

YS FairGaze MUN 3.0

UNESCO

STUDY GUIDE

Evaluating the Role of Social Media in
Threatening Individual Privacy and
Cultural Integrity.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings Delegates!

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to the simulation of UNESCO at *YS FairGaze MUN 3.0*. The agenda for the session is:

Evaluating the Role of Social Media in Threatening Individual Privacy and Cultural Integrity.

This study guide is by no means the end of research. We would very much appreciate it if the delegates could find new realms in the agenda and bring them forth to the committee. During the session, the executive board will encourage you to speak as much as possible, since fluency, diction or oratory skills have very little importance in contrast to the content you deliver. Just ensure you understand what you're saying and confidently present it.

Also, we must remind you that as dignitaries, etiquette and decorum in meetings are a sheer necessity. Quality research, good argumentation, and a solid representation of facts constitute excellent performance.

This sitting in the committee is not going to be an easy one of these we assure you. The pressure of accusations and defense has never been easy to deal with. But it is also not the sole purpose of the debate.

Thankfully for all of us, with the above comes another assurance, that of a productive session. We are certain that the conference will prove to be a learning experience for both sides of the dais. In case of any queries, feel free to contact us. We will try our best to answer your questions to the best of our abilities.

All the Best!

Executive Board

ABOUT THE UNESCO COMMITTEE

UNESCO stands for the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**.

It is a specialized agency of the United Nations, established in **1945**, with its headquarters in **Paris, France**.

Mission:

To promote **peace and security** through **international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication**, to foster sustainable development and mutual understanding among nations.

WHAT WE DO

UNESCO carries out a wide range of programs and activities across its core areas:

1. Education

- Promotes **inclusive, equitable, and quality education** for all (e.g., Education for Sustainable Development, Global Education Monitoring Report).
- Leads the **Global Education 2030 Agenda** as part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4.

2. Science

- Supports international cooperation in water, ocean science, climate change, and technology.
- Manages initiatives like the **Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB)** and the **International Geoscience Programme**.

3. Culture

- Protects **tangible and intangible cultural heritage**.
- Maintains the **World Heritage Sites list**, safeguarding natural and cultural landmarks around the world.
- Works to promote cultural diversity and creative industries.

4. Communication and Information

- Advocates for **freedom of expression**, media development, and access to information.
- Promotes **universal internet access** and defends **journalists' safety**.

FUTURE PLANS

UNESCO's future work is guided by its **Medium-Term Strategy (41 C/4)**, aligned with the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Key Future Plans Include:

1. Revitalizing Education Systems

- Promote **digital learning equity**, teacher training, and global citizenship education.
- Focus on post-COVID learning recovery and resilience.

2. Combating Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss

- Use education, culture, and science to address climate crises.
- Strengthening protection of **biosphere reserves** and **World Heritage Sites** affected by environmental threats.

3. Cultural Heritage Protection

- Use technology (like AI and 3D mapping) to preserve cultural sites in conflict or disaster zones.
- Expand support for **intangible cultural heritage** (e.g., indigenous languages, rituals, music).

4. Artificial Intelligence and Ethics

- Lead global dialogue on the **ethics of AI** and its responsible use in education, science, and communication.

5. Freedom of Expression and Digital Access

- Tackle **disinformation and hate speech online**.
- Expand programs that protect journalists and promote **press freedom**.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

In the digital age, social media has transformed the way people communicate, express themselves, and engage with the world. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become integral to modern life, offering unprecedented access to information, connectivity, and global culture. However, beneath this convenience and connectivity lies a complex web of challenges that threaten core human values, particularly individual privacy and cultural integrity.

The vast amounts of personal data shared online are increasingly exploited by corporations, governments, and third parties, often without informed consent. This raises serious concerns about surveillance, behavioural profiling, and the erosion of digital autonomy. Simultaneously, the global dominance of certain cultural norms on these platforms poses a threat to local traditions, indigenous practices, and linguistic diversity, leading to cultural homogenization and marginalisation.

This study aims to critically evaluate how social media contributes to these dual threats. It explores the mechanisms through which privacy is undermined and cultural identities are diluted or distorted, while also highlighting resistance movements and potential safeguards. By understanding these dynamics, we can work toward a more ethical and culturally inclusive digital environment.

What is Privacy in Social Media?

