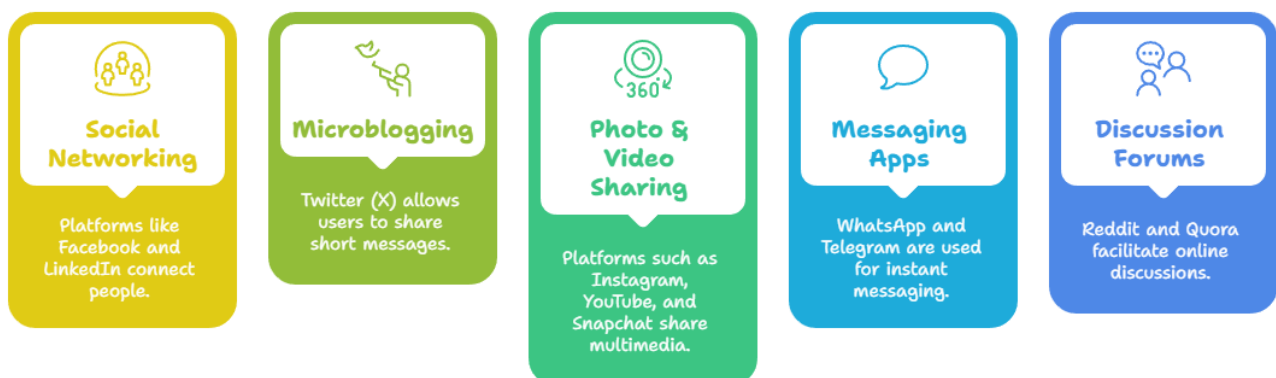# Impact of Social Media on Young People

Source: TH

Why in News?

The rise of **social media** has brought to light the **growing concerns** over its **impact on youth identity** and **mental health**. As young people's sense of self becomes **increasingly linked to online validation,** issues like **anxiety and distorted self-image** are on the rise, prompting a need for reflection on its role in shaping lives.

What is the Significance of Social Media?

Social Media Platforms

Social Networking
Platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn connect people.

Microblogging
Twitter (X) allows users to share short messages.

Photo & Video Sharing
Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat share multimedia.

Messaging Apps
WhatsApp and Telegram are used for instant messaging.

Discussion Forums
Reddit and Quora facilitate online discussions.

- **Impact on Indian Society:** Social media challenges **traditional media monopolies** by allowing citizens to share **real-time news and opinions,** holding authorities accountable as seen during **Covid-19** when doctors used Twitter to highlight oxygen shortages.
  - Governments and politicians use social media for direct public engagement, policy announcements, grievance redressal, and political promotion, as observed during the **Lok Sabha elections 2024** in India.
  - Social media amplifies marginalized voices, fueling movements like the **MeTooIndia**

(2018) campaign where women exposed harassment across sectors.

- **Social Media Impact on Indian Economy:** Social media drives India's **digital economy**, supporting small businesses, startups, **gig workers**, and influencers. For example, home chefs, artisans, and influencers use platforms like WhatsApp catalogs to sell products.
    - The creator economy, led by YouTube and Instagram influencers, grew from **962,000 in 2020 to 4.06 million in 2024, now supporting 8% of the workforce.**
    - India's creative economy, valued at **USD 30 billion in 2024, and contributes 2.5% to GDP.**
        - Following **WAVES 2025**, the government launched a USD 1 billion fund to support creators with capital, skill development, and global access.
    - Social media supports startups, crowdfunding, and economic diversification, fueling the e-commerce boom.
        - For example, Patanjali and boAt gained global visibility through strategic marketing.
    - It also promotes digital payments and the **formalization of the economy,** as seen with **WhatsApp Pay simplifying transactions.**

How is Social Media Regulated in India?

- **Laws Governing Social Media in India:**
    - **Information Technology Act, 2000:** It is the principal law for **electronic governance** and communication, including **social media.**
        - **Section 79(1)** grants **intermediaries** (like social media platforms) **liability exemption** for third-party content, provided they only offer access and don't control or alter the content.
    - **Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021:** It requires **social media platforms** to ensure **online safety** by **removing inappropriate content** and **educating users** on **privacy, copyright, defamation,** and **national security.**
        - The **2023 Amendment** requires **online intermediaries** like **Facebook** to remove false content about the Indian government, but the **Supreme Court** recently paused its implementation.
- **Judicial Stand:**
    - **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015): Section 66A** of the **Information Technology Act, 2000** was struck down by the **Supreme Court** for being vague, upholding **freedom of expression** on social media and ruling that **criticism**, **satire**, or **dissent** can't be criminalized for hurting feelings unless it falls under the reasonable restrictions listed in Article 19(2)
    - **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017):** It declared **privacy** a fundamental right under **Article 21** of the Constitution, influencing the push for **data protection laws** like the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act)**, and **WhatsApp privacy** and **Aadhaar norms.**

What Concerns are Associated with Social Media?

