

Education, young people and social media: a policy paper for the G20

Executive Summary

It is clear that social media offers a number of benefits to young people, directly as regards education and also as part of growing up in the 21st century. However, there are a number of potential harms to young people including risks of negative feelings of body image, of bullying, of declining mental health, and of the possibility of being targeted for radicalisation or violent extremism. Governments clearly have a duty both to protect young people as regards social media, but also to provide a stable regulatory environment for technology companies to operate in, particularly as regards companies which span multiple territories. Lax regulation can lead to harms for young people. But overly prescriptive regulation can lead to perverse and unintended consequences, as well as restricting access to the benefits of social media as a result of overly drastic restrictions on its use. The G20 represent the base of many of the world's largest technology companies, as well as very high levels of young people with internet access, and some of the most developed systems of voluntary regulation in a number of fields. Therefore, the role of social media and technology in the mental health of young people should be at the forefront of the G20 agenda.

This policy paper recommends the following to be considered by the G20 Education Ministers:

Proposed Recommendations

- **A voluntary compact between technology and social media companies and the G20.** The G20 should take forward the concept of a social media code of conduct and lead work to create a G20-wide voluntary compact. This should set out how, in exchange for a commitment from the G20 not to unduly regulate the scope and beneficial activities of social media companies, such companies pledge a set of world-leading best practice standards in the areas of: promoting good mental health; preventing bullying and keeping young people safe online; and protecting young people against the risks of radicalisation and violent extremism.
- **The G20 should encourage national governments to include digital literacy as a major part of the schooling curriculum.** Schools should not only provide guidance for parents but also improve students' and teachers' knowledge in this regard. Technology can provide many benefits to the learning experiences of children and using this innovation to enhance the educational journey of young people should be balanced against the need to protect them.
- **The G20 and national governments should promote the collection and availability of timely, reliable and accurate data.** Improved data and improved access to data that can help in safeguarding children in their online interactions is needed. This also includes improving linkages across different data sets such as health, education and social careⁱ.
- **The digital industry should build safety features into all products** which are designed for children and young people as part of the design process. Additionally, it should react more quickly to abuse by removing the accounts of perpetrators and reporting the abuse. It should remove inappropriate content rapidlyⁱⁱ.

Background

Technology, and in particular social media, has permeated through every aspect of people's lives. This is especially true of the youth of today who are digital natives but who are also undergoing a period of intense change not only physically but also emotionally and intellectually. The lines between different types of media and the definitions of different types of digital technology are not always precise and distinctive. However, any website that allows social interaction can be considered a social media site and will be so for the purposes of this paperⁱⁱⁱ.

Digital technology is a powerful tool. The World Bank's Digital Dividends report (2016) recognises this influence at the more macro level given social media's ability to catalyse citizen voice and collective action to hold governments accountable. There is also the recognition that the internet promotes transparency and its low-cost nature enables citizens to generate their own user-generated content that is easily available to others. Social media can also generate peer pressure and affect the behaviour and actions of others. Digital platforms also allow for low-cost mechanisms of information transfer between citizens and policy makers, thereby creating feedback loops which can prove invaluable.

A vast majority of young people (aged 16-24 years) globally use the internet for social networking both within and outside the school environment. With social media activity described as more addictive than smoking and drinking^{iv}, research increasingly finding links between social media and mental health issues and the often un-regulated nature of online material that young people have access to, this evidence paper is not only critical but also timely^v. When leveraged correctly, technology has the potential to present vast benefits such as the ability to connect people, promote a sense of community, encourage the exchange of information and facilitate the provision of emotional support, and the provision of innovation, learning and creativity^{vi}. However, there has also been a deluge of research highlighting the potential risks and negative and potentially long-lasting consequences for young people of over-using or mis-using technology. The report states that the rates of anxiety and depression in young people in the UK have risen 75% in the past 25 years and social media use has been linked to these negative outcomes. Additionally, poor sleep (also linked with excessive use of technology) has also been highlighted as a key negative factor affecting young peoples' lives and outcomes in and out of school. Additionally, 7 in 10 young people have stated that they have been victims of cyberbullying^{vii}.

