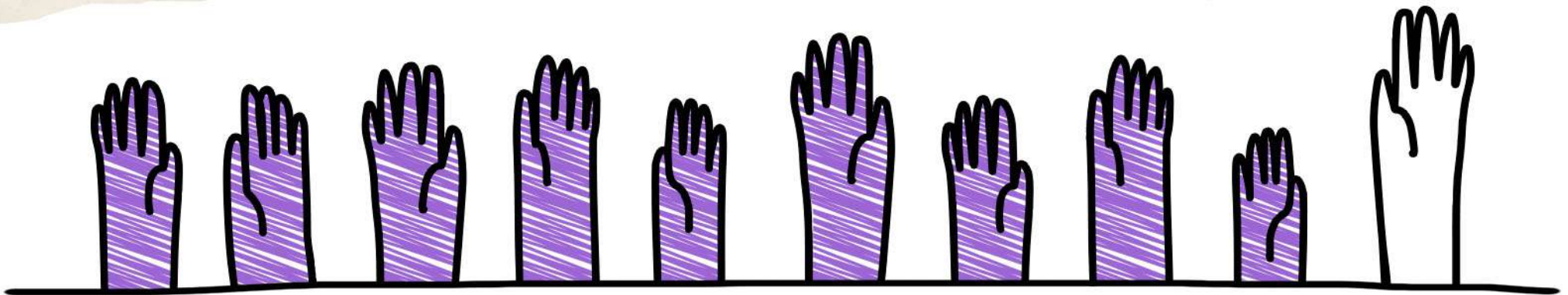
Implementing a strict policy/regulation for online news, being the foremost suggestion, with **48%** of the respondents suggesting it. Driving awareness campaigns on fake news **16%**, a total anomaly in today's world, and instituting a national level fact check mechanism **15%**, being the other solutions the youth of today believe in.

**THE BIG
INDIA SHOW
& THE
BIG FAKE**

THE BIG INDIA SHOW & THE BIG FAKE

It's no surprise that when elections are held anywhere in the world, fake news starts spreading faster than gossip at a family reunion.

It's a ripple effect - The Electoral mood sets in and political narratives go full steam ahead along with social coalitions and communication around leadership/party strengths.



*In fact, **9 out of 10** respondents believe national events like elections instigate fake news peddlers to unleash their might over the content-hungry Indians.*

THE BIG INDIA SHOW & THE BIG FAKE

More so, **91%** also believe that the big fake during the big India show make swings voters' trust and the mandate. It may mislead or malign- but it is a truth that Delhi's Gen Z can't ignore. The spread of fake news is potentially a kingmaker in Indian elections. Isn't it time to take a stand against this influence?


Can **FAKE NEWS!**
swing votes?

NO (9%)

YES
(91%)

THE
UNEXPECTED
INFLUENCER





**FROM THE
HOUSE OF
23 WATTS**

METHODOLOGY

The survey sought responses from 1200+ respondents, with an incidence rate set at **1%**. The research has a qualitative nature, emphasizing in-depth understanding and exploration of the participants' thoughts, opinions, and experiences. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of the various factors influencing the lives of college students in the Delhi NCR region. The survey was conducted using on-field as well as Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), ensuring a systematic and standardised approach.

Upon completion of data collection, qualitative data analysis techniques, such as thematic coding and content analysis, were used to extract meaningful insights from the responses. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues explored in the Survey.



FROM THE MOUTH OF MAVER

"The method of political science is the interpretation of life; its instrument is insight, a nice understanding of subtle, unformulated conditions"

- Woodrow Wilson

Fake News of yester years such as UFOs and Loch Ness monsters have been accidental and harmless in a relative sense and could be contained given a manageable velocity of the information spread. However, it gets much viral much faster, gathers momentum in no time and most important of all, it is weaponized with the intent to malign reputation, push an agenda/ideology or just gaming click bait for moments of opportunity.

Contentious yet the most important V among 5 Vs of big data that a champion data scientist would look for is the Veracity of the information. Intuition would point to Gen Z being more tech-savvy and expect them to employ a level of jurisprudence in consuming and propagating this information. However, with one's social capital and peer participation at stake, one's success factor in a big data ecosystem is no more the accuracy or legitimacy of the content being shared but being a dopamine-incentivised early responder in the scheme of things.

Is it the platform, is it the consumer or the broader regime that should resume responsibility and authority for this? It's a debatable question to be explored for another day but what this study brings out is the motivations, nuances and repercussions behind Fake News sharing that need to be understood to avoid a mass programming of narratives and echo chambers of sorts. This research explores these themes in detail with an ideal balance with the Quantitative approach needed for a piece of reliable empirical evidence and equally complemented by in-depth insights unlocked through qualitative research to understand motivations and behaviours. It's an evolving area of research and this is an attempt to demystify the larger community. I am sure it will unlock more and more such unknowns in its immediate future iterations.



Mr Vijay Ganesan
Former Director - Analytics & Data Strategy,
Europe, Kantar

GEN Z's NEWS ODYSSEY

With a crazy **66%** of Gen Z surfing through online portals for info, they're swimming in the vast ocean of online content. But, amidst these digital waves, there's a lurking danger: fake news! A staggering **80%** of these digital natives admit to getting caught up in its deception.

Fake news doesn't discriminate; it targets public figures, politics, and even religion. It's like a tricky genie granting wishes of sensationalism and polarization. But chillax, 'cause there's a lifebuoy called critical thinking and fact-checking to keep you chill amidst these wild waters. However, even after identifying fake news, fact-checking can sometimes kill one's vibe. With the clock ticking and the convenience calling, many end up sharing unverified stories, unknowingly adding fuel to the fire.

The spread of fake news has people questioning both the media and the government. While some throw shade at the media, others blame individuals for getting sucked into the sirens' song. The call for government action is loud, demanding tighter policies and education campaigns to navigate these rough seas. As the fog of fake news thickens, Gen Z rallies for education and awareness to navigate the storm. With a shared belief in the importance of digital literacy, they're calling for awareness campaigns and initiatives, arming themselves with knowledge to fight the deceptive tides. Sailing through the internet's news ocean throws plenty of challenges at Gen Z, affecting how they see things and make choices. But with education as their compass, fact-checking as their sextant, and a hunger for truth, they're out to conquer the waves of misinformation and sail towards media literacy!"



The 23 Watts
Insight Studio



THE
23
WATTS

Truth be told!

"The biggest enemy of truth is blind acceptance.

Base your decisions on knowledge.

Not on the lack of it."

