SOCIAL MEDIA EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN: CAUSES AND PREVENTION

Abstract

Social media's transformation of communication and identity in the digital age has had both positive and negative implications. This paper explores the dynamics of social media use across age groups, highlighting its significance and associated risks. It looks into the evolving landscape of social media, portraying its evolution from a basic information exchange tool to a powerful marketing platform. The term "social media" encompasses a diverse range of websites and platforms, including Outlook and Hotmail in its early days, and has evolved into more user-friendly forms with features like chat boxes, Pinterest, and dominant search engines like Google. Today it serves as a multifaceted tool for business and education while posing mental health challenges, especially for younger generations who are heavily reliant on it for cognitive development. As the saying goes, "There are two sides to a coin," and this applies to social media as well, which has both positive and negative aspects.

Keywords: Social media, younger generations, communication, Cognitive Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is a broad term encompassing websites and applications designed for communication, user-generated content, interaction, sharing, and collaboration. It is used for personal connections, business marketing, and customer feedback monitoring. The evolution of social media from a simple electronic information exchange tool to a virtual gathering place, and subsequently, a vital marketing tool in the 21st century, has been remarkable. (Dollarhide, 2023)

The term "social media" originally referred to platforms like Outlook and Hotmail, aiming to facilitate seamless communication among individuals. With innovations such as chat boxes, Pinterest, and the continued dominance of search engines like Google, it transitioned into more user-friendly and sophisticated forms.

1. **Background and Context of Social Media's Pervasive Influence:** Social media has a big impact on our lives today because of a bunch of reasons that have been shaping it for a while (Simms, 2022).. First, the internet got faster and technology got better, so it became easy for people to share stuff and connect online. Then, websites got more interactive, allowing regular people like you and me to make and share content, which changed how we use the internet. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube came along, giving us new ways to express ourselves and connect with others. Smartphones made it even easier to use social media wherever we are, so more and more people started using them. Social media has caused some problems too, like worries about our privacy, how it affects our mental health, the spread of fake news, censorship, and how it connects people around the world. So, it's a pretty complex and always-changing part of our modern world.

   Also, social media has made people worry about kids' safety online (Tuncay Dilci, 2019). There are several reasons for this concern. Social media companies collect a lot of information about users, even kids, and use it to show them ads or content that might not be suitable for them. There are also people on social media who pretend to be someone they're not to trick kids, which can be dangerous. Bullying can happen online too, and sometimes kids see things that they shouldn't. Social media can also be addictive, making kids spend too much time staring at screens. Plus, some social media challenges and trends can be risky for kids.

2. **The Transformation of Social Media from a Communication Tool to a Marketing Platform:** Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram started getting more and more users, making them appealing places for companies to reach lots of people. These sites also let people like, comment, share, and message each other, giving businesses a chance to connect directly with customers. Plus, social media platforms can use the information they have about users to show ads to specific groups of people, which is often more effective than old-fashioned ads. Other things like regular people making content, famous people helping with marketing, being able to buy things right from social media, and getting detailed data about how ads are doing have all made social media a big part of how companies promote themselves. This change means businesses can easily connect with customers, see how well their ads are working, and even sell things, all through social media.

3. **Significance of Examining the Impact of Social Media on Children:** First, kids are still growing and learning, so what they experience online can have a big impact on how they develop (Tuncay Dilci, 2019). Second, it's crucial to teach kids how to use the internet safely and wisely. Third, social media can influence kids' mental health, and we need to know how to support them. Fourth, there are online dangers like bullying and inappropriate content that we need to protect kids from. Fifth, kids' privacy and online security are at risk, and we must find ways to keep them safe. Lastly, knowing how social media affects kids helps parents, teachers, and policymakers make informed decisions about their digital lives. In the end, it's all about making sure kids grow up to be responsible and safe in the digital world.

II. HOW DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Research by the Pew Research Centre has unveiled distinct patterns in social media usage among different age groups

1. **Age Group 65 and Above**

   - In 2011, only 12% of this age group had social media accounts, but by 2018, this number had risen to 37%, largely driven by Facebook.
   - Adoption is limited, as they prefer platforms like Facebook or email for connecting with family.
   - Their primary use of social media is for consuming news and information.

