Menace of Micro Targeted Political Ads

Why in news?

Leading social media platforms like twitter are considering ban on micro-targeted political ads.

What is online political advertising?

- Online political advertisings are messages intended to reach a large audience through periodicals, sample ballots, web sites, e-mails, text messages, social media, and other online or electronic formats enabling the exchange of communication.
- These ad campaigns are used for appealing, directly or indirectly, for votes or for financial or other support in any election campaign.
- There are two things that make online political advertising different from usual advertising, thy are

1. **Targeting -** Online advertising allows, especially on social networks, for a kind of targeting that wasn't possible at the same level before.
2. **Invisibility -** if there's targeted advertising on a social media platform, not everyone gets to know of it.

How are the issues with micro targeting in political sense?

- Personalized targeting based on multiple attributes is possible through platforms like Facebook and Twitter.
- Facebook, for instance, allows to choose a person from a particular caste and also from a particular class in the same caste.
- Targeted advertising makes it possible for two people connected to the Internet from the same source, to get two different advertisements.
- Micro-targeting has got potentially damaging results in the context of political advertising, particularly for elections.
- These platforms make it possible to go from manufacturing consent to manipulating consent.
- A person is continuously fed with information to vote for a particular party.
- This methodology in which these platforms have got their business models

and are engaging deeply in subverting the Indian democratic process is a serious cause of concern.

What is the stand of Social Medias on micro targeting?

- Many social media platforms claims that they are only intermediaries providing space, and that the content is being generated by the people to be consumed by the people, and they have no role to play.
- They defend them with the clause that they are not automatically liable for what people are seeing on those platforms.
- The people who are actually saying things should be liable, not necessarily those who are carrying it without knowing what they're carrying most of the time.
- Online platforms in comparison with political ads in newspapers are able to provide greater transparency.

What measures needs to be taken?

- **Role of Election Commission -** When people come to participate and engage in a democratic process, the EC and The Representation of the People Act (RPA) mandate that people should be allowed to take a very clear stand, to look at what has happened in the last five years, and decide how to vote, freely and fairly.
- That is why the RPA clearly lists a certain set of things free and fair elections, where even the use of money and manipulation should not be allowed to happen.
- The EC should come up with new methodologies, if the existing ones are not sufficient to address the micro targeting political advertisements.
- The EC should make public the way in which this advertising is being conducted, the money associated with it, and the people who are being reached with it.
- The EC should reach out to the Government of India and look at the departments that are capable of handling this.
- If they don't exist, it should start creating infrastructure that will be able to look into all these aspects.
- **Role of Social Media platforms -** The social media corporations who are responsible for the political advertisements need to be very transparent in the context of elections.
- They need to bring out all the ways in which advertisements are displayed and also the money associated with it.
- So, all the legislation that apply now for reasonable restrictions and

freedom of speech and the freedom of press also apply to these platforms.

- These platforms are culpable when the very intent of their business model allows such subversion of the democratic process.
- They need to be brought in line to ensure that Indian democracy is safe.

Source: The Hindu

