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Typosquatters roam unchecked in India

May 3, 2010, 02:29PM IST

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BANGALORE: Wrongly typing out an alphabet while keying in a popular website name can actually help some people make money.



Type goole.co.in instead of google.com or youtube .com in place of youtube.com and you will land in a proxy site loaded with advertisement links-a phenomenon known as typosquatting, a form of cybersquatting.

The registered domain will have ads of services similar to the original one so that the user who made a typing mistake will click on these links, generating revenue for the bogus domain. It is safe to say that there would be a typosquatted duplicate for any website with a considerable national readership. "Typosquatting is registration of a domain name similar to a popular name with a small change in spelling so that users who mistakenly type the wrong spelling would end up in the alternate site," says Na Vijayashankar, Bangalore-based cyber law expert and promoter of education website cyberlawcollege.com. Typosquatting is a declared offence in the US.

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The 1999 Anti-Cybersquatting Consumer Protection Act (ACPA) prohibits anyone from registering or using domains misleadingly similar to a trademark or famous name. Unfortunately, the Indian law does not deal with typosquatting, says Pavan Duggal, Supreme Court advocate and a veteran in cyber offence cases.

"The Indian Information Technology Act, 2000, the only legislation available in India pertaining to use of computers, computer systems, computer networks, computer resources and communication devices, does not deal with domain name issues. So much so, that even the amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000 have not dealt with any issue pertaining to domain name disputes," said Mr Duggal.

Even though there are innumerable instances where popular Indian websites are typosquatted, not even a single case has been registered against typosquatters in India; the major difficulties being proving a wrongful intent and tracing the owner of the domain.

For example, Indianrailway.com and indianrailways.com are ty-posquatted sites of Indian Railways, the official sites being www.indianrail.gov.in and www.indianrailways.gov.in. Both the ty-posquatted sites display offer for sale. When checked, indianrailway .com leads to a US-based

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domain seller and indianrailways .com leads to an UK-based hosting service provider.

Website-owner apathy is also a reason behind typosquatters thriving. All major firms whom ET contacted, including leading private banks, were indifferent towards the existence of typosquatters, mainly because the threat is not as big as cybersquatting, which would have taken off the original domain name from them.

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