



Civil Servants and Social Media

For Mains: Pros and Cons related to the use of Social Media by Civil Servants

Why in News?

Several civil servants-retired and serving-even advocated some sort of restrictions on social media accounts of civil servants as they may hinder work.

What are the Pros and Cons related to the use of Social Media by Civil Servants?

▪ Pros:

- **Accessible to the Common People:**
 - Civil servants have **become accessible to the common people** and public service delivery issues have been resolved through the use of social media.
- **Created Positive outlook:**
 - Social media has also created a positive outlook towards an institution long perceived as opaque and inaccessible.
- **Increased Awareness:**
 - Social media has increased awareness among people about government policies and programmes.
- **Opportunity to Shape Public Discourse:**
 - It provides an **opportunity for bureaucrats to shape the public discourse** and engage with the public while being politically neutral.
 - The use of social media **helps minimise blind obedience among bureaucrats** at a time when politicians tend to receive the advice they want to hear from bureaucrats.

▪ Cons:

- **Anonymity:**
 - Anonymity has been a **hallmark of Westminster bureaucracies**, including in India.
 - **Public service anonymity** is the convention that ministers answer to Parliament and to the public for government actions without naming the public servants who provided advice or who carried out the administrative action.
 - In a world where public governance has become the norm, **remaining habitually anonymous is counterproductive.**
- **Dominance of Values:**
 - Further, **values are becoming more dominant than facts** in public policymaking.
 - And both **values and facts are getting reshaped due to [fake news](#)** and systematic propaganda within public policy circles as well.
 - As a result, the bureaucracy, which is expected to serve as a repository of facts and epitome of public values, shouldn't be expected to govern privately.

- **Institutionalisation of Social Media:**
 - The use of social media is **gradually getting institutionalised** in many Westminster system-based countries.
 - During the Brexit debate in the U.K., **many civil servants shaped public debate through the use of social media** even while remaining politically neutral.
 - In India, **civil servants haven't reflected on this aspect of digital bureaucracy.**
 - Anonymity and opaqueness have already been watered down through the [Right to Information Act of 2005](#), but they continue to be prominent features.
- **Accessibility and Accountability:**
 - In India, the **role of social media in bureaucracy has taken a different direction.**
 - Social media is **getting used by civil servants for self-promotion.**
 - Through their **selective posts and promotion of these posts by their social media fans, civil servants create a narrative of their performance**, which is justified in the name of accessibility and accountability.
 - There is a wrong notion getting entrenched in the public consciousness that **social media is the way to access civil servants** and make them accountable.

Way Forward

- **Improving Public Policy:**
 - Bureaucrats should **use social media to improve public policies.** If they don't use social media appropriately, their role as independent advisers stands threatened.
 - Social media may have **improved accessibility and accountability**, but it is important to note that **civil servants are at an advantage to share the information** they want and respond to those they want.
 - It is not a **formal set-up where accessibility and accountability** are based on uniformity of treatment.
 - Social media accountability is no alternative to institutional and citizen-centric accountability.
 - It is, in fact, **partly unethical to use social media during office hours** and justify it when some people who have travelled long distances are waiting outside the office.
- **Use of Social Media to bring Facts to Light:**
 - It is **high time that not only should social media be used to bring forth facts** but the achievements also need to be road-showed.
 - This is a **part of the larger context to combat the negativity** that seems to be becoming all pervasive.
 - #Nexusofgood is a movement in that direction, which is a movement to identify, understand, appreciate, replicate and scale good work that is being done by civil servants and society as a whole.
 - The **idea is to evolve an alternative narrative to the negativity** that is becoming all pervasive in social media and other mediums of communication. Such negativity is impacting the thoughts and actions of a large number of people.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. 'The current internet expansion has instilled a different set of cultural values which are often in conflict with traditional values.' Discuss. **(2020)**

Source: [ET](#)

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