



A STUDY ON REGULATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Abstract:

Social media has undoubtedly brought benefits to society, such as reuniting lost family members, allowing individuals to maintain connections across distances, assisting in the search for organ donors, and motivating people to learn new skills. Nevertheless, the rising evidence of its negative effects is becoming increasingly significant. The use of social media appears to be linked to online harassment and heightened divisions among individuals. Research shows that there are connections between excessive social media use and issues like depression, loneliness, and various other mental health challenges. There is a need for regulation of the operations of social media platforms to ensure that their business practices and engagement-driven algorithms do not harm society while also protecting free speech rights.

Keywords: *Social Media, Harassment, Regulations and Laws.*

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Introduction:

The term "social media" describes a range of technological tools that help users exchange information and ideas. User-generated content on social media usually encourages interaction through likes, shares, comments, and discussions. Social media is used by over 5 billion people worldwide. While social media is criticized for promoting hate speech and misinformation, it is also praised for helping people form communities. Additionally, social media is becoming a more significant component of many businesses' marketing initiatives. The biggest social media networks in the world are WeChat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube. Initially created as a means of communication with friends and family, social media quickly grew to be used for a wide range of objectives. The first network to reach one million monthly active users was Myspace in 2004. As Facebook and Twitter (now X) entered the market, social media usage skyrocketed in the years that

followed. Companies flocked to these platforms because they allowed them to instantly reach a global audience. 46% of internet users worldwide get their news from social media, according to the Global Web Index. This is comparable to 40% of users who visit news websites to view news. Compared to other generations, Gen Z and millennials were the most likely to watch news on social media. People can connect with others, find niche communities, and obtain information in real time through social media platforms. When it works well, it increases global connectivity. However, social media is also highly effective at polarizing people, disseminating false information, and even having negative psychological effects.

A 2019 survey found that social media use is associated with more friends and a more varied personal network, particularly in emerging economies. According to about 80% of teenagers, social media makes them feel closer to their peers. Overall, 59% of



respondents stated that social media had neither a positive nor a negative impact on them, while one in three stated that it had a largely positive effect. However, the excessive use of social media by many teenagers has sparked concerns about how it may affect their physical and mental well-being by diverting their attention, interfering with their sleep, and exposing them to peer pressure, bullying, rumours, and distorted perspectives of other people's lives.

Review of Literature:

1. **Jack M. Balkin (2021), How to regulate (and not regulate) social media.**

Jack M. Balkin (2021) discusses the ways to regulate, or avoid regulating, social media. The research focuses on comprehending the necessity of regulating social media due to the interest in the digital public sphere. It states that social media platforms have already created a digital public sphere where they serve as key participants. The objective should be to enhance that digital public sphere, ensuring it remains vibrant and healthy to advance the principles of free speech, political democracy, cultural democracy, and the development and dissemination of knowledge.

2. **FRANK FAGAN, (2017), Systemic Social Media regulation.**

In the paper, it is concluded that social facts, norms, and misinformation spread due to human actions and the design of platforms. While regulation is necessary, legal measures should prioritize systemic changes and the reengineering of platform design rather than focusing on censoring speech content. Regulations that define the boundaries of the forum and influence how speech acts circulate can guide speakers toward social media platforms that promote high-quality discourse.

3. **Tarleton Gillespie (2017), Regulation of and by platforms.**

This paper states that the exquisite chaos of the web gave rise to platforms. Their founders wanted to create areas for the best and most social features of the web, but they were also motivated by the freedom it offered. The study came to the conclusion that long-running discussions over the nature and content of public conversation have found a home in the policies of the main social media platforms. It is hardly surprising that our problems with sexuality, terrorism, misogyny, and violence against women—all of which have been intensified over the past ten years should also arise here.

4. **Fred Stutzman, Woodrow Hartzog (2012), Boundary Regulation in Social Media.**

Fred Stutzman discovered that there are numerous reasons and methods for controlling the contextual limits of social media disclosure. We demonstrate that utility, propriety, and identity management are extra important motivators for border regulation, even if group management systems are frequently made to improve privacy. To gain a deeper comprehension of the goals and strategies of boundary regulation through multiple profile maintenance, this study employed a qualitative technique.

Objectives:

- To understand the negative side of Social Media Platforms.
- To study the need of Regulations of Social Media Platforms.
- To study the need of Regulations by Government on Social Media Platforms.