2. **Age Group 50-64**

   - Approximately 65% of individuals in this age range have Facebook profiles, and there's notable usage of LinkedIn and Instagram, especially among senior professionals.
   - They focus on maintaining family connections and sharing updates.
   - Some actively participate in online communities and groups related to their interests or local events.

3. **Age Group 30-49**

   - Social media serves as a news source for 40% of this demographic, with a significant preference for Facebook.
   - They predominantly use Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter for both personal and professional purposes.
   - They often turn to social media to stay informed about current events.
   - Content creation is less common; they tend to observe others' activities.

4. **Age Group 18-24**

   - Younger people lean towards image-centric platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, reducing their reliance on Facebook and Twitter.
   - They actively use various platforms for personal and professional networking and engage in diverse content sharing.

- Social media plays a crucial role in job searches, networking, and career development.
- Some also utilize it for family connections and parenting-related activities.

5. Age Group Below 18

- Teenagers prefer platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, known for their visually engaging and interactive content.
- They are prolific content creators, frequently sharing videos, stories, and short-form content.
- Active participation in viral challenges and trends is common, contributing to the rapid spread of content.
- Messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Snapchat are their primary channels for private communication.

III. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHILDREN

The impact of social media on children's mental health is closely tied to their usage habits. Healthy use can foster social support, resource access, and a sense of belonging. Conversely, unhealthy online behavior can lead to anxiety, depression, or hyperactivity. The advantages encompass improved communication skills, enhanced social connections, and technical proficiency. However, drawbacks include cyberbullying, phone addiction, and disrupted sleep patterns (Procentese et al., 2019).

1. **The Advantages of Social Media Usage:** It allows individuals to stay connected with people from all corners of the globe, whether they are friends or family, and it offers the convenience of instant communication. Additionally, it serves as a rich source of information, enabling users to stay updated on current events, acquire new knowledge, and access online educational resources. In the professional arena, social media plays a pivotal role in networking and career advancement, providing opportunities for personal branding and entrepreneurship. It also fosters creativity by providing a platform for individuals to share their artistic endeavors, be it art, music, or writing. Moreover, it offers a sense of community and support through various online groups, and businesses leverage it for marketing and customer engagement (Simms, 2022).

   - **Strengthening Social Connections:** It helps us stay in touch with friends and family, no matter where they are. We can send messages and have video chats in real time, even if we're far apart. Sharing personal stuff like photos and videos lets us get a glimpse into each other's lives and feel closer. Group features and online communities make it easy to engage with lots of people who share our interests. Plus, social media can help us reconnect with old friends and make new ones.

   - **Enhancing Communication Skills:** Through written communication in various forms such as posts, comments, and messages, individuals can refine their ability to express their thoughts clearly and succinctly. Engaging in discussions and reading comments facilitates active listening, leading to a better grasp of diverse viewpoints and heightened attentiveness. Interacting with people from different backgrounds broadens one's perspective, fostering empathy and greater understanding. Handling disagreements online provides valuable lessons in conflict resolution, emphasizing the

importance of maintaining composure and approaching conflicts constructively. Effectively conveying emotions, whether through emojis, GIFs, or words, enhances emotional intelligence. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram Live offer opportunities to create and deliver presentations, honing public speaking skills. Crafting and sharing visually appealing content sharpens the capacity to convey messages through images and videos. Engaging with individuals from diverse cultures heightens cultural awareness and proficiency in cross-cultural communication. Establishing connections with peers and professionals on platforms like LinkedIn nurtures valuable relationships for personal and career development. Practicing good online etiquette can spill over into improved manners in face-to-face interactions, encouraging courteous and respectful engagement.

- **Fostering Technical Proficiency:** Social media platforms offer valuable opportunities for individuals to network with professionals and experts in various technical fields, enabling them to gain insights and establish meaningful connections. These platforms host specialized online communities and forums tailored to specific technical interests, fostering collaborative learning and the exchange of knowledge. Moreover, social media supports professional development by providing access to technical courses and webinars, allowing individuals to acquire new skills and stay updated within their respective industries. Collaborative efforts, problem-solving experiences, and exposure to cutting-edge trends are additional benefits, as are the opportunities to showcase one's work, access educational materials, receive constructive feedback, and cultivate a professional online presence.

