Film and Publication Board
Content Regulatory Authority of South Africa.

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IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON ONLINE AND SOCIAL HARMS

5 MARCH 2025

REGULATORY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ANALYSIS UNIT

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SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The rise of social media and digital communication platforms has facilitated the spread of various online social harms, where individuals are harassed, intimidated, or targeted online. On the contrary, technology has also enabled the rapid dissemination of information but has also made it easier for false or misleading information to spread. (Turif and Sanad ,2023). The anonymity afforded by the internet can embolden individuals to engage in harassment and online abuses. This can take various forms, including trolling, stalking, doxing, image based sexual abuses, hate-speech and threats of violence. Victims of online harassment may experience significant psychological distress and may even face real-world consequences affecting their day-to-day activities[1].

Technological advancements have significantly transformed the media content landscape, leading to new ways of creating, distributing, and consuming media content (Parker,2025). This has further significantly influenced media content regulation, providing opportunities for new enforcement tools and regulatory oversight while, also bringing to the fore new challenges that require meticulous regulations (Parker,2025).Balancing the benefits of technological advancements with the need to protect fundamental rights remains a critical task for regulators, including the Film and Publication Board (FPB).

Nonetheless, the constant connectivity provided by technology can lead to digital addiction and have negative impacts on mental health. It has been proven overtime that excessive use of social media, online gaming, and other digital platforms can contribute to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among young people (Naslund, et al, 2020). Thus, technology has undoubtedly revolutionised the way we interact, communicate, and access information, but it has also introduced new challenges and risks, denoting online social harms (Marsh, et al, 2020).

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research study is to;

- Assess the impact digital technology has on various forms of online and social harms and
- Assess how effective the FPB is handling the impact of technology on online and social harms; and

[1] *Creating a safe digital spaces free of trolls, doxing, and hate speech (2023)un women (Accessed: 30 August 2024).*

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- How the FPB could adapt to Technological advancements to effectively monitor the online space and fully execute its mandate.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study will incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. It will be conducted through desktop research and by distributing a set of questions to relevant FPB expert units in the field to gather data for analysis.

SECTION B: AN OVERVIEW OF ONLINE SOCIAL HARMS

4. WHAT ARE ONLINE HARMS?

According to the United Kingdom Draft Online Safety Bill, online harms are defined as user-generated material or actions that are prohibited or have the potential to seriously injure a person's physical or mental health. Online harms can be illegal, or they can be harmful but legal. Examples of online harms include (but are not restricted to); child sexual exploitation and abuse, terrorist use of the internet, hate crime and hate speech, harassment, cyberbullying and online abuse (Gov.Uk. 2012). The Films and Publications Act, 65 of 1996, notes that harmful "means causing emotional, psychological or moral distress to a person, whether it be through a film, game or publication through any on or offline medium, including through the internet and "harm" has the corresponding meaning".

4.1 WHAT ARE SOCIAL HARMS?

The negative effects or outcomes that affect people, communities, or society at large are referred to as social harms (Hillyard and Tombs, 2017). These negative effects frequently jeopardize people's wellbeing, social cohesiveness, and public safety. **They can take various forms and are frequently divided into several categories, such as, social inequality, political unrest, environmental damage, economic harm, psychological harm, cultural harm, and financial instability**. Institutional policies, cultural norms, personal behaviours, and more significant systemic problems are some of the many potential causes of these harms (Hillyard and Tombs, 2017).

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4.2 TYPES OF ONLINE HARMS

Listed below are types of online social harms retrieved from the *FutureLearn Leadership Team* webpage[2]: -

- **Online harm that violates the right to personal safety:** Threats of violence, intimidation and harassment**,** incitement or facilitation of violence**,** content that promotes and or records violence**,** child sexual exploitation and or abuse material.
- **Online activities or content that violate a person's right to health and wellbeing:** Threats of violence, intimidation and harassment, graphic violence, developmentally inappropriate activity or content
- **Online harms that violate dignity:** Non-consensual sharing of intimate material or image-based abuse**,** trolling, abuse, insults, rumours, sexual extortion**,** bullying and social exclusion.
- **Online harms involving discrimination:** individual identity attacks**,** dehumanisation**,** hate speech**,** sexual, harassment / aggression.
- **Online activities or content that interfere with a person's right to privacy:** Doxing (i.e. activity or content that exposes a person's identity, private and sensitive information, financial information etc, without their consent to exert control, intimidate, threaten or extort money).
- **Online harms involving deception and manipulation:** Misinformation and disinformation**,** scams, phishing and catfishing**,** extremism**,** deepfakes**,** solicitation of children for sexual purposes ('grooming' or 'enticement').
- **Online harms that violate a person's right to participation or free expression;** Being prevented from safely engaging online**;** misinformation and disinformation.

5. VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF ONLINE HARMS AND OCCURRENCES

Online harms encompass various dimensions, including harm in content production, distribution and consumption[3]**.**

5.1 Harm in content production

Where a person is physically harmed, and the abuse is recorded or streamed in order to create online material. This could include images or videos of sexual abuse of adults or children, murder or assault.

5.2 Harm in distribution of content

Where an intimate image of a person is self-produced and shared voluntarily and is later shared and distributed online without their consent. That person may have not been harmed in the production of the content but is exposed to harm once their intimate image is shared.

