

# Together for a better internet

SHILPI

**Keeping children safe online is a challenge for most parents, but it is needed now more than before because their world is mostly online**

A mother of two, Nidhi Pramod, had always been wary of the smartphone and preferred to keep the gadget at arm's length, and for obvious reasons. The humble device that could fit into her palm had knocked her children — Rehaan, 11, and Vivaan, 9 — off their feet in no time. Much to her chagrin, the duo preferred spending most of their waking up hours in its company. Annoyed and alarmed in equal measure at their gadget fascination, Pramod quickly sought intervention. "I was perturbed by the PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds doing the rounds way back then. Their gaming addiction had set the alarm bells ringing. A new internet challenge crops up every day, from Momo to Keke, from Blue Whale to Tide Pod. Children are innocent and can end up falling for these online games, losing a lot in a bitter trade-off for momentary pleasure," warns Pramod, narrating how she could nip the problem in the bud way back in 2018. Back then, it was easier to cut short her kids' digital dalliance but not anymore.

The pandemic struck in 2020, and the entire world was in lockdown. The schools went online and so did everything else, and there was no escape from digital exposure for Pramod's children and others of their ilk. "I have been on guard ever since, but even then, it is getting increasingly difficult for me to monitor my kids' screentime, control their addiction and keep a tab on their online adventures," says the Gurugram-based mother, narrating how like Ro in Decoupled, they have learned to erase their web history.

### Why does it matter?

The issue of internet safety for children needs attention because they are the most vulnerable and can fall prey to online predators who will exploit their innocence for their

gains. But in today's age when technology is integral to people's lives, it is seemingly difficult. "Children are growing up with technology all around, be it their entertainment or education. They are connected online more than ever, spending a large portion of their day in the online world. It could be for learning purposes, gaming or streaming, all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic," says Sonali Kumar, a Navi Mumbai-based educator. At times, overexposure or gadget addiction poses risks that can lead to cyberbullying or accepting internet challenges that can be dangerous for one's life. One can be duped by online scams, or fall into the trap of online

### SAFER INTERNET DAY

predators who prey on young children, finding them through social networking sites, chat rooms, discussion boards, and take advantage of their innocence and going on to sexually exploit them.

A few teenagers and young adults are locked in the throes of their gadgets, vying for attention and social recognition in online media. They don't mind accepting online challenges, befriending a stranger, or even sharing personal details. "Likes and comments on their social media posts, shares and followers makes them feel wanted and desirable. Social media greatly influences a teenager or young adult's social acceptance. It meets the immediate need for gratification," explains Dr Keerti Panda, a clinical psychologist. However, she adds that a lot depends on the neuropsychological and socio-cultural aspect that makes them vulnerable to the Internet's woes.

There's scientific reasoning behind this behaviour. Teens and young adults are

more likely to fall prey to digital monsters, accept and perform risky internet challenges, or fall prey to online scams because the brain's prefrontal cortex (the region responsible for control) is in the developmental stage.

Low serotonin in the brain can also trigger feelings of emptiness, loneliness, low self-esteem, predisposing one to take up Internet challenges and spend a lot of time on mobile/Internet. An in-depth clinical assessment and a series of neuropsychological tests can give a clearer picture of the brain's functioning.

### Digital detox

However, before the pandemic, parents could think of digital detox and opting for engaging ways to keep their kids off the gadgets, but now it doesn't seem easy. Pramod saw her younger one playing an online game and happily chatting with a stranger, sharing intimate details like name, age, school, parents' details, etc. She made her little one watch an animated film Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet, a retelling of "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" fable, to teach her child that people online may not be who they seem.

Dealing with digital addiction involves both medical and psychological management.

### Keeping children safe

The matter needs a holistic effort by all the stakeholders — parents and carers, teachers and educators, researchers, civil society, decision-makers and law enforcement agencies.

Mohamed Mustafa, Founder & CEO, Developing Internet Safe Community (DISC) Foundation, has been working for mass awareness for Safer Internet Day in India since the day came into being. This year on Safer Internet Day, DISC Foundation will be organising a couple of workshops and conducting sensitisation programs in India in coordination with international agencies. Expressing his concern, Mustafa says, "The issue of child abuse online is a worrisome trend in the Indian context because child pornography has risen drastically during the pandemic. People used to abuse children physically, and during the pandemic, the cyber predators are doing it online. To mitigate this problem, we need to enhance the law, law enforcement as well as legal framework in the country."



PHOTO: FREEPIK

## The Web of Woes

**CHILD PORNOGRAPHY:** It refers to images, films or writings which include sexually exploitive activities involving a child.

**Terrorism:** Propaganda, internet campaigns or articles aimed at spreading hatred and terrorism through the internet.

**CHILD GROOMING:** Establishing an emotional relationship with children to reduce inhibitions about sex and later sexually exploit them.

**PRIVACY INVASION:** Collection of personal information other preferences through the monitoring of behavioural patterns and selections.

**GAMING:** Addiction to online gaming prevents the socialization of kids and change in behaviour through aggressive gaming methods.

**VIOLENCE:** Instigation of violence through internet campaigns against other people and the government.

**CYBER SCAMS:** Organized schemes by internet crooks to rob innocent people of their money and possessions.

**GAMBLING:** Illegal gambling through the internet results in the loss of money.

**MISSED CALL SCAM:** Purposefully giving missed calls and thus urging the receiver to call back resulted in money loss.

**SEXTING:** The act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones.

**CYBER RELATIONSHIP:** Intimate interpersonal relationships between individuals online who know each other only via the internet.

**HATEFUL CONTENTS:** Spreading of hateful content online to instigate violence and hatred between people of different races, castes and religions.