- **Opportunities for Volunteering and Community Engagement:** Social media offers various ways for individuals to volunteer and engage with their communities. They can create fundraising campaigns on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, raise awareness about social issues, and participate in virtual volunteering. Online communities and groups dedicated to causes thrive on social media, making it easier to organize volunteer events and share resources. Supporting nonprofits, advocating through petitions, and offering mentorship are additional options. In times of crisis, social media helps coordinate relief efforts and connects volunteers with those in need. It also supports environmental initiatives, community development, skills sharing, and empowerment.

2. **The Drawbacks of Social Media:** Social media use can contribute to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression in children. Children who engage in extensive social media use are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health challenges, and they may be more susceptible to peer pressure. Some of the significant drawbacks of social media use include (Simms, 2022)

- **Cyberbullying:** Extensive online activity can expose children and adolescents to cyberbullying, a pervasive form of bullying that can lead to anxiety, depression, behavioral issues, low self-esteem, and even thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

- **Phone Addiction:** Many teenagers report feeling addicted to their smartphones, and they believe that their lives, including their dietary habits, sleep patterns, exercise routines, and academic performance, are negatively affected by their relationship with technology.

- **Increased Anxiety and Depression:** Extended screen time, particularly for teens who spend over three hours a day on social media, can lead to heightened levels of anxiety and depression. This can result in the tendency to internalize problems.

- **Disrupted Sleep:** Children who experience poor sleep are more likely to encounter mental health issues such as depression, impulsive behavior, anxiety, and lower scores on cognitive assessments.

- **Indications That Social Media Is Impacting a Child's Mental Health**

  ➤ Spending more time online than with friends, potentially leading to detachment from real-world activities and a reduced development of social skills.
  ➤ A decline in interest in previous passions and hobbies as they become increasingly absorbed in social media.
  ➤ Sleep disturbances, including tiredness, lethargy, or mood swings, which may result from excessive screen time and disrupted sleep patterns.

IV. REPORTS ON EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

1. **Report #1:** Using social media data for assessing children's exposure to violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Babvey et al., 2021)

   - **Increased Violence Concerns during the Pandemic:** This study investigates the potential surge in violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Factors contributing to this concern include heightened stress among caregivers, economic uncertainty, job disruptions, social isolation, and increased online presence among children. The study analyzes social media platforms like Reddit and Twitter to examine violence-related trends during the pandemic.

   - **Analysis of Social Media Platforms for Violence Trends:** This report highlights that the COVID-19 crisis and the measures taken by countries, like lockdowns and social distancing, led to worries about an increase in violence against children. Factors contributing to this concern included increased stress among caregivers, economic uncertainty, job disruptions, social isolation, and children spending more time online. The report analyzed social media platforms, particularly Reddit and Twitter, to study trends related to violence during the pandemic.

   - **Implications and Proactive Measures:** The study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated challenges may have increased violence against children, both physically and online. This highlights the need for proactive measures to safeguard children's well-being during crises and in evolving technological landscapes. The pandemic has revealed various risks children face during such times. As societies adapt to a "new normal" with technology, remote work, and online learning, governments and stakeholders must implement protective measures against child violence in anticipation of future threats.

2. **Report #2:** The model of countermeasures criminal offenses commercial sexual exploitation of children (Nyoman Ngurah Suwarnatha, 2016)

- **Types of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children:** This report centers on the commercial sexual exploitation of children through social media platforms, emphasizing how it violates children's rights by treating them as objects for both sexual and financial purposes. It identifies several forms of this exploitation, including child prostitution (exchanging sex for goods or services), child pornography (depicting sexual activities or explicit body parts of children), trafficking (placing children in abusive situations, like prostitution, through force), child sex tourism (traveling to exploit children sexually), and child marriage (marrying children, often for financial gain).

- **Legal Framework and Recommendations:** The report emphasizes the need for comprehensive legal measures to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children, focusing on penalizing offenders and the psychological recovery of victims. It also provided with the Legal Framework that could help us fight with this exploitation of our children:

  Victim-Centered Approach

  ➢ The legal framework should not solely concentrate on penalizing offenders but should also prioritize the psychological recovery of victims. Current laws are perceived as insufficient in addressing the mental well-being of victims.
  ➢ Regulations are needed that emphasize psychological support for victims and delineate responsibilities for their recovery.