Privacy in social media refers to the **ability of users to control the information they share online**, who can access it, how it is used, and for what purposes. This includes:

- **Personal data** (name, phone number, location, age)
- **Behavioral data** (likes, shares, search history)
- **Content shared** (posts, photos, videos, messages)

In simple terms, **social media privacy is about having the freedom to decide what to share, with whom, and for how long.**

Why is Privacy Important on Social Media?

a. Protection of Personal Data

- Users often unknowingly share sensitive data.
- Without privacy, this data can be misused by third parties for **advertising, profiling, or fraud**.

b. Digital Autonomy

- Privacy supports **freedom of expression**—people speak more openly when they feel secure.
- It allows users to create and explore their online identity safely.

c. Safety and Security

- Exposure of personal information can lead to **cyberstalking, harassment, identity theft**, or even physical harm.

d. Preventing Manipulation

- Without privacy, companies or political groups can manipulate user behavior through **targeted ads, misinformation, or data-driven influence campaigns**.

How is Social Media Privacy Threatened?

a. Data Mining and Tracking

- Social media platforms collect extensive data through cookies, apps, and user behavior tracking.
- Even deleted data or private messages may be stored in backend servers.

b. Third-Party Access

- Apps connected to social media accounts (e.g., games, surveys) often access user data without clear consent.
- Notorious example: **Cambridge Analytica scandal** (Facebook users' data used without permission to influence elections).

c. Weak Privacy Settings

- Most users are unaware of how to configure privacy settings properly.
- Default settings often favor **platform visibility over user control**.

d. Data Breaches

- Hacking incidents (like LinkedIn and Facebook breaches) expose millions of users' information.

e. Surveillance by Governments

- In many countries, authorities monitor social media for dissent, threatening **freedom of speech and privacy**.

ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS

Social media threatens individual privacy by collecting and exposing vast amounts of personal information, often without the user's full awareness or consent. When individuals sign up for platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, they provide personal data such as name, location, contact details, and interests. Beyond this, these platforms continuously track user behaviour—likes, shares, search history, and even conversations—to create detailed profiles that are used for targeted advertising and other commercial purposes. Additionally, privacy settings are often complex or set to "public" by default, making it easier for strangers or third parties to access sensitive information. Data breaches and unauthorised sharing of content further expose users to identity theft, cyberbullying, stalking, or manipulation. In some cases, governments also exploit social media data for surveillance, especially in authoritarian regimes, threatening freedom of expression. Overall, the lack of transparency, weak legal protections, and the aggressive monetisation of user data make social media a serious threat to individual privacy in the digital age.

EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CULTURAL INTEGRITY

Social media significantly affects the cultural integrity of individuals by influencing, diluting, and sometimes replacing traditional cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok promote dominant global trends—often Westernised—that are widely shared and imitated, leading to cultural homogenization. As people, especially youth, consume and recreate global content, they may begin to prioritise these trends over their local customs, languages, dress, and

traditions. This constant exposure can result in a gradual loss of identity, where cultural practices are seen as outdated or less valuable. Moreover, algorithms tend to favour viral content, which often sidelines indigenous voices and culturally diverse content, making it harder for minority communities to preserve or share their heritage. In some cases, cultural symbols are misused or commercialised without proper understanding or respect, leading to cultural appropriation. Additionally, when local content does appear, it may be mocked or misunderstood, discouraging individuals from expressing their cultural identity online. In this way, social media, while offering a platform for cultural expression, often undermines cultural integrity by promoting conformity and eroding the richness of cultural diversity.

Protection from Social Media for Individuals

To safeguard themselves from the potential risks of social media, individuals must adopt a proactive approach to digital privacy, security, and responsible usage. First and foremost, users should carefully manage their **privacy settings** on each platform, ensuring that personal information such as location, contact details, and posts is shared only with trusted individuals or kept private. It is equally important to **limit the amount of sensitive data shared online**, such as daily routines, financial details, or personal issues, which could be exploited by malicious actors. Individuals should also avoid using public Wi-Fi for accessing social media accounts and must use **strong, unique passwords** along with **two-factor authentication** to prevent unauthorised access. Awareness about **phishing attempts**, suspicious links, and third-party app permissions is critical, as these are common methods for stealing user data. Furthermore, users should regularly **review the terms and conditions** of social media platforms to understand how their data is being used, and they should stay updated with **digital literacy programs** that educate them about evolving privacy risks. Using platforms that prioritise privacy, such as Signal or Mastodon, can also be a step toward safer online communication.

Conclusion

While social media has become an essential tool for connection and expression, it also poses serious threats to individual privacy and well-being. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each user to take informed steps to protect themselves online. By managing privacy settings, practising cautious sharing, and staying digitally aware, individuals can enjoy the benefits of social media without compromising their security and autonomy. Responsible usage, combined with stronger platform accountability and legal protections, is key to ensuring a safe digital future.