**INTERNET ADDICTION:** Refers to excessive computer usage which affects daily life, family relationships and career.

**SPY CAM:** Installation of hidden cameras to obtain information and images invading privacy and violating laws.

**PHISHING:** Refers to the act of attempting to obtain personal information, financial details, username, passwords, etc., through duplicate websites and malware.

**CHILD SEX PREDATORS:** A person who establishes an emotional relationship with children to exploit them sexually.

**CYBER BULLYING:** Harassing, humiliating or threatening another person through electronic media like the internet and text messaging.

**PORNOGRAPHY:** Visual materials containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity are available on the Internet.

MAITHILI CHAKRAVARTHY

This year, after being postponed from January to February, one of Mumbai's most coveted art and cultural events, Mumbai Gallery Weekend (MGW), will take place this month from 10 to 13. The 'weekend' will preview shows by artists, photographers, installation artists, doodle artists, and more. There are group and solo shows, which range from showcasing works by minimalist artists to expressionists to showcasing 'teak-wood prints' to showing rich, embroidered paintings. Some shows like 'Savage Flowers', curated by independent curators like Nancy Adajania, present woven sculptures that use everyday material, found objects and strings of fabric, whereas other shows such as 'Where do We Come From?' by Kochi-based Sosa Joseph present oil paintings inspired by the riverine ecosystem amidst which the artist grew up, in a village in Kerala.

Speaking about the show, Ranjana Steinruecke, Owner, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, says, "We have some beautiful shows previewing this year, along with walk-throughs planned over four

days. From shows by abstract artists like Anupa Mehta to a book launch at the DAG gallery at the Taj Mahal Palace on the iconic masterpieces of Indian modern art to ceramics showcased by a Sri Lankan artist at Jhaveri Contemporary, to our own show, the 'week-end' promises to have something for everyone."

An exhibition called Bkck by Mumbai-based Santanu Hazarika

# A touch of PAST & a hint of PRESENT!



Sosa Joseph, Gift From the River II, 2021

Other exhibitions one can look forward to are Information Architecture by Kunel Gaur, Trinity by Hetain Patel, Cosmos by Desmond Lazaro, Portraits of Intimacy by Sathi Guin, and As I Am by T. Venkanna. 'As I Am' is a continuation of a series by the artist before it called 'Love Me'. The two series come together as 'Love me as I am'. 'As I Am' is a story of sexual imagination, and how there is a kind of alienation in recent times. How love has fallen by the wayside and lust has gotten more importance," says curator of 'As I Am', Abhay Maskara.

The works which are the handiwork of 14 Zardozi Karigars from Lucknow showcase ideas of angst and how the emotional and physi-

### Mumbai Gallery Weekend is back to woo art connoisseurs with eclectic artworks rooted in modern times and history

Many of the artists who have created fresh works for the 'weekend' have sought inspiration from where they grew up, the idea of migration, to displacement to even taking inspiration from the politics of the day, how political ads are reused. A show by photographer Ritesh Uttamchandani, curated by Ranjit Hoskote, explores this very theme, where images from across Mumbai show how political hoardings have found a new life. Either as roofs of houses or clothing for goddess sculptures or coverings for street-side stalls. "There are three layers to the show. One is a book I brought out in 2018, The Red Cat and Other Stories, which has been stacked on shelves. The other layer is the entire book put out for display as a spread, and the third layer is the images themselves," shares Uttamchandani. The images hope to present a commentary on society

will invite viewers into a world of "comfortable turbulence". Winner of the Red Bull Doodle Art championships in 2014, Hazarika who doodles themes relating to pop art, Japanese anime, philosophy and other themes has also jumped onto the metaverse bandwagon. He will soon launch a line of cool repurposed jackets and T-shirts that will be available to wear physically and as NFTs.



T. Venkanna, As I Am

and a pictorial investigation of the curiosity that the hoardings often generate among us. What actually happens to them when parties are done with them?

Delhi-based Parul Gupta, an artist participating in a group show titled Ufuq: Zarina A Tribute, says, "This is the first time I have dealt with a topic that I had so far been trying to escape. Of family and financial troubles, and continually moving houses in Delhi. There have been similarities between Zarina's themes and mine, with loss and relocation being a common one." In the works, Gupta has used black primarily — charcoal, oil pastels, and ink on paper to convey her feelings, to pay homage to feminist artist, Zarina Hashmi. The show curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala is the art historian's way of paying tribute to an essentially South Asian artist whom the world lost two years ago. Ufuq means horizon and the show seeks to celebrate Hashmi's "incredibly political and beautiful remembered legacy".

The subject of going back home has been examined by Mumbai-based Saju Kunhan in a show called 'Home Ground', where he has explored his ancestral history and the battle march of North Malabar and how his people who were mainly warriors migrated to Kerala. "I constructed the works from collective memory by observing my two ancestral homes, which were in a

Parul Gupta, Ufuq: Zarina A Tribute



demolished condition. Migration is an important theme for me and I also try to show my great grandfather's brother's journey to Fiji; he was an indentured labourer. Another grand uncle who was being sent to Penang is also shown," Kunhan explains. The process of transferring images digitally onto teak-wood is called 'displacement' and quite telling of how the art also migrates from one media to another. Just like Kunhan's family did. For Kunhan "history is extremely important today".

cal self varies. Maskara says one should view the show with an open mind, and that there are quintessential elements of surprise within it. The paintings question typical ways in which sexuality has been thought about so far. They explore the realm of sexual fantasy, which often stems from the sexual conditioning in society. How day-dreaming allows one that flight of fantasy, and right and wrong are surpassed. Well as Picasso says, "Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth."