



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyze the ethical concerns surrounding social media use by public servants. Propose guidelines for ethical conduct based on public service values. **(150 words)**

13 Jun, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by highlighting the significance of social media
- State the ethical concerns surrounding social media use by public servants
- Propose appropriate guidelines for ethical conduct
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized communication, offering unprecedented opportunities for public servants to connect with **citizens, promote transparency, and build trust**. However, this powerful tool presents a double-edged sword.

- Its misuse can undermine public trust, compromise sensitive information, and tarnish government reputations.

Body

Ethical Concerns Surrounding Social Media Use by Public Servants:

- **Confidentiality and Privacy** Public servants have access to sensitive information and are bound by confidentiality obligations.
 - Inadvertent disclosure of confidential information on social media can have serious consequences.
 - **Example:** An **IAS officer** posted on Instagram with their official vehicle even before the official announcement of the designation.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Social media interactions with companies or individuals seeking preferential treatment can create a perception of bias.
 - **Example:** A city council member **endorses a construction company** on social media before awarding them a contract.
- **Misinformation and Bias:** Public servants may struggle to maintain neutrality on controversial topics, potentially swaying public opinion.
 - **Example:** A police officer shares an **unverified news article about a crime**, fueling public outrage.
- **Reputational Risk:** Inappropriate personal posts or online behavior can damage the public image of the government.
 - **Example:** A **diplomat's offensive social media comments** (like recent comments of Maldivian Politician on India's Prime Minister social media post), spark a diplomatic crisis.
- **Erosion of Public Trust:** Excessive focus on personal lives or partisan posts can undermine **public trust in the professionalism** of public servants.
 - **Example:** A government official spends more time posting selfies and grand entry videos

than engaging with people.

- **Misuse of Official Resources:** Public resources should be used solely for official purposes and not for personal gain or benefit.
 - Social media use during work hours or on government-issued devices can be considered a misuse of resources.
 - **Example:** A public servant **using their official vehicles or office premises to make reels.**

Proposed Guidelines for Ethical Conduct:

- **Implement Robust Social Media Training:** Provide comprehensive training programs on the appropriate use of social media for all public servants.
 - Making training mandatory and requiring periodic refresher courses to keep up with evolving social media trends and best practices.
- **Clear Social Media Policy:** Developing and implementing a comprehensive social media policy like the **Uttar Pradesh Police recent Social Media Policy** that outlines **expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries** for public servants.
 - Providing training and awareness programs to ensure understanding and compliance with the policy.
- **Separation of Personal and Professional Accounts:** Encouraging public servants to maintain **separate personal and professional social media accounts.**
 - Personal accounts should be clearly identified as such and not used for official purposes.
- **Responsible Use of Official Resources:** Clearly defining acceptable use of official resources, including devices, email accounts, and social media platforms.
 - Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting misuse of resources.
- **Professional Conduct and Accountability:** Emphasize the importance of maintaining a high standard of professional conduct on social media.
 - Implementing disciplinary measures for breaches of conduct, such as **inappropriate posts or behavior.**

Conclusion

By implementing comprehensive guidelines and fostering a culture of ethical social media use, public servants can leverage the benefits of social media while upholding the highest standards of **integrity, accountability, and public service values.**