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What's up: Feeling blue?

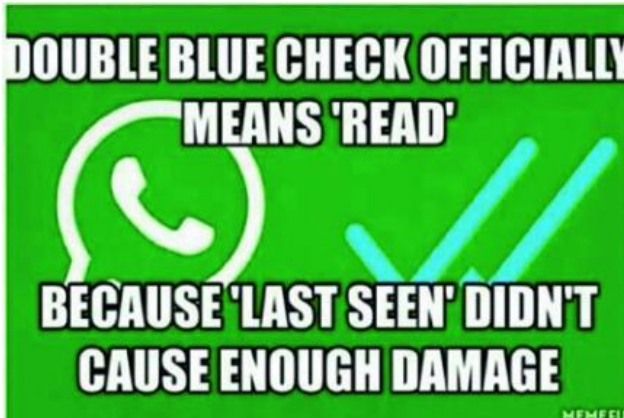
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Messaging app WhatsApp's blue tick feature has unnerved many. Tech experts say it's an upgradation and users need learn to guard their privacy

We've heard of the infamous 'Monday Blues'. But now a new shade of "blue" called 'WhatsApp Blues' has surfaced in our already obsessive compulsive life. We are not kidding. The fact is that recently when our beloved messaging app WhatsApp introduced a new and improved version with an additional feature of 'Blue Ticks', the Gen Y brigade instead of rejoicing, went into a severe paranoid state. Why? Because now the app will show others that you have read their messages and vice versa. Hence hiding behind the disabled "last seen status" and ignoring chats with a simple excuse of "Oh, I haven't checked my WhatsApp for ages" is irrelevant.

With memes and jokes doing the rounds on the Internet, even after the new announcement update that the company is testing a "beta" version to "disable" the feature which will be rolled out for all platforms, we quizzed tech experts about the importance of this new feature and whether it is going to damage relationships in the near future.

Tech guru Rajeev Makhni says, "The very idea of instant messaging services or any messaging product is that you must have a two-way communication process. WhatsApp's biggest competition even now is BBM and in the latter, one always gets to know that their messages have been delivered as well as read by the recipient."

He adds, "WhatsApp till now was lacking this feature. Hence it's nothing more than just playing a catch-up game." Talking about the hilarious side where people are freaking out and making statements like "I cannot believe that WhatsApp did this to us," etc., Rajeev laughs, "First of all, WhatsApp in any way is the worst place to be, don't you think? It puts a time stamp on top of you and shows info about when was the last time you were active on that app, without your permission. So, in an app world like that, people who are cribbing now are acting foolish because they have given that privilege away a long time back. WhatsApp should have also enabled 'voice and video calling' within the app."

According to Ankit Prasad, CEO and co-founder Touchtalent.com, this new feature might be the result of the recent \$19 billion acquisition of WhatsApp by Facebook. He shares, "After the acquisition it was apparent that Facebook might try to push its own philosophies on their newly acquired product. Although it's a logical step towards building a transparent communication channel but transparency comes at its own cost. Some people (including me) treat this information shared by blue ticks as private information and hence it becomes ironical when WhatsApp say they are protecting our privacy while exposing our private information. Interestingly, they have not updated their privacy policy yet even after this major release. Though there are claims that WhatsApp is building the settings to switch off blue ticks which might come out soon and for now it is available on their "beta" version but I seriously doubt it as time will

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Time for a rethink?



S. Nihal Singh

What happened at the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was condemnable without reserve and the world's media, including in India, have risen in solidarity.

have to tell.”

Upon questioning if this change will affect WhatsApp’s popularity, Pranav Kumar, CEO at Startup Village, asserts, “People like being connected and are looking to get information quicker. Platforms such as WhatsApp are powerful because everyone else is also using it. If the changes don’t affect the majority it will not affect the platform either.”

Whereas Himanshu Chakrawarti, CEO at The Mobile Store, says, that even though WhatsApp’s popularity will remain unaffected, BBM and WhatsApp are two very different platforms. “BBM doesn’t hijack your entire data list and adds very random people so that they can connect with you. Even though it is a relevant step but WhatsApp is not that secure. I don’t think it will affect their popularity since in many ways it is a much easier, quicker and faster medium in comparison to most of the messaging apps in the market.”

However, if you look at it from the legal angle, this feature just might harmful. According to cyber expert Pavan Duggal, since this feature tells you exactly that a person has read your message, people can definitely present this as an evidence to prove it in the court of law. He informs, “There are ramifications which users need to know of. Firstly, this could have impact on your privacy. ‘Do you want to be a passive recipient or do you want to be an active participant in a conversation’ should remain in the exclusive control of the individual user. But by providing this feature WhatsApp has violated the personal and data privacy of an individual because I as an individual may want to read certain things but may not want this to be known to the sender. Secondly, and more significantly, you can use this feature to prove in a court of law that a person has read the content, which could then potentially expose the reader to legal consequences. For e.g. if a person sends some content which involves child pornography and if the receiver has viewed the content then it automatically means that he has browsed the content and that is an offence under Section 67B which involves imprisonment and fine. And it can also be used for entrapment purposes as well.”

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