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## RESEARCH REPORT

Committee: Economic and Social Council  
(ECOSOC)

Topic: Addressing the effects of social media on  
the minds of the youth

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## Introduction

Social media has been on the rise since the creation of the smartphone. Websites and applications that allow users to share, create and post content on the web for others to see allow users to generate content through sending text messages, photos and comments on them, leading to a vicious cycle of cyberbullying and harsh standards online on the web, having a deep negative effect on teens throughout the world.

Social media has become an integral part of young people's life, allowing them to consume content and stay in touch with friends and family through advanced communication tools such as messaging and calling. However, excessive use of social media and overconsuming it can have various negative effects on users and are a growing problem in this day and age. By exposing teens to cyberbullying, unrealistic expectations about beauty and body standards are set, along with teens getting addicted to social media, reducing their attention span, resulting in depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

While it may seem as a place for fun and to enjoy, social media has often been negatively criticised for worsening political polarisation and undermining democracy through spreading misinformation and out-of-context clips defaming people. Social media's algorithms; furthermore, tend to favour content which spur negative emotions in people, such as anger and rage. Overall, social media in the current age has become a breeding ground for cyberbullying and addictive content, both leading teenagers all around the world into depression and unreal standards negatively impacting millions.

## Definition of Key Terms

- 1. Social Media:** Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

2. **Addiction:** Addiction is the inability to control a craving for a substance or activity, even when it causes harm.
3. **Depression:** Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious mental disorder that negatively affects how you feel, think, act, and perceive the world.
4. **Communication:** the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium.
5. **Cyberbullying:** the practice of bullying a person by sending messages or posting social media content of an intimidating, mocking, or threatening nature.
6. **Mental Health:** A state of well-being where an individual can realise their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community

## Background Information

### Origin

The PLATO system was first launched as a precursor of social media in the 1960s by the University of Illinois in the US, as it was the first known social media online, allowing users to interact and message each other over the internet, enabling them to discuss various topics. However, this was taken forward by the first true social media website, coined “Six Degrees”, allowing users to do many things on social media similar to today, allowing users to create profiles, maintain lists of friends and contact others through private messages, while also allowing users to create group chats online.

The negative effects of social media are not only seen for a short amount of time. As they have been seen consistently throughout the past 2 decades, highlighted through the landmark case of Megan Meir on MySpace in 2006, where cyberbullying on social media eventually caused her to take her own life. Throughout history, the effects of social media

have been known; however, it has only been since the late 2000s that scientists have figured out the effects of addiction, depression and withdrawal from excessive use.

## Current Situation

### Mental Health Concerns

Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has deduced that over 1 in 7 teens from the ages 10-19 suffer mental disorders, accounting for over 15% of the global burden of these diseases within this age group. With depression and anxiety among the leading causes of diseases within Adolescents both fueled by social media. With social media setting unreal body standards and social expectation driven by the model of 'liking' others posts and commenting pressure on teens has been at an all time high. Studies show that nearly 50% of teens living in the US are pressured to look good in a society dominated by standards rising day by day. To make matters worse this pressure is looking to have serious side effects on teens, with the pressure to post due to peer pressure making many commit risky behaviours online and in person while also suffering from mental illnesses such as depression and body anxiety.

Recently with the rise of social media multiple platforms have been stormed by viral challenges and trends, some resulting in deaths turning into high profile deaths widely discussed over the internet. However, the issue has not been quenched as the development of complex algorithms included in developers apps such as Meta and Tiktok have only caused people to get hooked to websites fueled by the rush of dopamine amounting with every scroll. Studies conducted by the NIH have found that this excess dopamine has already been seen to cause teens' attention spans to reduce significantly, with studies showing an increase in procrastination throughout teens, resulting in significantly lower productivity for many.

## **Addiction and Distraction**

These days, with the development of software and billion-dollar companies backing social media websites, everything has been designed to keep you using the website. By notifying you often with daily updates and other messages on online social media websites, keep you coming back to them, impelling you to pick up your device. For youth who are still developing vital self-regulation skills, this can lead to uncontrollable addiction and habitual usage. Recent studies conducted by the NIH have seen that excessive use of social media is linked to negative effects, including poor academic performance, reduced sleep quality and lower attention spans.

Furthermore, through social media employing quick looping content on their platforms, apps have gotten users to 'scroll' on their platforms for hours at a time. Not only does this have physical impacts on your eyes with excessive screen time leading to eye strain and discomfort, excessive use has also been linked to reducing youth's multitasking capabilities and their ability to focus during class for extended periods of time. Fueled by the constant influx of notifications and pings on users' phones, teens' attention has now become fragmented, increasing cognitive load on the brain, leading to lower quality work and other performance issues in class.

## **Misinformation**

Misinformation has become one of the defining challenges of the digital age, amplified through the use of AI tools all over social media. Social media is an open tool available to display content of any sort; however, the issue has arisen lately with deepfake videos created by AI and edited clips, which spread false information online for millions of people to see. The problem gets worse, however, when this information contains offensive content which defames people, a legal issue that has serious implications all over the world. With the spread of misinformation, teens all over the world are being spread false information about "people, race and even events occurring around the world". This issue is

especially severe considering it is during a human's adolescence and teenage years where their brain starts to form and develop. Furthermore, through false information going around online, many false implicit biases are created in a child's head, severely obstructing them from having a clear opinion on a topic.

