Mains Practice Question

Q: What are the ethical issues involved in the use of social media for public service delivery? Discuss with suitable examples and suggest measures to address them.

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Approach

- Start your answer with a brief introduction of Social Media and Public service delivery
- Explain the ethical issue along with examples.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction:

Social media refers to the platforms that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking and public service delivery is the provision of essential services such as health, education, sanitation, etc. by the government or its agencies to the citizens.

Social media can be used for public service delivery in various ways, such as disseminating information, seeking feedback, enhancing transparency and accountability, promoting citizen participation, etc.

Body:

- Some of the ethical issues involved in the use of social media for public service delivery are:
    - **Privacy and Data Protection:**
        - Social media platforms collect and store a large amount of personal and sensitive data of the users, which can be misused or breached by hackers, third parties, or even the government itself.
        - This can violate the right to privacy and dignity of the citizens and expose them to identity theft, cybercrime, surveillance, etc.
            - For example, the Aadhaar data leak compromised the personal information of millions of Indians.
    - **Fake News and Misinformation:**
        - Social media platforms can also be used to spread false or misleading information that can create panic, confusion, hatred, violence, or distrust among the public.
        - This can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of public service delivery and harm the public interest.
            - For example, the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed a surge of fake news and misinformation on social media regarding the causes, symptoms, prevention, and treatment of the disease.
    - **Digital Divide and Exclusion:**
        - Social media platforms require access to internet connectivity, digital devices, and digital literacy, which are not equally available to all sections of society.
        - This can create a digital divide and exclude those who are poor, rural, illiterate, elderly, disabled, etc. from accessing or benefiting from public service delivery through social media.
            - For example, online education during the lockdowns due to Covid-19 was

inaccessible to many students who lacked internet access or devices.
- **Ethical Dilemmas and Conflicts:**
  - Social media platforms can also create ethical dilemmas and conflicts for public servants who have to balance their personal and professional identities, values, and responsibilities.
  - They may face issues such as maintaining confidentiality, impartiality, integrity, accountability, etc. while using social media for public service delivery.
    - For example, a public servant may have to deal with online harassment, trolling, criticism, or pressure from various stakeholders.

Conclusion:

- Social media can be a powerful tool however, it also poses some ethical challenges that need to be addressed by adopting appropriate measures such as:
  - Developing clear guidelines and codes of conduct for public servants and citizens, strengthening the legal and institutional framework for data protection, privacy, cybersecurity, etc., combating fake news and misinformation, bridging the digital divide and ensuring digital inclusion by providing affordable and accessible internet connectivity, devices, and literacy to all sections of society.