- **Significance of Sexual Education:** It underscores the importance of sexual education in raising awareness and preventing such exploitation. This report talks about the significance of sexual education, particularly for children, to raise awareness about reproductive health and the risks associated with sexual encounters. Secondary school education should support the inclusion of a sexual education curriculum that provides early knowledge about reproductive health.

3. **Report # 3:** Social Media and Suicide: A Public Health Perspective (Luxton et al., 2012)

- **Availability of Online Suicide-Related Content:** This report examines the prevalence of online content related to suicide methods and highlights how easily individuals can access pro-suicide information, including detailed descriptions of methods. The report discusses the impact of such content on the suicidal tendencies of children and adolescents. In one study by Biddle et al., they conducted a systematic web search using various suicide-related terms, finding that around half of the websites in their search results either promoted or provided factual information about suicide. Pro-suicide websites and chat rooms discussing suicide were commonly found among the top results. It's important to note that this study mainly focused on pro-suicide search terms, potentially missing many suicide prevention and support resources. Another study by Recupero et al. explored suicide-related websites found through internet search engines, revealing that a significant portion of these websites had neutral or pro-suicide content. Together, these studies demonstrate the ease of accessing pro-suicide information online, including detailed methods.

- **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment's Role:** Cyberbullying and cyber harassment are major concerns, with data showing high rates of both victims and offenders. These problems can result in anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem among children. Data from surveys conducted between 2004 and 2010 revealed that lifetime rates of cyberbullying victimization ranged from 20.8% to 40.6%, with offending rates ranging from 11.5% to 20.1%.

V. NATIONAL CRIME RECORD BUREAU REPORT

1. **Overview of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):** The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) was established in 1986 to serve as a central repository for crime-related information and data. It was created based on the recommendations of the Tandon Committee to the National Police Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs' Taskforce. Over the years, the NCRB has taken on significant responsibilities, including the implementation of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) project, which connects thousands of police stations and higher offices across India. In 2017, they introduced the National Digital Police Portal, allowing searches for criminals and suspects in the CCTNS database. The NCRB also manages the National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO) and oversees the Online Cyber-Crime Reporting Portal.

2. **Key findings from the NCRB report in 2021:** The recent NCRB report offers statistics on various crimes across states and under multiple laws. Here are the key findings:

   - **Crimes against Children**

     ➢ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) accounted for 36.05% of the 1,49,404 cases of crimes against children registered in 2021.
     ➢ Cases under POCSO have consistently increased, with a rate of 12.1 per 1 lakh children in 2021, compared to 10.6 in 2020 and 2019.
     ➢ Sikkim had the highest rate of sexual offenses against children, followed by Kerala, Meghalaya, Haryana, and Mizoram.
     ➢ Uttar Pradesh (UP) recorded the highest number of POCSO cases in 2021, followed by Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.
     ➢ Delhi had the highest rate of crimes against children among union territories in 2021.

   - **Child Labour Act**

     ➢ In 2021, 982 cases were registered under the Child Labour Act, with the highest number in Telangana, followed by Assam.

   - **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act**

     ➢ The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act saw 1,062 cases registered in 2021, with the top three states being Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Assam.

- **Overall**

    ➢ Kidnapping and abduction accounted for 45% of crimes against children in 2021, followed by POCSO cases.
    ➢ There was a 16.2% increase in cases of crimes against children in 2021 compared to the previous year.

- **Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act**

    ➢ Punjab had the highest crime rate (per lakh population) for cases lodged under the NDPS Act in 2021, with Himachal Pradesh ranking second.
    ➢ The lowest crime rates under the NDPS Act were reported in UT Dadar, Nagar Haveli, Daman, and Diu, followed by Gujarat and Bihar.

3. **Overall Statistics and Trends:** In all 28 Indian states, NBRC reported that 32.6% of total crimes were against children under 18, and 67.2% resulted in charges being filed. Looking at individual states, Sikkim had the highest at 72.4%, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 66.7% and Haryana at 62.5%. On the other hand, some states reported the lowest crime rates, with Mizoram at 6.2% and Jharkhand at 13.5%. Among the union territories, Delhi had the highest reported crime rate at 128.5%, followed by A &N Islands at 110.4%. The higher crime rates in these territories can be attributed to extensive migration and tourism.

