



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the ethical implications of social media on individual privacy and public accountability. (150 words)

10 Oct, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by highlighting how Social media is increasing getting woven in our lives
- Give ethical implications of social media on individual privacy and public accountability separately.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, **offering numerous benefits such as communication, information sharing, and entertainment.** However, their rapid growth and widespread adoption have also raised serious ethical concerns related to individual privacy and public accountability.

Body

Ethical Implications of Social Media:

- **Individual Privacy**
 - **Data Breaches and Identity Theft:** The increasing number of data breaches on social media platforms has led to the exposure of **sensitive personal information, making individuals vulnerable to identity theft, financial fraud, and other harms.**
 - In 2018, the **CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation)** filed a case against **Cambridge Analytica** for illegally harvesting and misusing the personal data of **5.62 lakh Indian Facebook users.**
 - **Algorithmic Bias:** The algorithms used by social media platforms can **perpetuate biases,** leading to the amplification of certain viewpoints and the suppression of others.
 - This can have a negative impact on individual privacy and freedom of expression.
 - During the 2019 Indian general elections, research by the BBC found that **Twitter's algorithm tended to amplify more polarizing political content.**
 - **Surveillance Capitalism:** The business model of many social media platforms is based on "**surveillance capitalism,**" where user data is monetized through targeted advertising.
 - This raises concerns about the extent to which individuals are being surveilled and exploited for commercial gain.
 - **Deepfakes and Misinformation:** The spread of **deep fakes, manipulated videos or images** that can be used to spread misinformation or harm individuals' reputations, is another ethical concern associated with social media.
 - Bollywood Actors like **Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh** have both been the subject of deepfakes during the **2024 Indian election.**
- **Public Accountability**
 - **Political Manipulation:** Social media platforms have been accused of enabling foreign

interference in elections and the spread of political misinformation.

- This raises questions about the **role of social media companies in ensuring the integrity of democratic processes.**
- **Online Harassment and Cyberbullying:** Social media can be a breeding ground for **online harassment and cyberbullying**, leading to negative mental health outcomes for individuals and communities.
 - **Platforms** act as **third-party agents**, shielding themselves from any accountability.
- **Government Overreach:** Governments may use social media platforms to monitor citizens, suppress dissent, and spread propaganda.
 - **Russia** is being alleged to increasingly turn to American social media stars to covertly influence voters ahead of the **2024 USA Presidential Elections.**
 - This raises concerns about the potential for government overreach and the erosion of democratic values.
- **Lack of Content Moderation:** Social media platforms often struggle to effectively moderate harmful content. The controversy surrounding **Twitter Content Moderation Policies**, as raised by the **European Union**, highlights the gravity of the issue.

Conclusion

The ethical implications of social media are complex and multifaceted. While these platforms **offer numerous benefits**, they also pose significant risks to individual privacy and public accountability. Addressing these concerns requires a **collaborative effort involving social media companies, governments, and individuals** and steadfast implementation of **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.**

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