National Youth Council (NYC) x Singapore Polytechnic (SP) Webinar Series
Webinar #1 - Beyond Filters and Likes:
Navigating the Pitfalls of Social Media Approval Culture

01 November 2023 | Online (Zoom)

On 1 November 2023, 264 youths from Singapore Polytechnic (SP) gathered for an webinar on digital mental wellbeing which discussed i) Seeking validation on social media, expectations vs reality; ii) Scams; iii) Cyberbullying; and iv) Enhancing public education and victim support.

This session was co-organised by SP and the National Youth Council (NYC), and involved the following panellists:

- Ms Joanne Wong, Head of Touch Cyber Wellness

- Ms Naomi Neo, Content Creator and Founder of Empath

- (Moderator) Ms Sharmain Chin, NYC INSPIRIT member, Co-founder, Total Wellness Initiative Singapore, and Human Resource Business Partner, Sopra Steria

(i) Seeking validation on social media, expectations vs reality

The session was kickstarted by an ice-breaker poll asking participants about their experiences on social media.
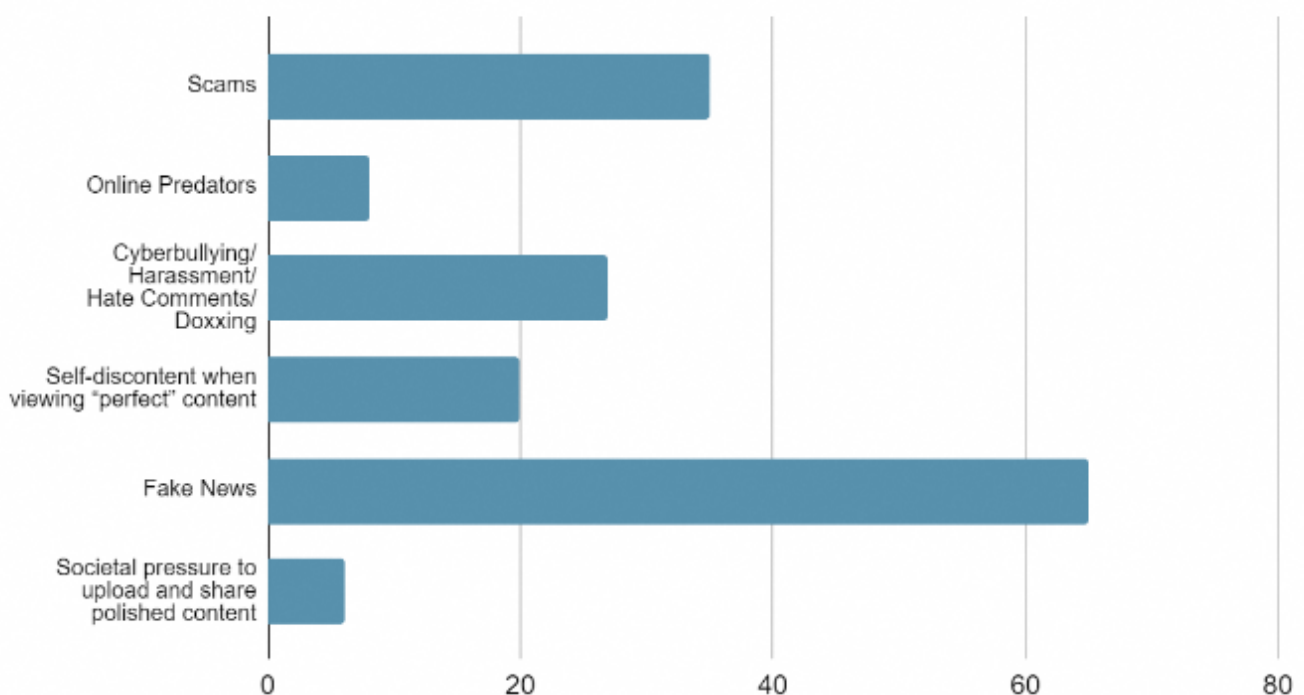
- From the Zoom poll, the top answers given by the participants were that they had experienced (i) Fake News, (ii) Scams, and (iii) Cyberbullying on social media.

1) Ms Chin asked panelists about their key concerns regarding youths using social media today.

- Ms Wong said that youths should try to ensure that their online persona was aligned with their true selves and not unintentionally portray themselves inaccurately online while trying to seek validation on social media. She shared that misrepresentation could impact an individual's credibility and affect career opportunities especially since potential employers could have seen the content they posted.

- Ms Neo shared that as a content creator, her audience sometimes held preconceived impressions of her. She said that these expectations made it challenging for her to establish offline or "real" connections with them. Therefore, Ms Neo advised participants to stay true to their purpose and values and recommended engaging in conversations with peers and family to filter the content shared online.

