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CSTD: Topic #1 - Mental Health Decline from Social Media

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With 970 million people struggling with mental illness or drug abuse worldwide, the UN is tasked with taking dramatic action. Mental disorders are up 50% worldwide between the years 1990 and 2013. It was in this timeframe that social media was invented, with Facebook in 2004, the iPhone in 2007, and Instagram in 2010, amongst a slew of recognizable others. While the causal relationship between the mental health decline and usage of social media remains unclear, there is undoubtedly an immense correlation.

Many studies show that prolonged use of social networking sites (SNS) often coincides with signs of depression, addiction, and low self-esteem. While originally geared towards admirable ideals like creating community and sharing content, social media platforms have become so pathological and addictive for some users that they are "phubbing" at high rates, missing out on social interaction.

Teens and kids are similarly exposed to content that puts them at increased risk of anxiety, eating disorders, depression, and addiction. The Netflix docudrama, *The Social Dilemma*, compiles testimonies from former high-ranking officials at various social media organizations to show the detrimental effects that social media is having on society, with a particular focus on the mental health of teens. Countless research studies show how "high social media use [is] correlated with self-reported declines in mental and physical health and life satisfaction." Although indirect, this mental health decline undoubtedly contributes to the shocking suicide rates worldwide.

We, as CSTD, have done little to recognize or address the prevalent issue of social media overconsumption and mental health decline. Whatever the cause and effect of SNS and weaker mental health may be, we have a moral obligation to do our part in creating safe social communities for users, just like other technologies. Social media can be a beautiful resource when used properly. Our goal is not to destroy them but rather to enact international law to support and perhaps even save countless lives.

So, what are possible solutions? As a UN body, what can we do without infringing on national sovereignty?

This is your place to be creative. As CSTD, we can form a treaty of standards to which countries may opt in. We can hold our member countries to certain standards, with possible recourse for countries or companies that don't adhere. Ultimately, you should consider what you think your country would do. Don't be afraid to bring up ideas outside the box. As John F. Kennedy once said, "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." The following are a handful of questions to guide your research:

- Is access to social media a universal right?
- Should we have age limits for usage levels? What role does age play?
- How strict or lenient should we be on countries, NGOs, and social media companies?
- Should we have universal standards? Who will oversee these standards? What should they be?
- Should we conduct more research? Who would fund that research?

We are not discussing the issue of illegal data mining/collection, as tempting as that may be. Stay focused on the theme of mental health and how it relates to social media usage.

Review some of the sources we cite below to help you get started. Be sure to use reliable sites; especially check those with .org, .edu, .gov, and .int for the best research.

Also, a quick reminder: **you, as a delegate, are representing your country's opinions, and not your own.**

Please don't forget to include citations, and keep in mind that all position papers will be submitted through Turnitin. Also, don't hesitate to reach out to us at btklein@mail.yu.edu or zbotnick@mail.yu.edu with any questions or concerns. We're looking forward to reading your work and meeting you all!

All the best,

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