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Author & corresponding author

**Dr. Sunil M. Doshi,**

Associate professor,

Department of Forensic medicine & Toxicology,

Smt.B.K.Shah Medical Institute and Research Center,

Sumandeep Vidyapeeth University,

Vadodara,

Gujarat.

Mobile = 9426654327

Email= [drsunil2347@gmail.com](mailto:drsunil2347@gmail.com)

**Pranks: Practical Joke, Profession or Path to Prison?**

Prank simply means a practical joke or mischievous conduct. According to Cambridge dictionary, prank means a [trick](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/trick) that is [intended](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intended) to be [funny](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/funny) but not to [cause](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cause) [harm](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/harm) or [damage](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/damage). But, can it be called ‘*just a prank’* when someone receives physical intrusion in addition to embarrassment? Obviously not! Viewers enjoy the scene at the cost of a victim who receives mental and/or physical intrusion. It’s not unknown that social medias are not just for entertainment but a business, commercialization of which intensifies such activities as the prankster (who plays prank) receives fun, fame as well as funds.

One of the most famous practical joking traditions still vibrant in many countries is “April Fools’ Day”, celebrations of which date back to the ancient Roman times.1 Also few shows on television, previously made to entertain the people, were broadcasting prank acts with lighter level of joking or pranking. Most of the acts were limited to make the participants foolish or surprised without involving any physical intrusion. For example, a man was standing in a public place as to look like a statue and surprised the people passing by. However, in the era of unstoppable usage of social media, the level of pranks goes higher and higher. It cannot be called *‘just a prank’* when someone suffers from multiple injuries. The scene of a prank may look laughable when prankster in a get up of a terrorist throws a suspected bag in public and run away which obviously followed by panic and/or stampede due to sympathetic response of “fight or flight”. Neither it can be *‘just a prank’* when victim is to be kidnapped by the pranksters. Many such types of videos are available on social websites under the heading of “pranks” which includes not only mental humiliation and embarrassment, but also physical harms. In one video, the prankster as a hairstylist prank the customer by snatching his hair, bending his head violently and massaging the hair in way that provoke the customer to react violently in return. Many other prank videos are comprised of kissing in public pranks, ghost pranks, thief pranks, killer pranks, kidnapping pranks with etc.

Question arises at this point that why such type of prank videos uploaded in hundreds every day? One of the reasons behind this is professionalism of the internet based earning. The more you upload videos with questionable content the more you will attract viewers and the more you will earn from the commercially developed system. Most of the pranksters have already started earning through “uploading prank videos” and some of them made this as their profession. Since decades, it has been observed that human tendency towards earring is to keep the efforts as less as possible to earn as much as possible. However, the famous dictum “No gain without pain” applies here also but, at the cost of pain which is perceived by the victims of prank and the gain generated for the pranksters instead. Basically, Internet provides platforms and promotes such concepts. When going through the most famous websites one can found millions of makers as well as millions of viewers who enjoy making and viewing prank videos respectively. Nevertheless, the term ‘business’ comes with the inherent part called ‘competition’ which ultimately results in propagation of the idea. Most professions acknowledge that benefits of social media must be balanced against its potential to negatively affect professional lives and the public trust.2

In a different context, when a researcher is required to provide “participant information sheet” and “consent form” even in interview based research study how can these types of pranks be excluded from the list of ethics in human experimentation? Pranks cannot be considered as social experiments in a lighter way when it involves making fun of people by physical-mental intrusion (that too without taking consent!!). In western countries apart from injuries, sometimes deaths were also reported while pranking.3,4

In addition to breach “right of privacy”, many prank acts fall under the definitions of offences prescribed under Indian Laws along with the punishments. But, in absence of filing complaints most of the prank acts go unnoticed and unreported. However, Indian penal code defines injury, public nuisance, hurt, intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace under sections of S. 44 IPC, S.268 IPC S.290 IPC, S.319 IPC, S.321IPC, S.323 IPC , S. 504 IPC, S.506IPC, S.509 IPC respectively. Many other sections are also applicable depending on the individual act of prank. It is high time for our country to consider the pranks in terms of defining boundaries and prescribe specific legislations to at least halt the progress of the people who are doing this for the sake of business.

Summary-

It’s pretty easy to hoax or prank the people. More or less all want to be deceived, but only up to a point. Some hoaxes are for fun and pleasant but, others are malicious and unpleasant.5 It is high time for policy makers to understand the earnestness of the current trends towards pranking the people and to make aware the community about their personal rights, delay in which can result in something more serious. Irony is, pranks are always funniest and most effective when there are people who find them neither funny nor effective.6

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