



## 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-shown.
- 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](#)