Research Methodology:

This research is entirely based on secondary data. The secondary data is collected from various articles, blog and other web sources.



Limitations:

The present study is based only on secondary sources and it might not be reflective of the current state of policies or societal attitudes.

Importance of Regulations in Social Media Platforms:

Social media users can post anything on their accounts, from timed images and videos on Snapchat to brief videos on TikTok. Some of these users might become well-known and well-liked on social media sites. Because of their appealing personalities or content, these so-called influencers may amass thousands or even millions of followers. Influencers can influence their audience on a range of topics, including which water bottle to buy or which restaurants to visit, thanks to their extensive platform on these social media apps. However, what occurs when influencers begin sharing content that promotes negativity, and why do they do so?

According to Dr. Megan Maas, an associate professor of human development and family studies at Michigan State University, influencers spread harmful content because it draws attention. I think what people don't understand is that negative content can be very profitable, because that eye-catching, extreme, crazy content sometimes has a higher chance of going viral, or being shared, not necessarily because people agree with it, but because they think it's so outrageous that (it) can bring a lot of eyeballs, a lot of viewers, and then some followers along," Maas stated. In order to gain attention, "that then encourages those who are posting that content to keep posting more of it."

Maas added that given the amount of attention that audiences give creators, they won't be stopping any time soon. According to Maas, "people continue to visit those accounts because they believe they are receiving rogue insider information, but they are unaware of how they are contributing to their wealth, and that cycle doesn't stop. There is no motivation to

cease sharing the extremely negative content." Here are a few of the adverse consequences.

Cyber bullying:

Bullying that occurs via digital devices, such as computers, tablets, and cell phones, is known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can happen online in social media, forums, or gaming where users can view, interact with, or share content, as well as through SMS, text messages, and apps. Examples include:

- Posting embarrassing images or videos of someone on social media or spreading false information about them.
- Using messaging apps to send offensive, threatening, or abusive texts, pictures, or videos.
- Posing as someone else and using fictitious accounts to send hurtful messages to other people on their behalf.

Cyberbullying raises special issues because it can be:

Persistent: Since digital gadgets allow for instantaneous, round-the-clock communication, it can be challenging for kids who are being bullied online to get help.

Permanent: Unless reported and deleted, the majority of electronically transmitted information is public and permanent. A bad online reputation, even for bullies, can affect one's ability to get a job, get into college, and other aspects of life. **Hard to Notice:** It is more difficult to identify cyberbullying because parents and teachers might not hear or see it happening. Online bullying can make you feel like you're being attacked everywhere, even at home. There might appear to be no escape route. The repercussions can be severe and affect a person in many ways:

- **Emotionally:** feeling ashamed or losing interest in the things you love;
- **Mentally:** feeling angry, upset, embarrassed, foolish, even scared, or angry;
- **Physically:** Exhausted (not getting enough sleep), or exhibiting symptoms like headaches and



stomach aches. People may refrain from speaking up or attempting to address the issue if they feel that others are making fun of them or harassing them. People may even commit suicide as a result of cyberbullying in severe circumstances.

In the past five years, 25% of kids and teenagers have, on average, cyberbullied someone. Girls (20%) were more likely than boys (11%), with 16% of high school students reporting having been electronically bullied in the past 12 months in 2021. Seventy-seven percent of 12- to 17-year-olds who had cyberbullied others had also been cyberbullied. After experiencing cyberbullying, over 50% of teenagers felt angry, roughly 33% felt hurt, and almost 15% felt afraid. Additionally, according to two-thirds of teens who have been the victims of cyberbullying, it "affected their ability to learn and feel safe at school." Additionally, they are four times more likely to act suicidal or harm themselves.

Spread of misinformation :

False information is now widely disseminated on social media. Because rumours and fake news are so easily spread on social media, people are frequently misinformed, which breeds mistrust and chaos. Disseminating false information can also undermine public confidence in institutions and democratic processes.

A study was conducted to investigate the diffusion characteristics, emotional impact, and propagation dynamics of false information on social media platforms. In order to compare accurate and inaccurate information, the study combined extensive social media datasets and used content and emotion analysis. Their findings show that, in contrast to true information, which usually elicits neutral or positive emotions, misinformation spreads more quickly, has a wider impact, and evokes stronger negative emotions like fear and anxiety. Misinformation erodes trust in the government, media, scientific community, and

medical establishments. False information about illnesses, diets, or treatments can lead to harm and poor healthcare choices. In order to increase polarization and foster animosity between communities, political groups, and individuals, misinformation frequently takes advantage of already-existing societal divisions.

According to the study, which examined a sizable portion of fake news stories, political fake news makes up the largest percentage (46 percent), followed by general issues (33.6 percent) and religion (16.8 percent). Just these three groups account for 94% of all the fake news cases that were examined. The majority of misinformation comes from social media platforms, accounting for 77.4% of cases, while mainstream media only accounts for 23%. Facebook (34 percent) and Twitter (61 percent) were found to be the most popular sites for disseminating false information.

Harmful Content – Violence

Our young people's recent surge in the use of cell phones, text messaging, email, and chat rooms has created new social interaction spaces where aggression can happen and young people can become victims. These spaces transcend the traditional boundaries of family, neighbourhood, and community that may have previously provided some protection for our young people. Although these global electronic communication tools haven't actually created new psychological risks for our kids, they have made it more difficult to shield them from them and exposed a greater number of them to dangers that only a small percentage of them may have previously encountered. The main causes of the effects of media violence exposure are

- 1) Priming processes, 2) Arousal processes, and
 - 3) The immediate mimicking of specific behaviours
- Priming - Priming is the process by which a node in the brain that represents a thought, emotion, or



behaviour is excited by spreading activation in the neural network of the brain from the locus representing an externally observed stimulus.

Arousal - Excitation transfer and general arousal are two potential short-term factors that may increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviour in response to the degree to which mass media presentations arouse the observer. First, because part of the emotional response triggered by the media presentation is misattributed as a result of the provocation transfer, a subsequent stimulus that elicits an emotion (such as a provocation evoking anger) may be interpreted as more severe than it actually is. Alternatively, the media presentation may simply raise general arousal to a point where dominant learned responses are demonstrated in social problem solving and inhibition of inappropriate responses is reduced.

Copying - Imitation of particular behaviours, the third short-term process, can be seen as a particular instance of the longer-term, more general process of observational learning. There is growing evidence in recent years that young humans and primates are naturally inclined to imitate those they see. Children are more likely to exhibit particular social behaviours if they observe those behaviours in others. In particular, kids are more likely to imitate violent behaviour when they witness it. Although the exact neurological mechanism underlying this phenomenon is unknown, it appears likely that "mirror neurons," which fire when a behaviour is either observed or acted out, play a significant role.

Teenage children are exposed to a quarter of violent content promoted by social media platforms. On TikTok, teens are most likely to see violent content, and X.1 out of 9 will see images of zombie knives or machetes. In the past year, 70% of adolescent children have come across violent content from real life on the internet. Just 6 percent actively looked for it.

Sexual Content:

In recent years, there has been an increase in the prevalence of sexual content on social media. Some people use social media to advertise and engage in online prostitution, despite evidence that viewing sexual content on these platforms can influence young people's attitudes toward sex and behaviour. According to a study, 30.62% of the kids they spoke with had at least one encounter with offensive material on Facebook. In Kwara state, some computer shops discovered in 2004 that students and children were downloading more pornography than any other type of material. This demonstrates unequivocally that children and students continue to view a great deal of sexual content without parental or elder supervision. The proliferation of pornography is one of the biggest effects of technology, particularly on social media. Pornography has become even more addictive due to technology. When someone becomes psychologically dependent on viewing, reading, and thinking about sexually explicit material, it is known as pornography addiction. Several aspects of their lives suffer as a result of this overemphasis.

Pornographic material can be found on all platforms, including Facebook Feeds, Instagram Discovery pages, and YouTube video comments. In a similar vein, child predators frequently target possible victims using these platforms. Anyone can create a profile on the platforms and connect with other users with ease. When someone lies about who they are, there is nothing to stop them. Predators can easily target children and teenagers with the help of these platforms. In order to establish a trustworthy online relationship with their target, they usually take on a persona that includes lying about their age, among other things. A predator's objective after establishing a relationship is frequently to obtain sexual images or videos or to take advantage of the victim in person.



By the eighth grade, roughly half of the participants had encountered sexual media content. Seventy percent of teenagers say they have unintentionally come across pornography online while looking for other content. Social media platforms have exposed 60% of teenagers to sexual content, including sexually suggestive images and videos. Despite teens reporting higher exposure rates, only 37% of parents think their child has been exposed to sexual content online.