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[2] *Online risks and harms (2022) FutureLearn (Accessed: 30 August 2024).*

[3] *2023) Typology of online harms - www3.weforum.org. (Accessed: 30 August 2024).)*

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- In a similar vein, victims who are the subject of abuse in the production of content may experience trauma when that content is distributed.
- The person objectified in such content is also harmed because the distribution of that content can reinforce negative attitudes towards certain populations.

5.3 Harm in consumption of content

Where a person is negatively affected because of viewing illegal, age-inappropriate, potentially dangerous or misleading content.

- Online harms can also occur as a result of online interactions with others **(contact**) and through behaviour facilitated by technology (**conduct**).

SECTION C: IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON VARIOUS ONLINE SOCIAL HARMS

6. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL (CSAM)

According to Cullen, et al, (2020) under U.S. federal law, child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is defined as any visual representation of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (anyone under 18 years old). The image does not have to show the child participating in sexual activity to be considered explicit, even a sexually suggestive photograph of a nude child can fall under this legal definition. The FP Act further defines child pornography as defined in section 1 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007).

Additionally the FP Act further notes that “child pornography” includes any image, however created, or any description of a person, real or simulated, who is or who is depicted, made to appear, look like, represented or described as being, under the age of 18 years— (a) engaged in sexual conduct; (b) participating in, or assisting another person to participate in, sexual conduct; or (c) showing or describing the body, or parts of the body, of such a person in a manner or in circumstances which, within context, amounts to sexual exploitation, or in such a manner that it is capable of being used for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Latth, et al (2022) argues that several forums on the Darknet allow people with a sexual interest in children to anonymously gather and discuss or share CSAM. The Darknet is an online overlay network that requires specific browsers like the Tor browser [4]. This level of secrecy can be used to evade law enforcement's surveillance and detection. A recent Darknet survey indicated that many users report seeking direct online contact with children

[4] Dark Web vs. Deep Web. www.bitsight.com (Accessed 16 January 2025)

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for sexual purposes after viewing (Lätth *et al.,* 2022). Before the digital era, child sexual abuse material (CSAM) was usually exchanged among offenders through physical means, such as mailing or in-person exchanges of hard-copy images. Unfortunately, the internet has made it easier for offenders to share and distribute CSAM while also making it harder for law enforcement to detect their activities (Cullen, et al, 2020). The use of digital technologies to facilitate child sexual abuse is constantly growing. Although computer-generated imagery (CGI) is not a recent development, it allows individuals to produce artificial child sexual abuse material[5]. Furthermore, the investigation of child sexual abuse (CSA) has grown more complicated due to technological advancements and the widespread accessibility of the internet. In the U.S., the production and distribution of CSAM online is one of the fastest-growing illegal online industries (Cullen, et al, 2020).

Accurately estimating the scale of child sexual abuse facilitated by digital technology and the internet is challenging, however it has significantly increased the circulation of images and web pages related to this abuse. In 2019, the We Protect Global Alliance reported that U.S. technology companies made 18.4 million referrals of child sexual abuse material to the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the previous year.[6] That same year, EUROPOL revealed that its repository contained over 46 million unique images or videos of child sexual abuse. Due to the hidden nature of the issue, these figures likely underestimate its true extent. The spread of digital images is hard to monitor, and many children may not report abuse out of fear of social stigma, exclusion, or alienation. Some may not even be aware they have been exploited or abused.[7]

7. REVENGE PORN

The distribution of non-consensual intimate images (NCII), commonly known as "revenge porn," has gained increasing attention as a global and public issue. Instances of NCII are frequently covered by the media and lawmakers worldwide and are actively discussing ways to address this growing concern (Dodge, 2019). Revenge pornography refers to a type of online content featuring amateur images or videos that were either self-produced or created with the consent of those involved but later shared without their permission. This often happens out of "revenge" after a relationship ends, giving rise to the term "revenge porn" (Salter and Crofts, 2015). Revenge porn can also occur for monetary gains and/or sextortion purposes.

[5] Technological developments| IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (Accessed 30 September 2024)
[6] UNICEF-Post-Consultation-Brief-Sale-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-Digital-Tech-EN.pdf(Accessed 30 September 2024)
[7] UNICEF-Post-Consultation-Brief-Sale-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-Digital-Tech-EN.pdf- (Accessed 30 September 2024)

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A distinction must be drawn, and it should be noted that the consensual sharing of intimate images amongst adults over the age of 18 is legal in many global jurisdictions but any sharing, possession and/or distribution of sexually explicit images including videos of minors under the age 18 is illegal and considered as Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). Simply put CSAM denotes sexual abuse of children which maybe technologically facilitated and/or physical in nature. Child sexual exploitation and abuse takes on an online dimension when, for instance, acts of sexual abuse are photographed or video/audio-recorded and then uploaded and made available online, whether for personal use or for sharing with others.

Again, the FP Act in section 18F provides for the ***Prohibition Against the Distribution of Private Sexual Photographs and Films***. For instance, section 18F (1) (a) and (b) of the Act stipulates that no person may expose, through any medium, including the internet and social media, a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made: -

- without the consent of the individual or individuals who appear in the photograph or film; and
- with the intention of causing that individual harm.

The Act further stipulates that a photograph or film is "sexual" if such a film or photograph: -

- shows all or part of an individual's exposed female breasts, anus, genitals or pubic area;
- shows something that a reasonable person would consider to be sexual because of its nature; or
- its content, taken as a whole, is such that a reasonable person would consider it to be sexual (Section 18F of the Act).

The nature of "revenge porn" allows an image to go viral within minutes of being posted. By the time a victim realises their content has been shared and requests its removal, it may have already been downloaded, forwarded, and reposted by hundreds or even thousands of people (Franks, M.A., 2017). Numerous websites and blogs now exist which promote the malicious sharing of such material, often focusing on current or former partners. Although men can also be victims, revenge porn is primarily a gendered issue that disproportionately impacts women (Salter and Crofts, 2015). Concerns regarding the impact of new technologies and privacy issues have often been present since the beginning of personal photography. Salter and Crofts (2015). For instance, the invention of the Polaroid camera eliminated the requirement for photos needing to be processed using a series of chemical baths, while innovations in video technology made it possible to produce home movies.[8]

[8] Salter, M. and Crofts, T., 2015. Responding to revenge porn: Challenges to online legal impunity.

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The internet can be accessed from a variety of devices, including desktops, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs, and gaming consoles. Most smartphones are equipped with built-in cameras and recording features, making it easier to take and store images. As a result, the global reach of the internet allows billions of people to access, view, and share images available online. These developments have contributed to the emergence of the "revenge porn phenomenon" (Dickson,2016). Moreover, the internet is playing an increasingly vital role in the daily lives of South Africans. As of January 2024, there were 45.34 million active internet users in the country. The same report indicates that nearly 26 million of these users actively participated in social media, accounting for approximately 42.8% of the total population.[9]

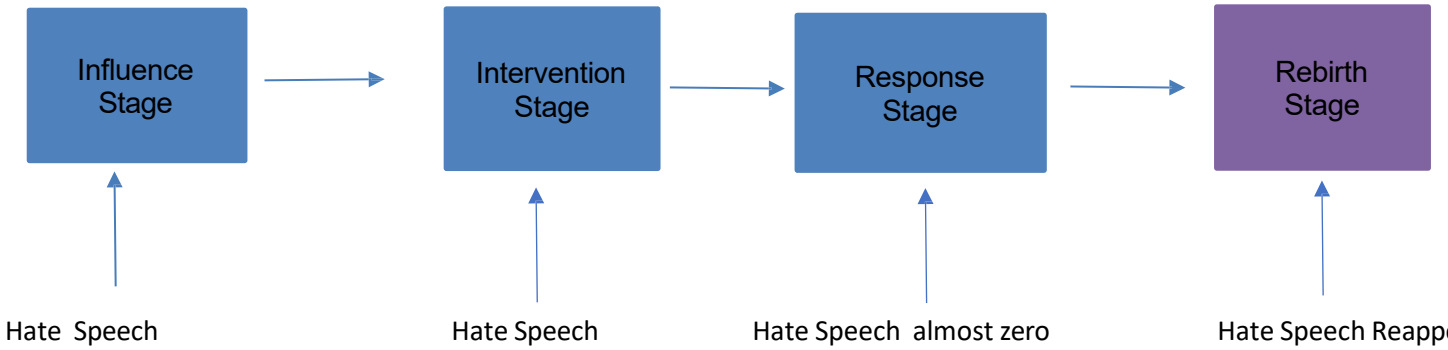
8. HATE SPEECH

Social media platforms have emerged as a hotbed for hate speech, largely due to their accessibility and the anonymity they provide. Many users do not understand that the same laws governing traditional communication also apply to social media. It is important for users to recognize that deleting a post containing hate speech does not eliminate their legal responsibility, as such posts can still be traced and used as evidence.[10] Additionally, liking, reposting, sharing, or supporting content that constitutes hate speech without clearly explicitly distancing oneself can make users equally liable, as they are effectively spreading and republishing harmful material.[11]

According to Chetty and Alathur (2018), hate speech and terrorism are prevalent and closely interconnected activities. Traditionally, these actions were communicated through conventional social networks, including broadcast television, radio, and newspapers. Today, however, online social networks like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube are being utilized for similar purposes.

Figure 2 below shows stages of hate speech following a trigger event.

N.B Figure derived from (Chetty and Alathur,2018).



[9] South Africa: digital population as of January 2024 (Accessed 30 September 2024)
[10] Social Media Law. www.dmllaw.co.za (Accessed 30 September 2024
[11] Social Media Law. www.dmllaw.co.za (Accessed 30 September 2024)

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Hate speech, immediately after the event (**influence stage**) will flow heavily on social networks, after few days (**intervention stage**) will get reduced, after some more days (**response stage**) reduces to zero level and after a long time once again it may appear. This suggests that following a specific event, individuals may initially feel heightened emotions before eventually returning to a normal state or behaviour. The rebirth stage is represented by a dashed line to indicate that it is optional, depending on the nature and impact of the event, hate speech may or may not resurface after a significant period (Chetty and Alathur,2018).

Additionally, it has also been suggested that anonymity provided by the internet allows for more open expression, as individuals can voice their opinions without the fear of negative reactions or judgments based on factors such as their race, sexual orientation, or gender identity (Brown, 2018).

9. CYBERBULLING

Cyberbullying is characterised by the use of websites, text messaging, mobile phones, email, and other digital communication tools to socially isolate, embarrass, harass, and/or threaten a person (Alismajel, 2023). Another contributing factor is access to digital technology, which influences participation in cyberbullying. Continuous access to mobile technology, such as cell phones, is common among both adults and adolescents. Census 2022 shows 92% of South African households now have a cellphone as landlines disappear. Furthermore, the greater digital exposure to potential cyberbullies appears to raise the likelihood of victimization. The more time a user spends online, the more visible and accessible they become a potential target in digital spaces. Consequently, several studies have suggested that increased access to digital technology likely contributes to higher involvement in cyberbullying (Englander, 2019).

Below are the most common platforms where cyberbullying typically occurs:

- Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok,
- Instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the internet,
- Text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices,
- Online forums, chat rooms, and message boards; such as Reddit,
- Emails, and
- Online gaming communities.[12]

As communication technology evolves, people are becoming more connected through the internet and social media. **According to a 2018 survey by Ipsos, South Africa has the highest rate of cyberbullying in the world, with 51% of**

[12] What is Cyberbullying. www.stopbullying.gov (Accessed 26 September 2024)

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South African teens reporting that they have experienced cyberbullying.[13] This is significantly higher than the global average of 37%.

10. ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL GROOMING

Online child sexual grooming has been defined as the process by which an adult, using digital media prepares a minor in order to obtain sexual content such as images, videos or to sexually exploit or abuse them at a later stage (Machimbarrena, et al, 2018). Schmidt, et, al (2023) argues that, the internet has increased the potential occurrence of certain types of online crimes. Social media platforms allow children, who are increasingly engaging in risky behaviour online, to connect with people they may not know. This enables online offenders to build relationships and friendships with children, which they can then manipulate and coerce into performing sexual acts (Schmidt, et, al 2023).

Interactive games that allow children to communicate with other players online have also been used for as a method for grooming and exposing them to various forms of sexual exploitation.[14] Offenders can exploit children through virtual reality (VR) games and augmented reality (AR) games, which overlay digital content like images, sounds, and text onto the real world. For instance, in an AR game, a child might explore their local area, with some games even allowing the child's location to be monitored[15].

SECTION E: PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF ONLINE HARMS

11. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLING

Cyberbullying has deep and lasting impacts on its victims, often resulting in severe emotional distress, such as heightened anxiety, depression and diminished self-esteem. The relentless harassment and humiliation can erode a person's sense of security and well-being. [16]Furthermore, it negatively affects academic performance, reducing focus, motivation and sometimes causing victims to avoid school altogether. **Socially victims may experience isolation and difficulty building trusting relationships, as the abuse undermines their sense of belonging and trust in others. In extreme cases, cyberbullying has been linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation.[17]**

[13] IPSOS. (2018) Global Views on Cyberbullying.(Accessed: 22 January 2025]
[14] The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: (Accessed 26 September 2024)
[15] The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: (Accessed 26 September 2024)
[16] The effects of online harms:www.netsweeper.com (Accessed 26 September 2024)
[17] The effects of online harms:www.netsweeper.com (Accessed 26 September 2024)

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12. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA)

The effects of child sexual abuse on a child or young person can vary depending on the nature of the abuse and their stage of development. **These experiences can reshape how they see the world, the people around them and their place within it. Their perception of themselves and their surroundings may become distorted, fostering feelings of mistrust, fear, and betrayal[18].** Experiencing CSA has been linked to various negative physical health outcomes. Penetrative abuse can cause acute injuries to the genital area and increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Additionally, CSA can significantly impact emotional well-being, resulting in low self-esteem and diminished confidence. **Mental health effects can manifest as internalizing behaviours, including depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm and suicidal thoughts, along with a range of other mental health issues** (Fisher, et, al, 2017).

13. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL GROOMING

The manipulative tactics employed by many sexual offenders during the grooming process can lead to persistent distortions in thought, issues with self-identity, relational harm, as well as isolating the child. The nature of the relationship and the length of the abuse may result in relational trauma that hampers their ability to connect with others and with themselves[19]. Additionally, **Child sexual abuse (CSA) can significantly impact victims' and survivors' capacity to establish and maintain healthy relationships. Research indicates that only 17 percent of CSA survivors exhibit a secure attachment style, which is crucial for developing strong emotional bonds and facilitating positive interactions between individuals** (Fisher, et, al, 2017). In addition, grooming can lead to both immediate and lasting effects. Regardless of whether it occurred in person, online, or a combination of both, the impact can persist throughout a person's life. A child or young person may experience difficulties sleeping, increased anxiety, or challenges with concentration and academic performance. They might also become withdrawn, uncommunicative, and exhibit feelings of anger or distress[20].

14. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF REVENGE PORN

The repercussions for victims of revenge porn can be extensive and may lead to life-altering effects. **Many individuals experience intense and complicated emotions, as well as emotional distress and anxiety due to their victimization** Murca ,et,a; 2023). **This is worsened by the perpetual fear of exposure once the videos or photos are shared publicly.**

[18] What are the effects of Child Sexual Abuse: www.bravehearts.org.au (Accessed 26 September 2024)
[19] What are the effects of Child Sexual Abuse: www.bravehearts.org.au (Accessed 26 September 2024
[20] What is grooming: www.nspcc.org(Accessed 30 September 2024)

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Victims often feel violated and vulnerable, which can lead to depression, suicidal thoughts and panic attacks (Bozzola,et al, 2022).

SECTION D: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

15. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Today's youth are being raised in an era where digital technology is ever-present and deeply embedded in almost every facet of life (Haddock,et al 2022). Essential human activities, such as education, social interaction and entertainment are increasingly conducted through digital platforms, leading to new forms of engagement. Some of the benefits of technology include:

- **Improved Communication:** Technology has made it easier than ever to connect with people all over the world. With the rise of social media and messaging apps, we can now communicate with friends, family, and colleagues in real-time, regardless of where they are located.[21]
- **AI:** AI excitement outweighs concerns by nearly two to one margin with 66% expressing excitement and 34% voicing concerns (Ipsos, 2023). Countries with higher overall optimism about AI's potential also anticipate the most significant economic benefits from the technology. Countries in the Global South, including Nigeria, Mexico, and South Africa, along with those in the Asia-Pacific region, are among the most enthusiastic about AI and hold the strongest belief in its positive economic impact (Iposos Google, 2.023) **AI- content moderation offers several significant benefits. These systems can analyse large volumes of data instantly, allowing platforms to oversee millions of interactions in real-time**. Additionally, advanced AI models can identify and mitigate harmful behaviour before it escalates, providing a more proactive and effective approach to user protection compared to a reactive method[22].
- According to Rose et al., (2022) **Facebook page** makes it easier for students to connect with teachers and lecturers. The Facebook social site becomes a medium for students to access teaching and learning information and references. Reference materials and learning information can also be referenced continuously by using the Facebook page without any time restrictions.

16. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Digital technologies also influence children's lives negatively with media usage affecting various aspects of their development. It has significant implications for their cognitive, language, physical, and socio-emotional growth (Panjeti-Madan, 2023).

[21] The Impact of Technology on Society: Positive and Negative Effects (Accessed 11 February 2025)
[22] AI-Powered Advancements in Content Moderation user protection.www.zevohealth.com (Accessed 7 February 2025)

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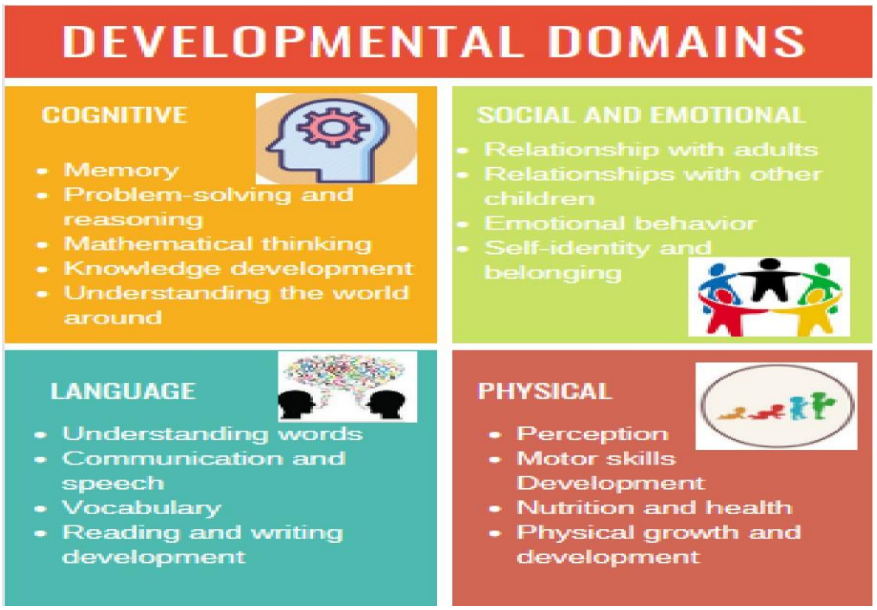
Figure 3 below shows the main childhood developmental domains and how different skills are clustered under each domain (Muppalla, et, al, 2023).



Muppalla, et, al (2023) argues that research has shown that **excessive screen time can interfere with these critical developmental functions.** The following areas are commonly affected, namely but not limited to:

- **Delayed Language and Social Skills:** Language development and social interaction are natural milestones in early childhood. **However, excessive screen time often experienced in isolation can impede the learning of these essential skills.** Engaging with a screen offers a limited, two-dimensional interaction that cannot replicate the depth of real-world exchanges, potentially resulting in delays in speech, vocabulary and social skills.[23]
- Digital technology influences the **growth and development** of adolescents by shaping their **emotional regulation.** While devices like computers and smartphones lack emotions themselves, they operate based on data and algorithms. **However, users project their emotions onto these technologies, forming a deep connection with them. Without this emotional engagement, technology holds little significance for its users** (Rose et al., 2022).
- **Sedentary Lifestyle and Reduced Physical Activity:** The habit of spending extended time in front of screens has contributed to a growing sedentary lifestyle among children. **Reduced physical activity not only**

[23] Muppalla, et, al (2023). Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development.

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increases the risk of obesity and related health problems in the future but also hampers the development of key motor skills needed for physical agility and coordination (Muppalla, et, al (2023).