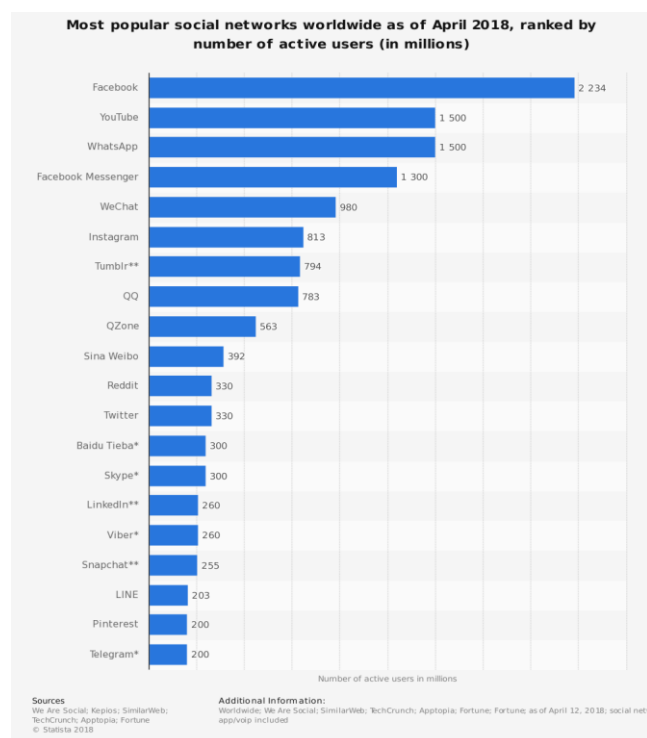
Social media is a relatively recent phenomenon that has changed how young people communicate with each other. The existing evidence on how these types of interactions affect mental health and emotional wellbeing, is not only unclear but also often conflicting. This evidence brief explores the existing research on the positive and negative impacts of technology use both within and outside of the school environment. Importantly, this paper aims to provide pointers on how this potentially powerful tool can be used for good and what governments, schools, social-media companies and parents should be doing to make sure that young people are not only well informed but also protected in relation to digital media usage. Frith (2017) also highlights the challenge faced by parents (who grew up without social media and who are often less technology-savvy than their digitally native children) in advising their children in how to effectively navigate the online world. Children and adolescents are even more susceptible to peer pressure and lack the capacity for self-regulation as they explore the digital world^{viii}.

Prevalence of social media and technology in and out of school

One defining phenomenon shaping the current world is the global accessibility to the internet and within this social media (including blogs, business networks, photo-sharing platforms, chat apps, social networks etc.) plays a fundamental role. Social media has grown rapidly with more than 3 billion people around the world using social media each month, 9 out of 10 of whom are accessing these platforms via mobile devices. The power of social networking is so extensive that by 2021 around a third of the earth's entire population (3 billion) will be using social media actively on a monthly basis. These numbers will be made of approximately 750 million users in China and a third of a billion in India^{ix}. The region with the highest penetration rate of social networks is North America where as of 2017, 81% of the population of the USA had a social networking profile. Africa not only has witnessed the fastest growth rate in internet users (20% year on year), but also has seen an immense growth in time spent online^x. Wasserman (2018) also recognises the fact that African youth are more active users of digital media than previous generations and cites the example of the South African student movement (2015) as an example of where a country's higher education landscape changed fundamentally through mobilisation of social media and dissemination of information about a cause through social media.