2) Ms Chin asked Ms Neo how she managed her online presence as a content creator on social media platforms.

- Ms Neo said that having an online presence was key to being a content creator. She said that being a responsible social media user meant being mindful and accountable for the content she posted, and she struggled at times with balancing audience engagement against creating content of her preference.

- Ms Neo said that from her experience, she sometimes received strong negative reactions from netizens, and as such, she would seek inputs from individuals she trusted before posting content. She advised fellow content creators to surround themselves with a strong support system or people they could seek advice from if they were concerned about possible backlash.

3) A participant asked if there were any emerging social media approval culture trends that one should be aware of.

- Ms Wong said that it was important for individuals to develop the ability to self-regulate their emotions online when navigating social media approval culture. She said that being able to express their opinions objectively would reduce youths' likelihood of being overly influenced by the content posted and emotions expressed by others online.

ii) Scams

4) Ms Chin asked how the panellists were able to discern between real and fake content online.

- Ms Neo shared that her approach was to practise the 3 R's: Research, React and Repost. She advised youths to **r**esearch the credibility of information before deciding how to **r**eact to the content and then decide whether to **r**epost it.

- Ms Wong acknowledged the prevalence of fake news online and said that youths should be vigilant. She advised youths to be cautious of sensational headlines or images, conduct reverse image searches to verify sources, and cross-reference the information they received against multiple sources.

5) A participant asked what were some ways to avoid falling victim to scams.

- Ms Wong said that youths were susceptible to various types of scams, including job, e-commerce, fake-friend calls, phishing, and investment scams. She advised youths to look out for common signs of scams including the use of familiar branding, e.g., using the "POSB" brand as a header in messages, and messages that created a sense of urgency to prevent individuals from taking time to think before reacting. She also advised youths to be cautious if they received notifications claiming they had won something, and recall whether they had participated in a contest in the first place.

- Ms Neo said that individuals should exercise caution before sharing personal information. She said that youths should verify the sender's email address, phone number, and other contact information before accepting prizes and rewards or sharing personal information.

6) A participant asked the panelists about their thoughts on parasocial relationships (a relationship that a person imagines having with another person whom they do not actually know, such as a celebrity or a fictional character) as a creator/consumer.

- Ms Neo said that parasocial relationships were dangerous if an individual were to place themselves in a vulnerable position by revealing personal information to someone unfamiliar. She said it was important to get to know the other individual before moving the conversation beyond social media platforms. She also cautioned against over-sharing personal information.

(iii) Cyberbullying

7) Ms Chin asked Ms Neo to share her thoughts on cyberbullying as a content creator.

- Ms Neo said that receiving hate comments on social media was unavoidable, given the anonymity that social media platforms provided. She said that she maintained a healthy self-esteem by focusing on her positive qualities, and engaged in activities outside social media (e.g. spending time with her family) rather than dwelling on the comments made by cyberbullies and haters.

- Ms Neo said that she would also engage in constructive discussions with her audience to understand their perspectives and how she could improve.

- Ms Chin added that everyone was responsible for managing their emotions when reacting to social posts and should contribute to fostering a positive and respectful online environment.

8) A participant asked how an individual could be more civil on social media, given the prevalence of trolls and hate online.

- Ms Wong said that as content consumers, individuals should be mindful of the impact of their words and actions on others. She said that individuals should be respectful in their online interactions by sharing constructive or positive comments to help promote a more considerate and positive online experience for everyone.

- Ms Neo said that online comments were subjective, and it was important to consider various perspectives. She said that online interactions should remain civil and advised youths refrain from responding to hate comments and trolls with more negativity.

(iv) Enhancing public education and victim support

9) Ms Chin asked panellists what were some ways youths could support their friends in online spaces.

- Ms Neo said she made a conscious effort to like and comment on her friends' posts and this showed her friends that she cared about and supported their online presence.

- Ms Wong said that youths should reach out for support from trusted individuals when needed. She also said building a supportive online community with positive interactions was essential.

- The panellists shared that youths could utilise the following resources should youths be facing distress from their online interactions:
    - TOUCHline: 1800 6123 123 (Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm), or via email (hello@help123.sg), where individuals can seek professional counselling services.
    - Mindline Online Support: https://www.mindline.sg/home, an online portal that provides tools, tips and resources to help individuals understand and manage their mental health and wellbeing.
    - REACH Community Services: https://www.imh.com.sg/Clinical-Services/Community-based-Services/REACH/Pages/default.aspx, a community-based mental healthcare service for students with emotional, social and/or behavioural issues.