SECTION F: ONLINE HARMS – PLATFORM MONITORING AND CHILD PROTECTION UNITS INTERVENTIONS

17. CHILD PROTECTION UNIT

The Child Protection Unit (CPU) is crucial for ensuring children consume age-appropriate media content, protecting children from harmful and/or prohibited content, supporting parents and educators while making sure children are protected and supported when using the internet. The Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996 as amended criminalises the possession, production and distribution of child pornography. The FPB CPU has a staff compliment of 2 Child Protection Officers and an Acting Child Protection Manager. The Manager reports to the Executive: Technology & Platform Monitoring. The role and the functions of the FPB CPU are as follows:

- To ensure that FPB enforces compliance requirements as stipulated in the Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996 as amended;
- Attend to queries relating to content depicting Violence Against Children, Child Pornography or Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM);
- To indicate methods of reporting CSAM available to the public;
- To attend to content referred by Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) for evidence verification and analysis of content; and
- To conduct outreach initiatives and stakeholder engagements.

17.1 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION MATERIAL ANALYSED DURING THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2024 – 21 DECEMBER 2024

The following are cases received through SAPS for CSAM analysis purposes:

	Number
Cases	18
Content Analysed	178 411
Confirmed CSAM	7461

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17.1.1 CASE DETAILS

The following is a list of images analysed by the FPB CPU Unit for CSAM purposes:

a) Walmer (1325 images) – CSAM = 373

b) Wellington (934 images) – CSAM = 623

c) Krugersdorp (1925 images) – CSAM = 1057

d) Potchestroom (33 images and 14 videos) – CSAM = 3 images and 1 video

e) Bothasig (5441 images) – CSAM = 1002

f) Ladysmith (4841 images) – CSAM = 0

g) Krugesdorp SECI (44 images) – CSAM = 13 images

h) Kraaifontein (149 094 images) – CSAM = 553

i) Mitchell's Plein * (137 415 images)

j) Hartbeesport (1400 images) – CSAM = 964

k) SECI Enq (3944 images) – CSAM = 2319

l) Silverton (130 images) – Non-commercial distributor

m) Port Alfred (1300 images) – CSAM = 160

n) Galvendale (1090 images) – CSAM = 0

o) Lyttelton (1800 images) – CSAM = 7

p) Mount Road (3040 images) – CSAM = 1 video

q) East London (1756 images) – CSAM = 205 videos

r) Honeydew (300 images) – CSAM = 180

***NB: On-going case with 137 415 images**

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17.1.2 COURT CASES

The following are court cases heard in the period April to December 2024 and the outcomes thereof:

Case Details	Outcome
Matlelerekeng	CPO attended court in May 2024, case postponed. New date for court to be announced as soon as placed on the court roll.
Boksburg North	Matter still on court roll
Jeffrey's Bay	CPO provided evidence in court, matter still on court roll
Florida	Matter still on court roll

18. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY WORKSHOPS

The purpose of Law Enforcement Agency Workshops organised by the Film and Publication Board (FPB) is to equip law enforcement officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to enforce regulations related to the classification and distribution of films, games and certain publications, including the internet. These workshops are critical in ensuring that the effective implementation of the Films and Publications Act, preventing the spread of harmful material, and fostering cooperation between the FPB and law enforcement agencies.

During the period under review, a total of 7 LEA's workshop conducted in Northwest, Bojanala District, Mmabatho & Klerksdorp, and Dr. Ruth Mokgomotsi District.

19. FPB NETHELPDESK

FPB NetHelpDesk is an online platform or helpdesk system used by the Film and Publication Board (FPB) to provide assistance, support, and communication for individuals and organisations. FPB NetHelpDesk is a vital tool designed to facilitate communication and improve the efficiency of services provided by the Film and Publication Board. It enables the public, businesses, and stakeholders to engage with the FPB in a streamlined and accessible manner, ensuring effective management of film and publication content and child protection matters.

In the table below are complaints received from the public during the period April-December 2024 **(All referred to the relevant unit for action)** – NethelpDesk

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Complaint Type	Number
CSAM	8
Impersonation	2
Bestiality	2
Cyberbullying	1
Public Complaints / Revenge Pornography	5
Child Abuse	2
TOTAL	**20**

20. INHOPE ICCAM REPORTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines) is a global network that works to combat child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online by facilitating the reporting and removal of such content. The ICCAM (International Child Sexual Abuse Material) reports are a key component of INHOPE's operations, focusing on tracking, reporting, and handling cases of illegal online content, particularly material involving the sexual exploitation of children.

The ICCAM Reports are part of INHOPE's global efforts to track and monitor online child sexual abuse material across different countries. These reports provide detailed information on the identification, reporting, and removal of CSAM from the internet. They serve as a means for participating organisations, known as hotlines, to report discovered CSAM to law enforcement agencies or the relevant authorities in their jurisdiction.

When a hotline or a member of INHOPE identifies CSAM on the internet, the organisation gathers information about the content, including the URL, screenshots, and any other pertinent details. This information is then reported to ICCAM for further action. The reports generated by INHOPE are passed on to national law enforcement or internet service providers, who are responsible for investigating and removing the illegal material.

In the table below is the INHOPE ICCAM Report and FPB Social Media Report

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Type	Number
INHOPE ICCAM System	90
Social Media Monitoring	441

The Platform Monitoring unit uses an online monitoring system (Meltwater) to monitor social media activities. The system scans the internet for specific harmful and prohibited content that is configured on the system. The unit has accounts on all social media and randomly logs in to manually check for harmful and prohibited content.

21. PUBLIC COMPLAINTS

The FPB Public Complaints Unit is responsible for receiving and addressing complaints from the public related to films, games, certain publications and online content that may violate FPB regulations, including the Film and Publications Act and child protection laws. Complaints can relate to content that is deemed inappropriate, offensive, or harmful to specific age groups, especially children and vulnerable individuals.

The Public Complaints Unit's role is to attend and prioritise investigation of all complaints received as mandated within the legislative constraints of the Film and Publication Act 65 of 1996 ("the FP Act"), as amended. The Public Complaints Unit also manages the clientsupport email, by receiving all queries and route the queries to the relevant units within FPB. The Public Complaints Unit currently have two (2) officials, namely Public Complaints Manager and Queries and Complaints Management Officer. The Manager reports to the Executive: Technology & Platform Monitoring.

In the table below is the list of public complaints lodged with the FPB and the action taken for each complain.

REF. NO	DESCRIPTION	NATURE	ACTION TAKEN
1. FPB_PC/04/2024/08	Hosting of content that is inappropriate for 13-year-olds and older adolescents.	Classification	Complainant failed to provide more information
2. FPB_PC/04/2024/09	Distribution of abusive materials	CSAM	Investigation on going
3. FPB_PC/04/2024/10	Distribution of prohibited materials	CSAM	Investigation ongoing

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4. FPB_PC/04/2024/11	Unlawful distribution of private sexual pictures through deepfake	Deepfake	Assisted Complainant to open Criminal case with SAPS
5. FPB_PC/04/2024/12	Distribution of child violence video	Child violence	Takedown Notice issued
6. FPB_PC/04/2024/13	Violation of privacy through Facebook/Cyber bulling	Cyberbullying	Resolved through FPB Outreach and advocacy training with the school
7. FPB_PC/04/2024/14	Unlawful distribution of private sexual tape/video/pictures	Sexual video	FPB outreach and advocacy conducted with the school. Complainant failed to produce evidence
8. FPB_PC/04/2024/15	Online harassment through spams emails	Cyberbullying	Matter referred to Information Regulator
9. FPB_PC/04/2024/16	Unlawful distribution of private sexual video/tape	Sexual Video	Takedown Notice issued Matter investigated and referred to Enforcement to institute legal proceedings before Enforcement Committee
10. FPB_PC/04/2024/17	Unsolicited sharing of adult video without consent	Sexual video	Matter Investigated and we pick up unregistered adults sites , and complaint had been referred to Compliance Unit for further investigation
11. FPB_PC/04/2024/18	Unknown group created WhatsApp channel and distributed content that defamed staff	Cyberbullying	Complainant assisted to open a case with SAPS

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12. FPB_PC-6/2024/19	Complaint about children abuse	Child abuse	Complaint referred to Department of Social Department
13. FPB_PC-7/2024/20	Child Porn	CSAM	Complaint referred to SAPS
14. FPB_PC-7/2024/21	Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying	Matter resolved through Court between the parties
15. FPB_PC-7/2024/22	Defamation of Character	Fake account	Requested Facebook to remove the account
16. FPB_PC-7/2024/23	Child Exploitation	Child exploitation	Matter referred to SAPS
17. FPB_PC-8/2024/24	Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying	Complainant advise to open criminal case with SAPS
18. FPB_PC-9/2024/25	Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying online	Complainant failed to provide further details
19. FPB_PC-1/2024/26	Distribution of video	Private Sexual Video	Investigation ongoing
20. FPB_PC-1/2024/27	Revenge Porn	Private sexual video	Investigation ongoing
21. FPB_PC-1/2024/28	Unauthorized use of content	Unauthorised use of image in a film	Investigation on going
22. FPB_PC-1/2024/29	Request to take down a video	Private sexual video	Investigation ongoing
23. FPB_PC-2/2024/30	Distribution of Sexual Content through Facebook Account	Facebook account	Investigation ongoing
24. FPB_PC-2/2024/31	Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying	Investigation on going

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22. TAKE DOWN NOTICES ISSUES FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2024 TO 21 DECEMBER 2024

The FPB takedown notices are formal requests issued for the removal or block access to online content that violates the Film and Publications Act or other applicable laws. These notices are typically issued when content is found to be harmful, illegal, or not in compliance with classification regulations, particularly regarding materials that may be harmful to children or violate community standards. Takedown notices are issued in accordance with the procedure in section 77 of Electronic Communications and Transactions, 2002 (Act No. 25 of 2002).

In the table below are the FPB takedown notices issued during the period under review.