    The total IPC crimes against children under 18 numbered 89,360 in the 28 states, accounting for 19.5% of the total, and 7,022 in the union territories, making up 54.5%. The highest IPC crimes reported against children included:

- **Rape (Sec 376 IPC):** Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh reported rates of 4.1%, 9.2%, 12.3%, 10%, 2.1%, 0.1%, 5.2%, and 0.3%, respectively. In the union territory, Chandigarh had a rate of 14.2%.

- **Procuration of Minor Girls (Sec 366A IPC):** States like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Jharkhand, and Tripura reported the highest number of crimes with rates of 0.5%, 7.1%, 10.9%, 2.2%, and 2%, respectively.

- **Kidnapping and Abduction of Minor Girls to compel her for marriage (Sec.366 IPC):** States like Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh reported rates of 3.8%, 6.1%, 2.3%, 9.1%, 4.4%, 15.6%, and 4.1%, respectively.

- **Kidnapping and Abduction (Sec.363 IPC):** Under two categories, A) Missing Children Deemed as Kidnapped and B) Other Kidnapping and Abduction, almost all states reported a higher ratio of crimes. The highest reported crime rates were in Chhattisgarh with 12.4% and 13.2%, Maharashtra with 14.6% and 10.9%, Odisha with 34.3% and 1.3%, and West Bengal with 4.9% and 8.5%. Among the union territories, only Delhi had rates of 45.6% and 45.5%, and Chandigarh had rates of 38.3% and 2.5%.

- **Simple Hurt (Sec.323 r/w 324,332,353, 327,328,330 IPC) and Grievous Hurt (Sec.325, 326, 326A, 326B, 329, 331, 333, 335 IPC):** The states with the highest crime rates were Bihar with 1.2% and 0.1%, Madhya Pradesh with 5.1% and 0.4%, Chhattisgarh with 3.8% and 0.1%, and Goa with 3.7%.

  Various factors contribute to a higher rate of crimes against children under 18 in different regions. These include socio-economic conditions, lack of awareness about child protection, population density in urban areas, cultural norms, law enforcement effectiveness, migration, economic disparities, educational opportunities, and social service availability. Addressing these complex factors requires region-specific strategies to protect children effectively.

VI. CAUSES AND PREVENTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

1. **Causes of Social Media Exploitation:** The increase in social media crimes against children can be attributed to several underlying factors (Nyoman Ngurah Suwarnatha, 2016)

   - **Widespread Internet Access:** The growing availability of the Internet means that more children are using social media platforms, creating a larger pool of potential targets for offenders.

   - **Anonymity:** Online perpetrators can conceal their true identities, making it easier to approach and manipulate children without the fear of being identified.

   - **Limited Awareness:** Children may not possess a comprehensive understanding of the risks linked to sharing personal information and communicating with strangers online. They tend to be more trusting and less cautious than adults.

   - **Grooming Tactics:** Offenders often employ grooming techniques, where they establish trust with children gradually before exploiting them. Social media platforms offer a convenient environment for this process.

   - **Privacy Settings Challenges:** Children might not always utilize or comprehend privacy settings on social media platforms, inadvertently revealing personal information to a wider audience than intended.

   - **Peer Influence:** Children can face pressure from their peers to engage in risky online behaviors or share inappropriate content.

   - **Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying on social media is another form of wrongdoing against children. It can result in significant emotional distress and harm to young individuals.

   - **Lax Regulation:** Certain social media platforms may have inadequate measures in place for identifying and preventing child exploitation and abuse.

- **Parental Supervision Gaps:** Insufficient parental supervision or awareness of their children's online activities can heighten the risk.

- **Digital Literacy Disparities:** Children may lack the digital literacy skills needed to recognize and respond to potentially harmful online situations.

2. **Prevention Strategies**

- **Legal Frameworks (e.g., POCSO Act):** Our Indian law also provides certain provisions, the information regarding various acts related to the protection and welfare of children in India (*National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report*, 2022)

  ➢ **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**
  - This is a specialized legislation aimed at safeguarding children from sexual abuse and exploitation.
  - Its primary objective is to protect children against sexual assault, harassment, and pornography while incorporating child-friendly procedures for reporting, evidence collection, investigation, and expeditious trial of offenses through designated special courts.

