

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Promoting Health and Protecting Vulnerable Populations from Social Media and Online Harm

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2023

Approved by the Assembly, May 2023

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Increasing social media and online engagement have led to complex challenges in psychiatric practice (Applebaum & Kopelman, 2014). From a data perspective, these platforms often contain personal health information that technology companies can exploit with data science, artificial intelligence, targeted advertising, behavior tracking, and other algorithms. Online interactions can have rewarding health benefits when done as part of the treatment plan, as well as lead to harmful social comparisons and eroded self-esteem for vulnerable populations throughout the lifespan. Research is needed to better assess the impact of social media on mental health.

APA Position:

The APA supports federal oversight of security and privacy standards to protect vulnerable populations and their personal information from predatory algorithms and deceptive content on online platforms, through reasonable content standards and transparent self-policing efforts to prevent the proliferation of harmful content such as: promotion of self-harm, encouraging addiction-like behaviors, deceptive online content, and promotion of marketing of unlawful products or services.

To inform the development of guidelines and recommendations for physicians and other clinicians, teachers, and families, the APA supports targeted funding for culturally informed research on: 1) the impact of social media on physical, social, emotional, and population health; 2) the differences between passive versus active consumption of social media; and 3) mental health messaging facilitated by these platforms.

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Collaborators: Council on Children, Adolescents, and Their Families, Council on Health Care Systems and Financing, Council on Quality Care