- **Mental Health Deterioration:** Mental health risks from social media include **anxiety, depression, and loneliness**, fueled by the pressure for constant validation, **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)**, and comparisons to idealized lives.
    - The **performance culture** suppresses **real emotions,** making it harder for young people to express vulnerability and seek help.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Social media **distorts identity,** especially among youth, by encouraging **curated self-presentation for public approval**.
    - Instead of developing an **authentic sense of self in private,** young users often shape their identities around what gains likes and followers. This constant need for validation blurs the line between **who they truly are and who they present themselves to be,** leading to confusion, anxiety, and emotional distress.
    - This, coupled with **filter bubbles**, leads to users being exposed to more extreme views, **reinforcing negative behaviors and limiting diverse perspectives.**

- **Filter bubbles** occur when algorithms show content based on a **user's preferences,** limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and **reinforcing existing beliefs.**
- **Parental Disconnect:** Most adults lack the tools or awareness to understand the **digital ecosystem** their children navigate.
  - Teens create **fake Instagram accounts** to hide their activity from parents, and which can make them **more secretive and disconnected.**
- **Child Exploitation:** Children **(child influencers)** are being used by adults to generate **content and income**, exposing them to **external validation, adult scrutiny, performance pressure**, and identity confusion before they reach **emotional maturity**.
- **Cyberbullying or Trolling:** [Cyberbullying](#) and exploitation involve **anonymous harassment, hate comments, [deepfake](#) abuse**, and child grooming, where predators target young influencers.
- **Ethical Concerns: Social media is addictive, using features like endless scrolling and notifications, with business models focused on engagement rather than user well-being.**
  - Many social media users **unknowingly consent to data collection**, often unaware of how their **information is use**d, leading to concerns over privacy **violations, data breaches,** and unauthorized sharing for advertising purposes.
  - Influencer marketing often misleads users, especially youth, as some influencers promote non-legit products like **online betting and fantasy gaming apps** without clearly disclosing paid partnerships.
    - This can lead to financial losses, burdening poor and middle-income families.

What Measures can Address the Challenges of Social Media for Young People?

- **Social Media Policy for Youth Protection:** Social media platforms must **modify recommendation algorithms** to prioritize **educational, skill-based, and positive content** for users under 18.
  - **Prohibit behavioral profiling** of minors for targeted ads (e.g., Meta's restriction on ad targeting for under-18 users).
  - Additionally, users should be granted the **ability to modify the algorithmic content** they receive, enabling them to **customize their social media** experience for **privacy and personal preferences.**
- **Enforce Ethical Design Standards:** Platforms should be prohibited from amplifying harmful content, such as **sexual, violent, or adult material**, including gambling, abusive, or exploitative content, and instead prioritize **ethical human learning**.
- **Digital Literacy:** [National Digital Literacy Program](#) should integrate **cyber safety course**s in school curricula (NEP 2020 alignment).
  - Train teachers and parents on identifying **online risks**
- **Strengthen Governance & Accountability:** The [DPDP Act, 2023](#) should be enforced to penalize platforms misusing children's data, with **third-party audits** to review compliance with youth safety norms.
  - Additionally, **faster resolution mechanisms** should be established for handling cyberbullying and harassment complaints.
- **Empower Parents & Society:** Promote parental control tools like **Google Family Link and Apple Screen Time**, and collaborate with NGOs and schools to raise awareness about **healthy social media use.**
  - Social media platforms can also introduce features like **Teen Accounts**, designed to **enhance safety** and provide a more **age-appropriate experience** for **users under 16**.
  - Additionally, **revive sports, arts, and outdoor activities** in schools to encourage offline engagement.
- **Promoting Mental Health Awareness:** Social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, can implement tools such as **screen time reminders, content filters, and well-being resources,** while enhancing and campaigning initiatives like the [Kiran Helpline,](#) **and** the [MANAS Mobile App](#) to provide additional mental health support.

Conclusion

The growing influence of **social media** on **youth** demands urgent **regulation**, **digital literacy**, and **ethical platform design**. While it offers opportunities for **expression** and **innovation**, **unchecked use** harms **mental health** and **identity**. A **collaborative approach** involving **policy**, **education**, and **parental engagement** is vital to ensure **safe** and **meaningful digital experiences.**

> ***Drishti Mains Question:***
>
> **Q**. Social media is both a tool for empowerment and a threat to mental health. Examine

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question:

Mains

Q. What are social networking sites and what security implications do these sites present? (2013)

Q. Child cuddling is now being replaced by mobile phones. Discuss its impact on the socialization of children. (2023)

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