  ➢ **Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act, 2015**
  - This act empowers authorities to ensure the best interests of India's children.
  - To fulfill this purpose, entities such as Child Protection Committees, Child Protection Units, and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) have been established and are operational at the district level.

  ➢ **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986**
  - This legislation prohibits children under the age of 14 from engaging in work in hazardous industries and processes.

  ➢ **The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (CALPRA)**
  - CALPRA states that children should not work for more than five hours per day and must have regular rest breaks.
  - It also mandates that at least 20% of a child's earnings from work be deposited in a fixed deposit account in a nationalized bank under their name, which they can access upon reaching adulthood.

  ➢ **Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929**
  - This act seeks to restrict the practice of child marriages.

  ➢ **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**
  - Enacted to address the limitations of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, this legislation focuses on preventing child marriages.

  ➢ **Special Marriage Act, 1954, and Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**
  - These acts specify that the minimum age for marriage is 18 years for women and 21 years for men.

➢ **The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), 1985**
- The primary goal of the NDPS Act is to regulate the manufacturing, possession, sale, and transportation of narcotics and psychotropic substances.
- It encompasses provisions related to the cultivation of specific plants like cannabis, poppy, and coca, as well as the production of psychotropic substances associated with these plants. The act also prohibits the sale of approximately 200 psychotropic substances to the general public.

- **Role of Parents in Education and Awareness:** Parents play a crucial role in safeguarding their children from the potential ill effects of social media. Here are several key roles and responsibilities they should fulfil (Procentese et al., 2019)

  ➢ **Education and Awareness**
  - Parents should educate themselves about various social media platforms, their features, and potential risks.
  - They should also raise awareness among their children about the potential dangers of social media, including cyberbullying, online predators, and exposure to inappropriate content.

  ➢ **Setting Age-Appropriate Boundaries**
  - Parents should adhere to age restrictions set by social media platforms and only allow their children to use platforms that are appropriate for their age.
  - They should guide their children on when and for how long they can use social media, ensuring it doesn't interfere with schoolwork, sleep, or physical activities.

  ➢ **Privacy Settings**
  - Parents should assist their children in configuring privacy settings on their social media accounts to limit who can view their content and interact with them.
  - They should teach their children to be cautious about sharing personal information online.

  ➢ **Open Communication**
  - Establishing open and non-judgmental communication with children is essential. Parents should encourage their children to share their online experiences and concerns.
  - If a child encounters a problem or feels uncomfortable online, they should feel safe discussing it with their parents.

  ➢ **Modeling Positive Behavior**
  - Parents should set an example by displaying responsible and respectful online behavior. Children often learn from observing their parents.
  - Avoiding negative online behavior, such as cyberbullying or excessive screen time, is crucial.

  ➢ **Monitoring and Supervision**
  - Depending on the child's age and maturity, parents may need to monitor their social media activity. This can involve periodically checking their accounts or using parental control software.

- However, parents should balance monitoring with respecting their child's privacy and trust.

  ➢ **Addressing Cyberbullying and Online Harassment**
- If a child experiences cyberbullying or online harassment, parents should take it seriously. Support the child emotionally, and take appropriate actions, including reporting incidents to the platform and, if necessary, involving school authorities or law enforcement.

VII. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Encountering suicide-related content on the internet is a complex issue. It can be found on various websites, depending on their rules and enforcement. Such content can harm those with mental health issues, potentially normalizing self-harm or suicide (Popoola et al., 2020).

While some countries have laws against harmful online content, enforcing them globally is tough. Some websites have rules against suicide-related content and offer reporting and support. Content moderation is crucial but not foolproof.

Efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of such content and provide mental health support are ongoing. This problem evolves, and experts, policymakers, and tech companies collaborate to balance free speech and protecting vulnerable individuals.

1. **Social Media Platforms' Role in Suicide Prevention:** Social media platforms play a dual role in suicide prevention. They provide helpful tools such as crisis helpline information, content reporting systems, and mental health education. These platforms also utilize technology to identify posts suggesting self-harm or suicidal thoughts, aiming to offer timely assistance. However, there are downsides, including the risk of exposing vulnerable users to harmful content, privacy issues linked to content monitoring, and the possibility of errors in automated content flagging due to limited resources (Smith et al., 2021).

