

Social Media And Its Impact On Society [UPSC Notes for GS I]

Social Media And Its Impact On Society

Context

- Social media has been accused of polarising the society due to the inflammatory nature of certain posts.
- World over concerns have been raised over social media being used for surveillance, election meddling, etc.

Background

- Social media has become ubiquitous. As per a UN report 47 % of the global population is online and among them the percentage of social media users is rising steadily.
- It does not have a steep learning curve and compared to other traditional websites offers content in the local language.
- The barriers to entry are quite low and there is a large and well development ecosystem in place for users which is unavailable in traditional TV media. The positives of social media.
- Social media offers a variety of entertainment that offers an escape from the conventional scripted entertainment industry funded by established studios.
- It offers people-to-people interaction that breaks barriers and forges true human connection.
- It also has been instrumental in pro-democracy fights in many oppressive regimes.
- Social media also played an important role in bringing out stories of 'Metoo' victims.
- Social media is also playing a crucial role in disaster relief, blood donation drives, etc.

The concerns

- It has led to anonymous trolls who attack the reputation of an individual.
- Women face cyber rape and threats that affect their dignity severely.
- Fake news and communal venom also spreads like wildfire on the media.
- Fake news about a child abduction gang was spread by teenagers as a prank and this led to a few people being attacked. This is encouraged by the fact that internet anonymity offers a disconnect from reality. So its users feel that they are not going to face any consequence to their actions.
- Social media bubbles or echo chambers are created where one finds only opinions that conform to one's own world view (confirmation bias). This strengthens already existing biases and prejudices.
- It also creates false notions about beauty and physical standards and strengthens narcissism in some and weakens self-esteem in others.
- Very structured, deep psychometric analyses have been used to influence elections and incite violence.
- **Conclusion:** There have been calls to regulate social media or ban it altogether. A ban might be an extreme step. However a digitally literate country is the need of the hour. Responsible social media use must be taught at every school and college in the country.