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**UN Committee on Science and
Technology for Development [UNCSTD]**
Topic: Effect of Social Media on Teens

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Background:

The world wide web was created in 1989. Ever since this nascence, technology has taken leaps of advancements. From calling phones that were barely mobile to hand-sized pieces of technology that allow you to complete an innumerable number of functions, technology's rapid improvement is creeping its ways into the hands of younger and younger generations. The drawbacks of this for teenagers are the possibility of name-calling, the spreading of false rumors, being a recipient of unwanted explicit images, being stalked, and receiving physical threats.

In fact, research from the Pew Research Center has shown that a majority of teenagers in America are active on social media (Instagram, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, and Reddit). Of all the teenagers that conducted the Pew Survey, almost a quarter believed that social media had a negative effect on them. Statistically more significant than all other possibilities, 27% of these students who believed social media had a negative impact on them stated that it was because of the ever-present bullying and spreading of rumors with social media. Effects like this are extremely significant due to further issues that it may cause such as mental health mishaps. In a society where we learn the importance of mental health more and more, these impacts from social media are put more into scope.

Of course, another detrimental effect is that more communication for teenagers is held online with new direct message platforms on social media applications such as Instagram Messages and Facebook Messenger. Not only does it make communication indirect, but it also gives teenagers a false sense of reality. With online messaging, teenagers are not obligated to respond to messages right away and instead may spend a large sum of time trying to formulate a response. For example, with new features on messaging apps such as Messenger where you can unread messages or even iMessage where you can force click to read a message without the

sender knowing, the necessity to respond in present-time is negligible. In addition to this, these teenagers are not able to express their emotions and hear what someone else has to say to the best of their abilities. Thus, this poses a large problem with these teenagers' futures where they need to be able to confront important conversations in real-time, not having time to flower their response. In an ever-changing world, we need future leaders who are not only intelligent but able to be quick in communication. It is clear that social media has an effect on teenagers not only in the short term but also in the long term. For the best interest of the next generation, this is a topic that must be addressed as quickly as possible.

UN Involvement:

The United Nations places a great emphasis on finding ways to make the internet a safer community for children and teenagers to be on. As such, the UN has created several initiatives such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and numerous other organizations that focus on the dangers of the internet world for children. These groups have developed educational programs on how to behave in an online environment and the potential risks along with courses aiding adults and parents on how to protect their children. Together these organizations are part of the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. The Commission has a group of senior representatives from the UN, non-governmental organizations, law enforcement agencies, regulators, and private companies that focus on working on the safety of children online.

In regards to social media, organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have created guidelines for country officials in the use of social media to protect People of Concerns (PoCs). The guide focuses on developing a Community-Based Protection (CBP) strategy in a way that respects data protection policies along with privacy and security rights. Additionally, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

has organized professional consultations and published multiple reports on the issue of the challenge on human rights and privacy in the digital age. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), made up of 18 independent experts that monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by its State parties, published legal guidelines on how States could protect children in digital environments. For example, “Article 34 CRC requires States Parties to ‘take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent’ the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, including ‘the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.’”

Bloc Positions:

Western Bloc:

Social networking sites such as Instagram have become essential for teenagers. Not only is there a lot of pressure to download the app, but many feel disconnected and out-of-line if they don't to their peers. To further its impact, teenagers in the western world consume the most unhealthy material including terrible and fake dieting tips, which promotes an unhealthy lifestyle. This is because many teenagers in the western world are drawn towards celebrities and what's trending. For example, 90% of the US' teenage population have at least one account on a platform that exerts material like this. And according to the Wall Street Journal, depression runs rampant in these countries and its cause lies in their excessive social media consumption.

Latin American Bloc:

After a study was conducted specifically on teenagers in Latin America, it was found that this is a big hotspot for social media consumption by teenagers. The study also shows that cyberbullying was not as common of an occurrence as it was in other blocs. We also see that

these teenagers believe that social media has a positive effect and that it is a benefit to the community. All in all, Latin America has not had a firm stance for or against the continued use of social media for teenagers.

African Bloc:

In the past decade, the African government has disrupted social media multiple times, all for different purposes. For example, in recent elections, Uganda and Chad have put temporary blocks on social media. Even more, some countries completely disconnected telecom and internet services. Because not all African countries are as developed in other continents to start out with, teenagers are not as reliant on their social media. Therefore, only the targeted teenage population that has access to the internet and holds social media accounts are affected.

Eastern European Bloc:

The Eastern European bloc is one of the most developed regions of the world. Therefore, accessing social media is not a struggle. This directly results in why we see countries like Hungary as extremely social media savvy. An astounding 65% of Hungarians claim to be involved in social media. This follows through with higher numbers of teenagers active on social media from this part of the world. There have been no stances for or against continued social media, however.

Asia Pacific Bloc:

The Asia Pacific Bloc has held many research studies on how social media is used for young adults. A recent finding showed that teenagers in East Asia may be the most active users in the region as they readily consume social media. Some parts of this bloc such as China have resorted to taking action in blocking some platforms during key times just as countries in the African bloc

did. Therefore, the Asia Pacific Bloc has not publicly made a stance in its efforts to combat the rising consumption of social media on their teenagers.

Questions to Consider:

1. What effect could more extensive use of social media have on society as a whole (from the economy to the environment)?
2. How does the effect of social media change within different demographics and different cultures around the world?
3. What are some ways your country's historical and current actions create a safer online environment?
4. Would policies need to be altered to account for the technological advances that have occurred over the years?
5. How do countries create the boundary between the benefits of social media and over consumption?

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