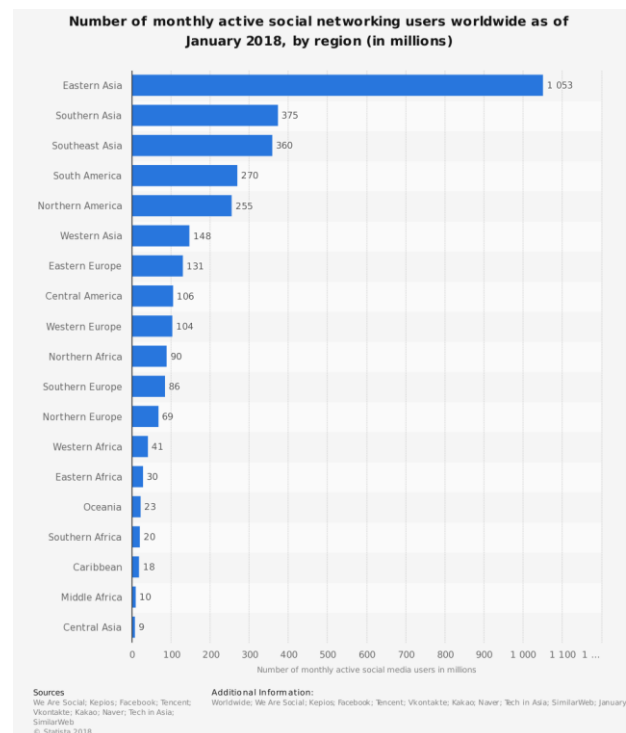
Figure 1 below illustrates the most popular social networks ranked by active users (in millions) and shows Facebook and YouTube and Whatsapp as the most popular platforms with 2234 million and 1500 million users respectively. Figure 2 depicts the regional penetration of social media with Eastern and Southern Asia emerging as two regions with the largest majority of active social networking users in the world (1053 million and 375 million respectively).

Figure 1: Most popular social networks by active users



Source: www.statista.com

Figure 2: Regional penetration of social networks by active users



Source: www.statista.com

Technology has also infiltrated the education sector worldwide. In 2015/2016, for the first time more state standardised tests were administered via technology than by paper and pencils in the US^{xi}. The rapid evolution of technology in schools means that how education is delivered has had to adapt from traditional means of instruction. In the UK, it is estimated that approximately £ 900 million is spent on education technology every year and that by 2020 the global ed-tech market will be worth a £129 billion. There is also evidence of increasing use of technology and social media amongst students in developing countries. For example, in a study of ICTs in Zambia, South Africa and Vietnam, it was found that 40% (62%) of children in rural (urban) Vietnam used the internet for educational purposes and 34% children sent school-related text messages in rural areas as compared to 57% in urban regions^{xii}.

Over the last decade, technology in the classroom has become more and more predominant. Tablets are more commonplace in the classroom and social media extensively used for learning purposes. Educators have embraced the importance of technology and recognise the impact that it can have on the learning process. Technology can improve the learning experience of children and youth whilst in school and can provide several benefits such as allowing students to learn at their own pace, receive individualised instruction, improve retention rates and connect with other students. Additionally, these technological skills will prove useful after students leave the education cycle and enter the world of work.

Whilst there has been a huge influx of new technology into classrooms, however evidence showing that technology and online learning have improved learning outcomes or that teachers have adapted their teaching styles to make use of these new technical tools remains limited. Concerns have also been expressed about unequal access to and use of technology increasing achievement gaps and digital distractions actually proving a negative influence on educational outcomes. However, evidence from the Kenyan context suggests that that using technologies in classrooms has the potential for narrowing education gaps in classrooms^{xiii}.

Additionally, concerns relating to the privacy and security of data have also been at the forefront of ed-tech discussions. However, overarching all of these issues is the recognition that new technologies can actually prove to be an incredibly useful tool to meet the ever-increasing demands that the growing and diverse student populations across the globe are placing on the education system. Going forward, schools and educators globally will need to take account of how technological progress will affect the changing role of teachers and schools and in particular whether a more personalised digital learning experience can not only improve overall student learning outcomes but also reduce disparities in their distribution.

Evidence on the benefits and risks associated with technology use on young peoples' social, educational and emotional outcomes is as yet inconclusive and mixed^{xiv}. These positive and negative relationships are discussed in the following two sections.

Main benefits of social media use in school and more widely

Social media can provide a range of benefits for young people both in and outside of the school environment. These include relationship creation and building, sharing information (particularly in relation to school-work and health), collaboration on educational and non-educational projects and community involvement.

Interpersonal relationships can be made, maintained and enhanced through social media platforms, allowing not only communication with those who would otherwise be in contact less frequently but even with those who are met on a daily basis^{xv}. These means of connecting with friends and family may help to address issues of social isolation and loneliness^{xvi} as well as potentially improving well-being based on these social interactions^{xvii}. Social media can be an effective platform for positive self-expression, allowing young people to develop an individual identity and put forward their best selves^{xviii}. It can also provide opportunities to share problems and to gain emotional support from friends and peers, particularly when face-to-face opportunities do not exist.

Collaborating on school projects can also be effectively used to enhance learning opportunities. Students can use social media platforms to exchange ideas and schools can also leverage learning opportunities by using technology as a relevant teaching tool^{xix}. Social media also presents extensive access to expert health-related information including hearing about other people's experiences and potentially helping making better health choices for oneself. Health campaigns can also use social media to spread information, however, measures must be in place to ensure information is credible and those giving advice can be trusted^{xx}. Mobile technologies in particular have been shown to be linked to multiple improvements in healthcare such as increased medication adherence, better disease understanding, fewer missed appointments and enhanced opportunities to learn and communicate about health issues^{xxi}. Social media can also be a powerful lens providing insights into psychological states, health and well being of individuals and populations by providing data on mental health issues longitudinally^{xxii}. Beyond this observation and insight, the aforementioned authors also state that social media provide a mechanism through which timely support can be extended to those who are vulnerable. Krausz (2017) highlights how the mental health care system has evolved due to communication tools such as social media and web-based health services and states that e-mental health will be an integrated component that can improve capacity, enhance the quality of care and improve access.

Social media also allows connections between those who share similar interests and/or backgrounds. Social media can enhance community involvement and community-building through the use groups such as those related to charity work, ethnic minority or disability support groups etc^{xxiii}.

Main risks and concerns associated with young peoples' mental health and social media use

Social media and technology use, particularly by young people, has faced a barrage of negative reporting not only in mainstream media and through anecdotal evidence but also through evidence-based research. The Five Rights Report (2018) highlights the impact online activity can have on young people's social, mental and physical development. In particular, the report indicates worsened personal anxiety, social aggression, denuded relationships, sleep deprivation and negative impact on education, health and well being of young people engaging with online activities. According to the NSPCC, in 2015/2016 more than 18,000 children aged 11-18 years were admitted to hospital for self-harm (a 14% rise from 2013/2014 reported statistics) in England and Wales. NSPCC also reported that there were 14 key sites, apps and games where children were particularly exposed to inappropriate content such as sex, violence, suicide, bullying, drugs etc. Facebook was reported as the top social media platform where young people had been exposed to violent material followed by YouTube. According to the MQ Annual Review (2017), less than 30% of mental health research is focused on young people despite the fact that 75% of mental illnesses start by age 18.

Given this exposure and these facts, young people remain particularly vulnerable to key risks associated with social media use. These include: young people sharing too much information about themselves and their lives online; being exposed to cyber-bullying; the influence of social media on self-esteem and in particular on body image; general well-being including impact on sleep and anxiety and fear of missing out (FOMO); sourcing harmful content and advice and the associated outcomes of these.

Risks associated with sharing too much information

A key concern relating to the improper use of technology pertains to a lack of privacy with young people sharing too much information or false information putting their privacy at risk. Researchers have described online disinhibition whereby people are more likely to not only share personal information but to also exhibit behaviour that they would not offline^{xxiv}. In particular, concerns have been raised about young people sharing too much information especially when intoxicated or sharing explicit images. Another key threat relates to young people's 'digital footprint' namely their collective on-going record of web activity which can affect their future reputation and therefore employment or life chances^{xxv}. Cyberstalking has also emerged as a new phenomenon with young people particularly vulnerable to being stalked as a consequence of sharing too much personal information with strangers^{xxvi}.

Cyber-bullying

Bullying, defined as repeated behaviour intending to cause emotional and/or physical hurt can take many forms including verbal abuse, physical assault and increasingly cyber-bullying. The last of these involves bullying through a mobile phone or online digital means. The rise in use of digital communications and social media may have become a vehicle for escalating instances of cyberbullying. However, research reports that traditional bullying is still

considerable more common (in England) than cyberbullying^{xxvii}. However, as children and young people increasingly access the internet and social media privately, often this type of bullying can escape the notice of parents and teachers^{xxviii}.

Victims of bullying are more likely to experience low academic performance, depression, self-harm, anxiety, changing eating and sleeping patterns, all of which can affect their personal, social and learning outcomes^{xxix}. Victims of bullying respond in different ways with younger children tending to talk to their parents and older ones more likely to talk to their friends. Scheleicher (2015) reported that those who reported being frequently bullied are more likely to end their education after secondary school, feel anxious during tests, are more unsatisfied with life and tended to feel like 'outsiders'. Parents also reported being most fearful of bullying in a study funded by MQ^{xxx}.

Whilst all social networking sites have anti-bullying policies in place, it has been found that many of these are inadequate, inconsistent and often inaccessible especially to young people (Children Commissioner for the UK Report 2017 and Safety Net Inquiry Report 2018). Young people themselves have highlighted that lengthy policies detailed in complex language mean that young people in particular do not even read these policies and, therefore, they do not afford the appropriate level of protection (Oral evidence: impact of social media and screen use on young people's health 2018). Additionally, young people experiencing bullying typically face the onus of reporting and acting on it^{xxxi}.

The instances discussed above highlight the need for young people to develop the digital skills to protect themselves such as by blocking users or updating their privacy settings (Glazzard 2018a). However, Shakya and Chritakis (2016) state that the negative associations of Facebook use were comparable to or greater in magnitude to the positive impact of online interactions which suggests a possible tradeoff between offline and online relationships.

Influence of social media on self-esteem and body image

The impact of the way in which physical appearance is portrayed in the media has been the focus of discussion for several decades however the advent of social media and subsequent explosion of images has brought this issue even more to the forefront of debate. Chalk (2017) notes that 46% of girls indicated that social media had a negative impact on their self-esteem. Girls also reported feeling worse if not connected to the internet^{xxxii}.

As highlighted by the #StatusofMind Report, the unrealistic expectations set by social media may leave young people with feelings of self-consciousness and low self-esteem. This pursuit of perfectionism can manifest as anxiety disorders^{xxxiii}. In particular, the advent of social media has brought the issue of body image to the forefront as approximately 10 million photographs are uploaded on Facebook alone globally every hour. This ongoing barrage of images can place endless pressure particularly on young people and can have serious and long-lasting repercussions on health, education, and wider life outcomes (A Body Confident Future 2017)^{xxxiv}. In particular, whilst women often are perceived to be more susceptible to body dissatisfaction, there is a danger that the distinctive challenges faced by other groups such as men, those faced with disabilities or serious illness or ethnic minorities might be overlooked (Ibid). A report by Fardouly et al. (2015), has found that participants who spent time on Facebook reported being in a more negative mood than those on the control website. Similarly, the growth of websites that normalise self-harm and eating disorders can promote unhealthy behaviour^{xxxv}.

General impact on well being

A PISA well-being report (2016) explored the relationship between internet use and various aspects of young people's well being. The report found that extreme internet users were less likely than moderate internet users to report a sense of belonging at school and were more likely to report feeling lonely at school. The study also found that extreme internet users were more likely to report bullying (other students spread nasty rumours of me, other students make fun of me etc.) than moderate internet users. The OECD also explored the overall relationship between excessive internet use and young people's well being and found, for example, in the UK, that extreme internet users had less life satisfaction than moderate internet users even accounting for socio-economic status. The report states that this might be a sign that young people use the internet as a coping mechanism when experiencing difficulties at school. However, it could equally be the case that excessive internet use is hindering these young people from forging stronger relationships offline.

Similarly, the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report (2013)^{xxxvi} in the UK found that internet use had potential negative effects including increased physiological arousal, decreased attention, hyper-activity, aggression, anti-social or fearful behaviour, social isolation and further technological addiction. This has resulted in new phenomenon such as life based on likes and 'Facebook Depression'^{xxxvii}. Another such phenomenon is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) which has been linked to higher levels of social media engagement with research suggesting that the more an individual uses social media, the more likely they are to experience FoMO which has been associated with lower mood and lower life satisfaction^{xxxviii}.

There are crucial links between mental health and sleep, the latter of which is particularly important for young people during this key time of development. Numerous studies have shown a link between increased use of social media and not only poor-quality sleep but also the time it takes to actually fall asleep. With lack of sleep being linked to many physical and mental health conditions (e.g. high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, depression), the consequences of high social media usage on sleep can be far-reaching. Further research in specific contexts has shown negative consequences of the influence of social networking sites on body image, self-esteem and eating disorders particularly for young women and especially when exposed to certain types of social media^{xxxix}. However, some evidence of the positive impact of social media has also been found. For example, Alloway (2018) finds that social media is primarily used as a tool for staying connected rather than self-promotion and sites such as Facebook by facilitating social connections may even encourage certain characteristics such as empathy.

Sourcing harmful content and violent extremism

Social media and the information available on the internet can be a powerful influence on the minds of young people in particular. This means that they can be the target of actions aimed

at changing their behaviour patterns and/or beliefs. For example, social media can be used by advertisers to influence purchasing behaviour or by individuals or organisations promoting a particular ideology, political and/or belief system. The internet provides opinion leaders, be they politicians, bloggers, activists etc. with the resources to shape public opinion^{xl}. The dark-side of technology can include instances of radicalisation, hate messages, fake news, mobilisation and support for terrorism as well as racist and misogynistic messages^{xli}. This means that digital media is reshaping political and social lives across the globe and amplifying

and shifting existing social, cultural, economic and political patterns (as discussed by messages Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017 in relation to Africa).

Alava et al. (2017) examine whether social media leads young vulnerable individuals to resort to violence. All over the world, decisions are being made on the basis of assumptions about the causes and remedies to violent attacks. Many believe the internet may be a cause and, therefore, have responded through online censorship, surveillance and counter-speech. Whilst there is a growing body of knowledge about how terrorists use cyberspace, what is less clear is the impact of this use and even more unclear is the extent to which countermeasures are effective. This research reviews 550 studies and concludes that the research in this area is still nascent and needs further investigation. The main conclusions of the research are that there is no definitive evidence on a direct link between the specificities of social media and violent radicalisation outcomes on youth. Similarly, there is no conclusive evidence on the impact on counter measures. What the literature does point to is that rather than being an initiator or cause of violent behaviour, social media may be a facilitator within the wider process of violent radicalisation. It may provide an appealing, interactive, user-friendly platform to attract younger audiences and to disseminate extreme violent and criminal content that may not be as easily circulated offline. According to this report, the use of social media by extremists is often sophisticated in terms of manipulation (propaganda, intimidation, recruitment and fund-raising). The speed, low-cost, anonymity, interactivity and global nature offers advantages to groups that may otherwise have remained marginal. With young people often specifically susceptible to and targeted by extremist groups, this report suggests taking into account and encouraging the participation of youth in decision-making processes and empowering them to lead digital projects in favour of peace, tolerance and mutual understanding^{xiii}. Additionally, the authors of this report make suggestions for civil society organisations, local communities, government and non-government actors, the private sector and internet users in general to combat issues relating to youth and violent extremism on social media.

Similarly, Waldman and Verger (2016) recognise the role social media plays in recruitment to violent extremism and suggests a set of recommendations for policy-makers to help develop and counter violent extremism activities. Wilner et al. (2017) discuss combatting violent extremism using Peer-to-Peer (P2P) programmes and social media campaigns. Using evidence from Canada, the authors discuss a publicly funded university-based platform to counter terrorism and note some key challenges in implementing such programmes.

As stated in a World Bank Report (2016: Digital Dividends), social media can also be instrumental in spreading democratic ideas, encouraging social cohesion and aiding development.

Who is responsible for keeping young people safe?

Given the important role that the digital world plays on young people's lives, the digital industry must also play a role in safeguarding young people. This protection is also the responsibility of the government, parents, schools and other stakeholders such as advertisers and the media. Together, all these players must play their part in creating an environment that mitigates the potential negative impacts technology can have on young people, educating young people on how to keep safe and be responsible online, making social media companies accountable for safety aspects relating to their platforms and websites. Despite major social media companies having minimum age restrictions, the under-age use of social media is

commonplace^{xliii} with 83% young people stating that social media companies need to do more to combat cyber bullying. Similarly, the Children's Commissioner's Life in Like report stated that 3 in 4 children aged 10-12 (underage) have their own social media account and that social media companies either need to incorporate under-13s into their service design or do more to combat under-age use. Some G20 governments have engaged with technology companies on a voluntary basis to set non-legislative standards for technology companies to adhere to. For example, the UK has engaged on a broad programme of internet safety for young people including a commitment to a social media code of conduct.

In addition to this, the industry needs to adopt the principal of 'think safety first'^{xliiv} by incorporating safety features right from the product-design stage. Glazzard also recommends improvements in reporting mechanisms and the control of inappropriate content. Similarly, the British Youth Council report^{xliv} suggests minimum standards across the industry for moderation and the removal of harmful content. Advertisers also have a role to play particularly as young people are susceptible to advertisements they see on all media. Advertising Standards Authorities can play a critical role in challenging inappropriate advertisements. The #StatusofMind report recommends what industry can do to improve safety including introducing a heavy usage pop-up warning on social media, highlighting when photos have been digitally manipulated etc. Some technology companies are already making efforts to this end. For example, Apple has introduced a new digital well-being tool aimed at helping reduce screen time. This 'screen time' app calculates the time spent on each app thereby allowing users to set personal limits. Similarly, there are a range of apps available through which parents can control and monitor the time and content of online material accessed by young people.

Children spend more time in school than in any other social setting and therefore the schooling system can be a space for preventative interventions, education and remediation^{xlvi}. Schools therefore play an important role in helping young people develop the skills needed to manage online risks. Similarly, government also play an important role in ensuring this. In particular, there is a need for all these different stakeholders to educate young people (in and out of school) on digital literacy to help develop critical awareness, resilience and knowledge that will help them to engage digitally in a safe and productive manner. For example, the UK government through the 2008 Byron Review of Internet Safety included recommendations on regulating internet access and building resilience amongst young children and in 2014 the government introduced age-appropriate lessons on e-safety across all levels of the curriculum^{xlvii}. In recognition of the fact that no technology can be good or bad, in order to improve online safety whilst protecting a free and open internet with freedom of expression, the British government published a Green paper in 2017 to ensure that 'Britain is the safest place to be online.' This paper was underpinned by three key principles: 1) what is unacceptable offline should be unacceptable online; 2) all users should be empowered to manage online risks and stay safe and finally 3) technology companies have a responsibility to their users^{xlviii}. However, as Frith (2017) recognises, in order to be effective, any government strategy needs the participation of young people and it needs to be developed in such a way that it empowers young people to stay safe and improves their knowledge, critical thinking and resilience when faced with online risks which cannot be totally eliminated.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the rapid pace of change in technology, even the way in which young people interact with social media will continue to change.

At its heart, maximising the benefits of social media for young [people in and out of education whilst minimising the risks requires action by all participants: technology companies, governments, schools and other educational institutions, and primarily parents and carers and children and young people themselves. The G20 represent the base of many of the world's largest technology companies, as well as very high levels of young people with internet access, and some of the most developed systems of voluntary regulation in a number of fields. Therefore, the role of social media and technology in the mental health of young people should be at the forefront of the G20 agenda.

The main recommendation of this paper is for the G20 to take a leading role in expanding the actions taken recently by the UK government in bringing a code of conduct to bear on social media companies. This sets out the actions which the UK government expects social media companies to take in exchange for fair and prudent regulation more broadly across technology and social media organisations. Such a compact, by its definition, can only be within the territory of the UK itself; however social media and young people increasingly cross territorial boundaries easily. As such, this is an area where voluntary G20 co-operation, and an agreement to introduce matching and aligned system of voluntary regulation, can be extremely powerful.

As such, the paper recommends that G20 Ministers should commit to taking forward and convening a separate meeting of representatives from all G20 countries, and all major technology providers, with the intention of agreeing and signing a voluntary compact between technology and social media companies and all the governments of the G20. The G20 should take forward the concept of a social media code of conduct and lead work to create a G20-wide voluntary compact. This should set out how, in exchange for a commitment from the G20 not to unduly regulate the scope and beneficial activities of social media companies, such companies pledge a set of world-leading best practice standards in the areas of: promoting good mental health; preventing bullying and keeping young people safe online; and protecting young people against the risks of radicalisation and violent extremism^{xlix}.

In addition to this main recommendation, this paper recommends the following actions for G20 education ministers:

- The G20 should prioritise and promote mental health and well-being of young people in their use of technological platforms.
- Social media companies, governments and parents should enable and educate young people to understand their rights and responsibilities including their behaviour towards others. This should include teaching young people to be safe and responsible online, learning how to respond to harms but also encouraging them to leverage the benefits that technology can afford them.
- The G20 should encourage national governments to include digital literacy as a major part of the schooling curriculum. Schools should not only provide guidance for parents but also improve teachers' knowledge in this regard. Technology can provide many benefits to the learning experiences of children and using this innovation to enhance

the educational journey of young people should be balanced against the need to protect them.

- National governments should ensure that the focus of public policy remains on developing young peoples' resilience to potential risks associated with social media use. To this end, children should be equipped with resilience, information and power where they can use the internet to promote broader digital citizenship and be creative but not addictedⁱ.
- National governments should encourage schools to respond to all forms of bullying – online and offline – irrespective of whether it takes place in or out of schoolⁱⁱ.
- The G20 and national governments should promote the collection and availability of timely, reliable and accurate data. Improved data and improved access to data that can help in safeguarding children in their online interactions is needed. This also includes improving linkages across different data sets such as health, education and social careⁱⁱⁱ.
- The digital industry should build safety features into all products which are designed for children and young people as part of the design process. Additionally, it should react more quickly to abuse by removing the accounts of perpetrators and reporting the abuse. It should remove inappropriate content rapidlyⁱⁱⁱⁱ.
- The industry needs to live up to its promise of progress, creativity and knowledge and meet the rights and needs of users by recognising the commercial and compulsive nature of the way in which the digital environment have been designed^{liv}.

This report has highlighted the two sides of social media and technology. On the one hand, social media plays an incredibly important role in improving the outcomes of young people across a range of aspects. However, also apparent are a range of risks that young people face in their growing engagements with digital technologies. It is everyone's duty to play a role in safeguarding and protecting young people and helping them get the most out of what technology can offer, make effective choices and receive the safety and support to which they have a right.

Acknowledgements, references and further information

Particular thanks go to the organisations from within this coalition who took a lead on this paper: **The Varkey Foundation and Dubai Cares.**

We would also like to thank MQ, Professor Jonathan Glazzard (Leeds Beckett University), the Children's Commissioner in England and Twitter, for their contributions, feedback and their time.

A wide range of organisations and individuals whose research has been consulted in the writing of this report are included in the endnotes. All errors and interpretations remain the authors'.

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- ^{ix} www.statista.com
- ^x (<https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>)
- ^{xi} Edweek.org
- ^{xii} <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/technology-empower-children-developing-countries>
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- ^{xix} O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson 2011
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