



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyse the limitations faced by model code of conduct in the digital age of political advertisement. (250 words)

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Approach

- Give brief introduction of Model Code of Conduct.
- Enlist and elaborate limitations faced by model code of conduct in the digital age of political advertisement.

Introduction:

The Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines issued by the election commission that political parties have to follow while campaigning during elections. Earlier Election Commission held tight reins on election-time propaganda. But today, the effective implementation of Model Code of Conduct is facing challenges in today's digital era and explosion of various type of multimedia.

Body

Limitations faced by model code of conduct in the digital age

- **Blurring distinction of Private and Public:** Social media has blurred distinction between private and public. New age tools like live webcasting, making election campaign related stuff go 'Viral', bringing in celebrities 'influencers' etc. have made implementation of MCC a complex task.
- **Accessibility:** Exponential growth of digital communication in India and being non-regulated social media due to concerns over freedom of speech, free internet, the challenge posed by social media for EC is significant. EC lacks resources as well as surveillance capacity to implement and punish the violation of MCC.
- **Jurisdiction issues:** Digital companies like Facebook are run by companies located overseas. Holding them accountable has been difficult for Indian agencies. EC will face similar challenge in preventing MCC violations.
- **Election expenditure:** Tracing money trails and poll expenditures is difficult in digital age.
- **Political advertisement on social media and lack of transparency:** In March 2019 Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Google, ShareChat and TikTok presented a 'voluntary code of ethics'. Among other things, that involves insisting on transparency in political ads. Even though a small beginning has been made, full transparency will remain a challenge for election commission.
- **Fake News:** Digital media is potent source of unverified and deliberate fake news. The way to solve the problem is for the EC to impose a hefty fine per view of an ad that breaks the rules. EC needs to create a clear set of rules and stipulate fines.
- **Closed system like Whatsapp:** There are many gaps like closed systems such as WhatsApp, where users connect individually, are not covered by the election commission's guidelines. This despite WhatsApp being one of the country's largest social media platforms, bigger than even Facebook.

Conclusion

Election commission recently has taken steps like all candidates are required to provide details of their social media accounts to the commission and take prior approval for all political advertisements on social media. Moreover, the model code will apply to all social media content. In spite of all these measures, effective implementation of MCC needs entirely new approach with stringent focus on accountability of digital mediums.

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