Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

You hold a responsible position in a ministry in the government. One day in the morning you received a call from the school of your 11-year-old son that you are required to come and meet the Principal. You proceed to the school and find your son in the Principal's office. The Principal informs you that your son had been found wandering aimlessly in the grounds during the time classes were in progress. The class teacher further informs you that your son has lately become a loner and did not respond to questions in the class, he had also been unable to perform well in the football trials held recently. You bring your son back from the school and in the evening, you along with your wife try to find out the reasons for your son's changed behaviour. After repeated cajoling, your son shares that some children had been making fun of him in the class as well as in the WhatsApp group of the students by calling him stunted, duh and a frog. He tells you the names of a few children who are the main culprits but pleads with you to let the matter rest.

After a few days, during a sporting event, where you and your wife have gone to watch your son play, one of your colleague's son shows you a video in which students have caricatured your son. Further, he also points out to the perpetrators who were sitting in the stands. You purposefully walk past them with your son and go home. Next day, you find on social media, a video denigrating you,

your son and even your wife, stating that you engaged in physical bullying of children on the sports field. The video became viral on social media. Your friends and colleagues began calling you to find out the details. One of your juniors advised you to make a counter video giving the background and explaining that nothing had happened on the field. You, in turn posted a video which you have captured during the sporting event, identifying the likely perpetrators who were responsible for your son's predicament. You have also narrated what has actually happened in the field and made attempts to bring out the adverse effects of the misuse of social media.

(a) Based on the above case study, discuss the ethical issues involved in the use of social media.

(b) Discuss the pros and cons of using social media by you to put across the facts to counter the fake propaganda against your family.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2023	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

The case involves a conflict between parental responsibility, protection of a child, professional integrity and the ethical responsibilities of a public servant in the digital sphere. The central issues are truth versus misinformation, privacy versus public disclosure, accountability versus retaliation, and the legitimate use of social media versus its misuse for humiliation and character assassination.

Model Answer

Introduction

Social media has transformed communication by enabling rapid dissemination of information, but its power also creates ethical responsibilities. The case highlights how cyberbullying, misinformation, invasion of privacy and public shaming can harm individuals, particularly children, while also testing the restraint and integrity expected from a public servant.

(a) Ethical issues involved in the use of social media

1. Truthfulness and misinformation:

The circulation of a false video accusing the family of physical bullying represents deliberate misinformation and distortion of facts. It violates honesty and creates reputational harm.

2. Cyberbullying and dignity:

The caricaturing and insulting of the child through social media amount to cyberbullying. Labelling him with derogatory names undermines his dignity, self-esteem and emotional well-being.

3. Privacy of children:

Sharing videos, caricatures and personal information about a minor without consent violates the child's right to privacy and exposes him to further psychological harm.

4. Anonymity and accountability:

The perpetrators may feel emboldened by the perceived anonymity of digital platforms. Ethical social-media use requires accountability for online conduct.

5. Right to reputation:

False allegations against the officer and his family threaten their dignity and reputation. Social media users have an ethical duty to verify information before sharing it.

6. Proportionality and restraint:

The officer faces the ethical dilemma of defending his family without himself becoming an instrument of public humiliation. Identifying suspected children publicly can expose minors to retaliation and violate their privacy.

7. Responsible digital citizenship:

Social media should facilitate informed communication rather than revenge, sensationalism or mob justice. The case demonstrates the need for empathy, verification, consent and responsible communication.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

(b) Pros and cons of using social media to counter fake propaganda

Pros

Immediate clarification:
A direct response can quickly communicate the facts and prevent a false narrative from becoming the accepted version of events.

Protection of reputation:
As a public servant, allowing a completely false allegation to circulate unchecked could damage personal as well as institutional credibility.

Public awareness:
The officer can use the opportunity to highlight the dangers of cyberbullying, misinformation and irresponsible social-media behaviour.

Transparency:
Sharing authentic evidence from the sporting event can demonstrate that there was no physical confrontation and reinforce the value of factual verification.

Cons

Violation of children's privacy:
Identifying the alleged perpetrators publicly may expose minors to social stigma, harassment or retaliation, even if they were involved in bullying.

Escalation of conflict:
A public counterattack can convert a school-level problem into a larger online confrontation and encourage further trolling or hostility.

Trial by social media:
The officer should not determine guilt through public accusation. Identification of “likely perpetrators” is not equivalent to legally or factually establishing culpability.

Conflict with official position:
A public servant must maintain restraint and avoid giving the impression that his official position is being used to protect personal interests.

Further amplification:
Responding to misinformation may inadvertently increase its visibility and prolong the controversy.

Ethically preferable approach

The officer should correct the false allegation **without publicly naming or exposing minor children**. He should preserve the original evidence,

report the fake content to the platform and appropriate authorities, inform the school administration and seek a formal investigation into the bullying and cyberbullying. The child's counselling and safety should remain the priority. If a public response is necessary, it should be factual, restrained and limited to clarifying that the allegation of physical bullying is false, without retaliatory accusations.

Conclusion

The ethical use of social media requires **truth, privacy, dignity, accountability, empathy and restraint**. In the case, the officer's best response would be to defend his family's reputation through verified facts and lawful institutional mechanisms while avoiding public exposure or humiliation of children. Such an approach balances parental responsibility with the higher ethical standards expected of a public servant.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP