

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING



Working together to keep our young people safe

Secondary | June 2024

Algorithms: Understanding Their Role in Social Media

Algorithms play a crucial role in organising content, ranking search outcomes and displaying advertisements on the internet, especially on social media. They are primarily used to arrange content in a user's feed. Given the vast amount of content accessible, social platforms use algorithms to prioritise content they believe will appeal to a user, based on what they have liked, commented on, watched and shared.

In this month's issue:

- Algorithms
- Edibles
- App focus: Reddit

Algorithms can have negative impacts on young individuals. They operate on the assumption that any interaction with content indicates a desire for similar information. Consequently, if a young person views inappropriate material, they may receive more of such content. Over time, this content may escalate in inappropriateness, potentially exposing children to extremely harmful material.

How to support your child with the negative impact of algorithms



1 Social media limits

Stepping away from social media and engaging in offline activities can enhance moods.

2 Curate feeds

Exploring diverse content and following accounts that share positive content can help create a more uplifting social media environment.

3 Notice reactions

Assisting your child in identifying content that triggers negative feelings and fostering healthy habits of disconnection can help disrupt the cycle of negative emotions.

4 WAYS ALGORITHMS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1

Mental health



Excessive engagement with negative content can increase anxiety and depression.

2

Misinformation and echo chambers

Young people may encounter misinformation and hate speech due to user-generated content in their feed, limiting exposure to diverse opinions and reinforcing existing views.



3

Body image and self-esteem



Social media promotes unrealistic beauty standards. The constant exposure to such content can negatively impact the self-esteem of young people who aspire to meet these standards.

4

Inappropriate content

It is very easy to come across content which is not age appropriate. This can be of a sexual nature, violent, sexist and racist.



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Edibles: What are they and what are the risks for young people?

Edibles refer to food items infused with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), a mood-altering ingredient derived from cannabis.

These products come in various forms such as cakes, sweets, chocolate, soft drinks and syrups. Unlike traditional cannabis, edibles do not have a distinct smell, making it challenging to detect their THC content. Furthermore, they may contain other illicit substances.

The packaging of these products is often appealing to young individuals, with some being marketed as 'gummies' to attract children.

Effects of edibles:

Consumption of THC through edibles can lead to altered perception, dizziness, slurred speech, heart palpitations, nausea and vomiting. Regular users of edibles may also face challenges like poor concentration and depression, among other symptoms, which can adversely affect mental health.

Availability of edibles to young people:

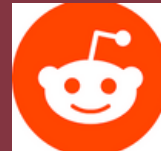
Edibles can be conveniently purchased online and delivered to a specified address. Some drug dealers have started promoting these products on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

App Focus: Reddit

Reddit serves as a platform where users can engage with like-minded individuals within various communities. It acts as a social news site for discussing current events, accessible both as a website and an app.

Risks linked to Reddit:

- Users have the ability to form 'subreddits' focused on diverse interests, yet adults with unknown intentions can create communities that might appeal to young users.
- User-generated content could expose children to potential grooming risks.
- Due to minimal moderation on Reddit, there is a prevalence of inappropriate content.



Age

Restriction: 13

Tips for ensuring your child's safety on Reddit:

- Wait until your child is 13 years old before allowing them to use Reddit and ensure they provide their real age on their profile.
- Assist them in selecting suitable subreddits to follow and verify their appropriateness.
- Familiarise yourself with Reddit's functionality to assist and guide your child effectively.
- Adjust the message privacy setting to 'Whitelisted' to restrict messaging to approved contacts only.
- Turn off adult content in the feed settings for added protection.