Suggestions:

- Numerous policy options have been put forth to address this problem. Here are a handful of them:
 - Let social media companies make their own decisions about content regulation. Regulation shouldn't be handled by the government.
 - Establish guidelines and give our government the authority to hold platforms accountable for damaging content.
 - Give users more control over what they see, while allowing the government to play a relatively minor role. The government might mandate, for instance, that platforms provide a variety of algorithms.

Most agree that Child pornography, explicit and targeted threats, violent extremist videos, and similar content should all be prohibited. However, it is unclear and requires careful consideration whether anything that is not obviously illegal needs to be regulated. The government contends that uncontrolled social media encourages anti-national activities, hate speech, defamation, threats to public order, bullying, and terrorist incitement. This may be the case, but if the content is not obviously unlawful, it is unclear why content regulation is the solution. Furthermore, social media is merely a forum for expression; holding the platform accountable for content—even if it is blatantly unlawful—makes no more sense than holding a courier, restaurant, or mobile network provider accountable for the content of any conversation that takes place on their network.

Conclusion:

Any mandatory social media regulations should not be implemented by the government. Government regulations stifle innovation and create monopolies, as demonstrated by collective experience across numerous industries, including banking, healthcare, insurance, oil, and more. Since it deters newcomers from entering a market, the high cost of complying with regulations limits competition. Additionally, it hurts current smaller players disproportionately. Social media regulations will cause exits and deter new investments in a nation that sorely needs more start-ups, innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment.

This will be particularly true if traceability is mandated by the government. The foundation of many modern businesses is end-to-end encryption. Instead of easing the end-to-end guarantees that their products offer, the majority of them would rather leave the Indian market (or not enter it). Furthermore, the government's data protection bill supports the data minimization principle, which is in conflict with weakening encryption.

The government's inexperience with regulation is another important reason why it shouldn't try. Due to scale, social media regulation must always be ex post, unlike traditional publishing, where it can be ex ante. The government lacks the technological capacity to quickly and efficiently identify and eliminate offensive social media content.

The tech companies themselves should be in charge of regulating social media content. There are a number of causes. They have a duty, to start. One could argue that they are making money off of a public resource: citizen data. Therefore, social media companies have a duty to the public to prevent the spread of false information, extremism, hate speech, etc., just like broadcast spectrum licensees are required to follow certain public interest requirements in exchange for



the chance to profit from a public resource. Second, the survival of these businesses is a powerful motivator. Consumers will instinctively avoid a platform with a high percentage of offensive or unreliable content. An additional motivator is the threat of regulations. Third, they are the only ones with the background and resources to deal with the issue. The creation of advanced tools and technologies will be necessary for the ex post detection and removal of objectionable content. Fourth, they've already done it. During a three-month period in 2018, YouTube, which employs 10,000 people worldwide to monitor and remove objectionable content, removed 8 million videos, 81% of which were automatically removed, and 75% of those clips were never viewed. During a three-month period in 2018, Facebook, which employs over 30,000 people for detection and removal, removed over 15 million pieces of violent content, with over 99% of that removal occurring automatically.

There is a role for the government as well. It ought to motivate social media firms to establish and revise content standards and enforcement policies on a regular basis. This should ideally be carried out by an impartial organization that involves involvement from all relevant parties, such as law enforcement and civil society. For the sake of transparency, finalized standards and guidelines ought to be made available to the public. In order to promote compliance and maintain transparency, this body should also release compliance data on a regular basis. Furthermore, the government ought to hold social media companies accountable for content that is blatantly unlawful if it is not taken down within a specific time frame after being reported. Additionally, there ought to be a quick and transparent process for resolving disputes. The government should bear the burden of proof; this will guarantee that content removal is an exception rather than the rule. Last but not least, the government should

prioritize resolving the systemic issues in society, such as casteism, communalism, sexism, extremism, and inadequate law and order. Discussions on the internet merely reflect what is already taking place in society. Strong rule of law enforcement will reduce the need for regulation and permit more freedom of expression online.

Social media freedom of expression is essential to a robust democracy. By encouraging and fostering it rather than suppressing it, we will be more powerful.

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Cite This Article:

Asst. Prof. Patil A. (2025). *A study on Regulations on Social Media Platforms.* In **Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal: Vol. XIV** (Number I, pp. 7–14).