WhatsApp limits message forwarding in fight against misinformation

WhatsApp will now limit users to forwarding a message only five times, in an attempt to cut down on the spread of misinformation. According to *Reuters*, the five time forwarding limit is being implemented across the world starting today.

While fake stories and deceitful groups on Facebook have been the focus in the US, misinformation on WhatsApp has become a problem elsewhere in the world. In Brazil, it became a particularly big issue ahead of the country's presidential elections in October, as bad voting information, conspiracy theories, and false stories about candidates spread across the network. One study of the most widely shared images in Brazilian political group chats found that more than half of the top 50 images were misleading, with many being completely false or presented out of context.

Five forwards can still reach nearly 1,300 people

WhatsApp initially limited messages to being forwarded 20 times in July, with the five time forwarding limit being tested out in India. Before that, you could forward a message to up to 256 people. WhatsApp began labeling forwarded messages around that time, too. The initial limits were prompted by a series of mob attacks and killings in India, set off by the spread of false information about child kidnappings.

While the smaller forwarding limit could help curb the spread of bad information, it won't necessarily be as limiting as it sounds. Messages can still be forwarded to groups, with each

group including up to 256 people. That means a forwarded message could be put in front of nearly 1,300 people, despite the five time limit.

WhatsApp didn’t immediately disclose any data on whether it had seen a substantial decline in the spread of false information by reducing the limit to five. We’ve reached out for further information.

Fighting misinformation on WhatsApp presents different challenges than misinformation on Facebook, because of the different ways the networks operate. Unlike Facebook, much of WhatsApp’s messaging and sharing is done through private, encrypted channels, limiting moderators’ ability to see what’s happening and intervene.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/21/18191455/whatsapp-forwarding-limit-five-messages-misinformation-battle