Name of Platform	Date of Receipt of Complaint	Section in the FP Act Contravened	Nature of Complaint	Date Take down issued	Current Status
X Corp.	15/04/2024	Section 18G- Prohibition against filming and distribution of films, photographs depicting sexual violence and violence against children.	(Violence against a child) A viral video depicting a woman physically assaulting a child.	19/04/2024	an interstitial warning was applied on the reported content to caution X (Twitter) users that images (if viewed) may contain sensitive material.
Tiktok	22/04/2024	Section 18H - Prohibition against propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence and advocacy of hatred that is based on identifiable group	Fake news/Misinformation (a viral video depicting money in boxes with an audio alleging that money was stolen by the "Minister of	22/04/2024	Content removed

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		characteristics, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm	Communications under the current leadership")		
X Corp.	08/05/2024	Section 18H - Prohibition against propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence and advocacy of hatred that is based on identifiable group characteristics, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm	DA advert depicting the burning of SA flag	08/05/2024	Content not removed-(Not violating Terms of services
X Corp.	07/05/2024	Section 18F (1) of the Act which speaks to the Prohibition against distribution of private sexual photographs and films	a viral video of a lady by the name of Gcinile was apparently distributed by her boyfriend Grootman where they were having sexual intercourse. The video was shared without her consent.	05/07/2024	Applicant obtained an interim order against responded. The matter is currently before court

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X Corp.	10/06/2024	Section 18H - Prohibition against propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence and advocacy of hatred that is based on identifiable group characteristics, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm	a tweet by a lady by the name of Dr Simamkele Dlakavu who published on her X account inciting violence against former President Jacob Zuma	12/06/2024	The post has since being deleted, the account holder alleges that she was hacked and issued a statement to that effect
X Corp.	21/07/2024	Section 18F (1) of the Act which speaks to the Prohibition against distribution of private sexual photographs and films	a viral video of a man and a lady having sexual intercourse in a polo vehicle at a bus stop.	23/07/2024	two account were suspended by X (@_mishumo_ & @Hlonk)
X Corp & Meta	06/08/2024	s18() (3) b - explicit infliction of domestic violence	a viral video of a famous pastor threatening people while holding a panga and with a bodyguard holding a gun	07/08/2024	The account has been suspended @Ori_RSA
X Corp.	07/08/2024	Section 18H - Prohibition against propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence	tweet relating to Miss SA which is advocate for her hatred as a foreigner	12/08/2024	X indicated that the account cannot be located (fake account)

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		and advocacy of hatred that is based on identifiable group characteristics, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm			
X Corp.	08/08/2024	s18() (3) b - explicit extreme violence	Turkish man shooting at a soldier in close range	08/08/2024	The account cannot be located (fake account)
X Corp.	11/11/2024	S18G - violence against children	a schoolboy being physically assaulted by his peers	12/11/2024	X has applied an interstitial warning on the reported content to caution X users that media (if viewed) may contain sensitive material- @trevor_sidogi

SECTION F: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

23. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHILD PROTECTION AND PLATFORM MONITORING SUB-PRGRAMME

The rapid advancement of technology has transformed digital landscapes, introducing both opportunities and significant risks. As online platforms evolve, so do the challenges associated with harmful content, making it essential for regulatory bodies like the **FPB** to adopt proactive and adaptive measures. This study emphasizes the increasing influence of technology on online harms and examines the effectiveness of the FPB in managing its impact.

The following recommendations aim to strengthen FPB's role in mitigating digital risks, ensuring public

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awareness, and fostering a safer online environment for all users:

- The Platform Monitoring unit should strengthen content moderation and AI integration such as; investing in AI-driven content moderation to detect and remove harmful content more efficiently.
- Currently the Platform Monitoring unit uses an online monitoring system (Meltwater) to monitor social media activities, however the organisation needs to keep abreast with the new technological advancements.
- With the rise of social media and messaging apps the FPB should collaborate with social media platforms and streaming services to enhance content regulation, advocate for stricter age verification measures for online platforms distributing sensitive content
- Encourage platforms and internet service providers (ISPs) to implement robust reporting mechanisms for users to flag and block harmful content.
- Encourage platforms and ISPs to promptly take down harmful content flagged by the FPB.

24. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY SUB- PROGRAMME

- The outreach and advocacy team need to explore and implement new innovative ways to spread the FPB's national footprint including technology-driven techniques.

25. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FPB

- The FPB to find opportunities/strategies to engage on social media (TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, X) with interactive content about online safety, collaborate with influencers who align with FPB's mission and vision to reach diverse audiences.
- Host live Q&A sessions on media literacy and FPB's role, run Radio and TV campaigns in multiple languages, featuring real stories of content regulation impact.
- Create educational resources to help users identify and report harmful content.
- The FPB should continue conducting research on online harms and consider publishing annual findings on harmful digital trends, including cyberbullying, Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), online child grooming and etc.
- The Regulatory Development & Research Analysis (RDRA) team should conduct nationwide surveys to assess public concerns and emerging threats in digital consumption.

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- Collaborate with universities and research institutions to analyse the impact of media content on different demographics, particularly children and vulnerable groups and learn best practices from organisations such as INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines), Australia's eSafety Commissioner and UNESCO to develop relevant regulatory strategies.

By implementing the above recommendations, the FPB can take a proactive approach to mitigate the impact of technology on online harms, ensuring a safer digital environment for all users. Strengthening its regulatory presence both nationally and internationally will allow the FPB to align with global best practices, collaborate with key stakeholders and adapt to the evolving digital landscape. Additionally, these measures will enhance the FPB's ability to safeguard digital consumers by improving content moderation, enforcing stricter compliance standards and fostering greater awareness around online safety. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to a more responsible and secure online ecosystem.

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27. APPROVALS

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