Exercise 2

Read the information. Then read the article and choose the most suitable title.

Choose the title that best fits the whole text, not just a part of it.

Anyone who regularly uses social media will be familiar with that rather irritating sensation of seeing that all their friends seem to be having far more fun than they are. This could be particularly noticeable if you are sitting at home feeling bored while everyone else, it seems, is out partying or enjoying a glamorous holiday. Not fair, is it?

In fact, this might be just one aspect of a widespread and more ominous social phenomenon. Could social media actually make people depressed? A study commissioned by the National Institute for Mental Health has identified 'a strong and significant association between social media use and depression' in a sample of young adults in the USA. This established that the amount of time spent on social media sites, as well as the number of visits to the sites, correlated closely with depression.

Of course, the picture may well be more complex than this. Joanne Davila of Stony Brook University has studied interpersonal relationships between both adolescents and adults. She acknowledges the powerful influence that social networks can have on their users, but says it may just be the case that 'people who are depressed use more social media sites'. In other words, it may be simplistic to conclude that one thing necessarily leads to the other.

As we all know, social media allows people to establish, re-establish and maintain social contacts very easily, with a minimum amount of time spent and at essentially no cost. Relationships can be kept alive with people who live on the other side of the globe, or with those who we rarely, if ever, see. On the other hand, social media can encourage feelings of isolation and, at times, inadequacy.

Naturally, everyone needs to sense that they are liked and approved of. Social media comes into its own here, with 'likes' being the currency of many social media platforms. Many people aim for as many as possible in order to enhance their self-esteem, but this of course is only a short-term boost to morale.

It is widely known that a weakness (as well as a strength) of the internet is that it essentially allows anyone to publish anything. If, like a substantial majority of people, you get your news from social media, then the chances are that you

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are exposed to a daily dose of conspiracy theories and misleading news. And when it's all mixed in with reliable information from respectable and reputable media sources, few of us can really tell which is which with any certainty.

In fact, researchers at Columbia University, using their 'emergent rumour tracker', found that misinformation is equally as likely as genuine news to go viral. The phenomenon is by no means new. After coming under scrutiny, many internet giants began to review their policies with regard to the publication and subsequent removal of fake news. Facebook added a box at the top of its newsfeed to inform users how to deal with dubious stories that look as if they might not be true; if concerned, users can click on it and are taken to Facebook's help centre where they are told about various features frequently found in fake news items, such as misspellings and nonstandard onscreen formatting.

In order to confirm the ease with which fake stories can be not just spread online, but also used to generate income, Filippo Menczer deliberately created a website that would computer-generate gossip about celebrities. This had no factual basis whatsoever, as a disclaimer at the bottom of the page pointed out. The articles also contained advertisements. Sure enough, at the end of the month, Menczer received a cheque in the post, courtesy of the adverts hosted by his page. This was undeniable proof that polluting the internet with lies could actually make a tidy profit, which was the conclusion Menczer expected to reach.

Nowadays, this is well understood, and we have a whole new industry: fake news and digital misinformation. A lot of the work is done by bots – fake accounts created to look like real people, whose only aim is to generate advertising money. Yet, the mainstream IT industry is fighting back. Computer scientists at Indiana University have devised a program to identify whether the source of online content is a bot or a genuine human being.

Another area in which the internet in general, and social networks in particular, are a cause for concern is addiction. According to an article by O'Keefe and Pearson in the journal *Pediatrics*, 22% of teenagers log on to their favourite social networking site ten or more times a day. At first glance, this may not seem particularly problematic, as these ten or more visits almost certainly aren't going to have an adverse effect on the person's health, as can be the case with other addictive behaviours. And yet, it is now clear that people's relationships frequently suffer damage as a result.

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We should also be concerned about the decreasing amount of sleep that heavy users of social media sites find they have time for, which is often inadequate for the body's systems. In other words, this can be detrimental to the well-being of a person. Often, people addicted to social media have a greater propensity to take risks, as compared with the population as a whole.

Essentially, there is no treatment for social media addiction and little understanding of how it can change over time. And how would it respond to therapy? At the moment, we have more questions than answers.

- The drawbacks of social media
- Three reasons not to use social media
- Why social media needs to be regulated
- Here's why social media can get you down

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