This issue, however, is not only limited to the problem of false information being spread online, and is instead creating vast echo chambers online of content from only 1 side of the story severely distorting the credibility and 2 sidedness of information that people should ideally be informed of. This arises from the way social media's algorithms have been constructed, only showing content which users like and interact with, thus causing them to never actually get the other half of the story, which is critical for teens to form informed opinions on certain subjects.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### United States

With social media increasing relevance in the US and the home ground of large companies including Meta and TikTok, social media is vital to the US's citizens no matter the age demographic. Over 74% of teens report feeling more connected to their friends thanks to social media, according to the Pew Research Centre in the US, and this number is only expected to grow with the technological advancements coming our way.

However, similar to other countries, the US also cites major concerns regarding the use of social media, acknowledging the effects it has on teens across the US. Vivek Murthy (the former U.S. Surgeon General) has described social media as a factor in what he calls a youth mental health crisis, and cautioned that there is not enough evidence that social media are sufficiently safe for children and adolescents yet. Moreover, the HHS goes further on citing that children who use social media for more than 3 hours a day have double the

risk of developing depression and anxiety, a number too small to ignore, thus prompting the US to take action on the matter. One notable attempt was the US trying to ban TikTok mainly due to its affiliation with the Chinese company Byte-Dance and the US's worry of China trying to spread misinformation to the US's users, allegedly claimed by Donald Trump the 47th president of the United States, thus prompting the US government to take significant action against the company.

## **Australia**

Australia has taken bold stances on the issue as well. Recently, the Australian government passed a law banning children from under 16 to access social media. Furthermore, similar to research from other top researchers the government banned social media in the hope to reduce cyber bullying, grooming and other negative impacts such as addiction. Moreover, though the move is popular with many parents, experts have raised concerns over data privacy and the accuracy of age verification technology. As the Australian government has left it in the hands of social media companies to add age verification technology, leaving children's privacy at risk. However, the government has taken significant steps to enforce the law as the government currently cites a fine of 50 million Australian dollar for social media websites which do not comply with the regulations.

## **Social media companies**

Many companies in the industry often fail to address the negative impacts of social media on their users. Several social media companies have faced criticism for algorithms that can contribute to the rapid spread of misinformation. This effect is only compounded by the decision made in boardrooms. Recently at the start of 2025 Mark Zuckerberg the CEO and founder of Meta took the decision to stop using 3rd party fact checkers on his website, associated with an increase in the circulation of false information. Moreover, it is important to remember social media companies are all driven by earnings, often leading them to only

increase engagement, boosting their revenue while not realising the negative externality of consumption they have with users often bearing a high external cost. When asked they ignore the reality, instead stating the positive aspects of their websites such as allowing people to build a community and promote creativity.

## **World Health Organisation (WHO)**

WHO is a specialised agency of the UN that acts on global health issues across the world including highlighting concerns regarding the possible dangers of social media. With them reporting that around 13% of girls compared to 9% of boys face problematic usage issues on social media. Moreover, Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe noted that “It’s clear that social media can have both positive and negative consequences on the health and well-being of adolescents,” revealing the WHO’s view on the issue. While they do address the positives such as community building and allowing people to express their voice online they do accept the harsh problems of bullying, overuse etc. Furthermore, the WHO has posted that it is vital for countries to adopt digital literacy education courses within school curriculums. Moreover, they suggest adopting interventions which are age-appropriate , gender-sensitive and culturally tailored, aiming to reduce the risk of problematic social media use.

## **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events**

The UN has passed multiple policies and resolutions up to this date regarding the topic of teen mental health linked with social media. Some of those are as follows:

- Policies and programmes involving youth, adopted by the General Assembly, 10 January 2020 ([A/RES/74/121](#))
- Policies and programmes involving youth, adopted by the General Assembly, 22 December 2023 ([A/RES/78/179](#))

- Policies and programmes involving youth (ECOSOC resolution), 2021, [E/CN.5/2021/L.5](#)
- United Nations General Assembly Resolution 78/213 – Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies, 22 December 2023 ([A/RES/78/213](#))
- Event: International Youth Day 2024 – Digital Pathways to a Sustainable Future, [12 August 2024](#)
- Webinar: “Protecting Youth Human Rights Defenders in the Digital Sphere” (United Nations in Kuwait / OHCHR), [12 August 2024](#)
- Side-event: UN Youth Forum 2025 – “Press Start: Understanding Harms in Online Gaming Spaces”, [28 April 2025](#)

## Possible Solutions

Developing Educational Programs: Educational programs are a great way to bring awareness to the major issue of mental health issues about social media as discussed above

Creating guidelines for safe online behaviour: While cyber bullying is a risk, steps can be taken to help reduce it online. By implementing robust guidelines on social media apps, users can stay safer and avoid the negative effects of cyberbullying online.

Encouraging responsible social media use: With the increasing popularity of social media across the world, international campaigns could act as a method to help increase the awareness of mental health issues teens face due to social media

Research into mental health impacts: With more developed and a better background on the issue researchers could help find ways to reduce the physiological effects social media can have and help develop strategies to avoid people from getting addicted to social media

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### Useful Resources

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<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<https://www.unicef.org/stories/how-to-stop-cyberbullying>

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