- **Crisis Help:** Some social media sites have information about crisis helplines. If you look up or post something about self-harm or suicide, they might show you where to get help right away.

- **Reporting Problems:** You can usually tell the platform if you see content that seems like someone might be thinking about hurting themselves. The platform can then try to help that person by reaching out or giving them resources.

- **Using Technology:** Some platforms use computer programs to find posts that might be about self-harm or suicide. They can flag these posts for a human to check and, if needed, offer help.

- **Rule:** Social media sites usually have rules against sharing harmful or dangerous stuff, including things about self-harm or suicide. They try to stop this kind of content from spreading and make the online world safer.

- **Awareness about Mental Health:** Some platforms work with mental health groups to teach people about mental health and how to help others who might be struggling.

2. **The Evolving Role of End-Users in Surveillance and Prevention:** The evolving role of regular individuals in surveillance and prevention is a significant aspect of our modern society. People actively contribute in various ways, such as sharing health data through devices, reporting emergencies on social media, and participating in community policing. They also play a vital role in cybersecurity by adopting safer online practices and reporting harmful content on social platforms. Privacy protection and disaster preparedness are priorities, as well as proactive engagement in personal health and environmental monitoring. Additionally, individuals use social media for advocacy and raising awareness about societal issues. This evolving role showcases the growing influence of technology in empowering people, but it also raises concerns about data privacy and security. Balancing these benefits with ethical and legal safeguards remains a challenge (Swedo et al., 2021).

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Need for a Comprehensive and Collaborative Approach:** Addressing social media exploitation and its prevention for children requires a collaborative approach. Social media itself isn't inherently harmful, but risks come from misuse and a lack of child-specific safeguards. Parents should educate and set guidelines, institutions should teach digital literacy, and platforms must enhance safety features. Governments should enforce laws for child protection, and open communication with mental health support is vital. Together, we can create a safer digital space for children to enjoy social media while minimizing exploitation risks.

2. **The Role of Parents, Educational Institutions, Organizations, Social Media Platforms, and Governments**

- **Parents can Provide**

  - **Education and Guidance:** Parents should learn about both the positive and negative aspects of social media and pass on this knowledge to their children, teaching responsible online behavior, privacy protection, and potential risks.
  - **Supervision and Support:** Parents should supervise their children's online activities, set boundaries, and have open conversations about their online experiences, providing mentorship and guidance.

- **Educational Institutions can Provide**

  - **Digital Literacy:** Schools should include digital literacy education in their curriculum, teaching online safety, privacy, and responsible internet use.
  - **Online Security:** Educational institutions must ensure a safe online environment with content filters and monitoring systems.
  - **Incident Reporting:** Schools should establish mechanisms for students to report online exploitation or cyberbullying incidents.

- **Organizations can Provide**

  - **Employee Training:** Organizations should train employees in cybersecurity, data protection, and recognizing/reporting online threats or exploitation.
  - **Cybersecurity Measures:** Implement strong cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data.
  - **Support Services:** Offer counselling and support to employees who may experience online exploitation.

- **Social Media Platforms can Provide**

  - **Content Moderation:** Social media platforms should invest in effective content moderation to promptly remove exploitative content.
  - **Reporting Tools:** Implement user-friendly reporting tools for inappropriate content.
  - **Age Verification:** Enforce age verification measures for age-appropriate content access.
  - **Privacy Controls:** Provide robust privacy controls for users.

- **Governments can Provide**

  - **Regulation:** Governments can create and enforce laws and regulations addressing online exploitation, cyberbullying, and data privacy.
  - **Collaboration:** Collaborate with social media platforms to develop content moderation and data protection guidelines.
  - **Public Awareness:** Launch campaigns to educate citizens about online risks and encourage responsible online behavior.
  - **Law Enforcement Support:** Provide resources and training to law enforcement agencies for effective investigation and prosecution of online exploitation cases.

3. **Creating a Safer Digital Environment for Children while Preserving Social Media Benefits:** Balancing child safety and the benefits of social media is crucial. Strategies include guiding kids to age-appropriate platforms, teaching effective privacy settings, using parental controls, and fostering open communication. Digital literacy, responsible online behavior, and etiquette are key. Promoting a balanced offline life is vital, along with staying informed about online safety resources and regularly reinforcing best practices to ensure children enjoy social media safely.

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