



Mains Practice Question

Q. Explain the ways in which social media can be used as a force multiplier in governance. Discuss the challenge it poses in governance. (250 words)

15 Jul, 2020 GS Paper 3 Science & Technology

Approach

- Highlight the relevance of social media with growing numbers of users.
- Illustrate the importance of social media establish the relationship between social media and governance
- Mention the challenge that social media poses in the governance.
- Conclude with suggestions.

Introduction

- With a growing number of users, social media has become a game-changer in the way central, regional, and local government agencies are engaging, interacting, and communicating with citizens.
- The Indian Government has been at the forefront of these emerging trends—it has rapidly adopted the latest digital technologies and embraced new forms of social media communication tools in the discharge of its governance and administrative duties.

Body

Importance of Social Media

- Most government departments and agencies now maintain an active presence on the popular social media channels. They have created official accounts, have a large number of followers, and regularly share news updates, departmental notifications, or public announcements on their channels.
 - Not just departmental accounts even executive officers, bureaucrats, politicians, ministers etc. are active on social media and regularly cross share (or retweet) each others' updates.
- There are various ways in which Indian Government agencies are using social media as a force multiplier in their work:
 - **Crisis/Disaster Management:** Social media is now increasingly being used by governments to reach out to citizens during an unexpected crisis. For example, recently a cyclone alert from the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) on India's eastern coasts (in the state of Odisha) was issued through social media platforms to make people aware.
 - **Citizen Grievances and Support:** Social media has emerged as a very impactful, real-time channel for citizen grievances and support.
 - Most citizen services maintain active accounts on social media and encourage

citizens to directly reach out with their grievances. Hence, there is pressure on the service providers to resolve the issue while appearing fair, transparent, and responsive for everyone to see.

- **Hiring and Recruitment:** Some government agencies are using social media hiring channels for attracting best-in-class talent for their job vacancies.
 - For example, a job vacancy was posted by **National Institute for Smart Government** (NISG) for technical positions in UIDAI on LinkedIn
- **Foreign Relations:** Social media bridges the distance between nations through the internet. Many government agencies are using social media channels effectively to engage with their foreign counterparts. Embassies and foreign consulates are active on Twitter and Facebook, engaging with each other or sharing important updates to their citizens.
 - For example, the Indian Government (through their official Twitter account) wished the people of Paraguay on their Independence Day.
- **Live Traffic Updates:** Real-time traffic updates and advisories get regularly shared in the metropolitan cities via the local Traffic Police social media accounts. These updates are helpful to commuters in avoiding traffic jams or taking detours to save time.
 - For example, Delhi police have been seen posting on their twitter account about road blockage to assist the citizens
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Citizens want ready access to government departments and their functioning officers. Given the size and expanse of the official setup, it is often not easy to figure out who is the concerned officer-in-charge and their contact details. Social media can come to the rescue in some cases.

Challenges of using social media

- **Rumour mongering:** The use of social media for governance comes with its own set of challenges like spreading rumours creating panic among the people.
- **Digital Illiteracy:** A major part of the population of India is illiterate which can not be ignored. It makes them vulnerable to various cyber threats.
- **Digital divide:** Lack of availability of basic infrastructure like internet, electricity, smartphones etc proves to be a major hurdle in the reaping of digital revolution.
- **Fake news:** There are plenty of miscreants from where fake news is spread which may lead to various issues such as violence, communalism etc .

Conclusion

- Social media helps in building trust among the citizens and the government since it provides a perfect avenue to remain transparent and clear with the citizens.
- The government needs to take certain steps to improve the situation like posting regularly, engaging with the people, educating the audience with valuable content etc.
- Only then, social media can be used as a force multiplier in governance.