

Should those under 16 be banned from social media?

What they said . . .

'I've spoken to thousands of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. They, like me, are worried sick about the safety of our kids online'

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese

'For my son and for countless other neurodiverse kids, the social media ban is going to isolate a group of kids already at high risk for loneliness'

Pilaf Mitchell, a freelance journalist

On November 28, 2024, Australia passed legislation making it the first country in the world to ban those under 16 from accessing some social media platforms. [↗](#)

The legislation is supported by 77 percent of Australians [↗](#) as a desirable measure to protect young people from risks associated with social media; however, it has been criticised by many experts [↗](#) and the Australian Human Rights Commission. [↗](#) There are also concerns as to whether a ban can be effectively implemented.

Methods of implementing the ban are being trialed from January 2025 and the ban is expected to be in place by early next year. [↗](#)

Debate around the issue continues and is likely to intensify as the implementation date approaches.

Background

Most of the information found below has been drawn from the Wikipedia entry titled 'Online Safety Amendment'. The full text can be accessed at [↗](#)

Social media platforms affected by the ban

The law will bar under-16s from being able to access social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit and X. Exemptions will apply for health and education services including YouTube, Messenger Kids, WhatsApp, Kids Helpline and Google Classroom. [↗](#)

Development of the Social Media Minimum Age Act 2024

The Social Media Minimum Age Act 2024 is an Australian act of parliament that aims to restrict the use of social media by minors under the age of 16.

The legislation imposes monetary punishments on social media companies that fail to take reasonable steps to prevent minors from creating accounts on their services. The Act is expected to take force in 2025.

The idea of a social media ban for young people was first proposed by the wife of the premier of South Australia. The premier and then the South Australian Government supported the concept and proposed it to the federal government.

Support for the Social Media Minimum Age Act

The plan is supported by the governments of every state and territory. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese adopted the plan and has described social media as a 'scourge'. He stated, 'I want people to spend more time on the footy field or the netball court than they're spending on their phones.' The prime minister is concerned that social media 'is having a negative impact on young people's mental health and on anxiety'.

Prime Minister Albanese also stated, 'I've spoken to thousands of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. They, like me, are worried sick about the safety of our kids online.' [↗](#)

The Federal Opposition also supported the plan and voted with the government when the Bill was presented to Parliament.

Parent groups and various researchers lobbied for the Act and continue to support it. Included among these support groups is 36 Months, 'a movement for healthy teen development, without the influence of social media, focused on the 36 months between 13 and 16.' [↗](#)

Concerns about the Social Media Minimum Age Act

Despite their support of the Act, the Federal Opposition is concerned about the invasion of privacy that will occur with the introduction of identification-based age checks. The Law Council has raised concerns over how the law may be implemented, stating that the scope of the legislation is too broad and presents risks to privacy and human rights. The Privacy Commissioner, Carly Kind, has also expressed scepticism regarding the legislation.

Australia's Human Rights Commission is concerned that the Act restricts the rights of Australian youth and argues that the aims of the Act could be achieved in other ways. [↗](#)

The Digital Industry Group is concerned about its implementation and potential impacts. TikTok described the legislation as 'rushed' and risked pushing younger users to 'darker corners of the internet'.

[Social media protections for children in France](#)

France has made it mandatory since 2023 for children under 15 to obtain parental consent to register on social media platforms, which are required to implement a system to verify whether that consent has been obtained.


The law also mandates that platforms create systems to verify users' ages. French authorities can impose fines of up to 1 percent of global revenue on platforms that fail to comply with these rules. In addition, parents can request platforms to suspend their 15-year-old children's social media accounts.

Internet information


On January 7, 2025, the University of Queensland published a comment titled 'Banning social media won't fix Australia's youth mental health crisis' by Child Health Research Centre PhD Candidate Julie Blake and Professor James Scott. The opinion piece suggests that the measure is a simplistic solution and that there are better alternatives available.

The full text can be accessed at 


On December 7, 2024, The Australian published a comment by freelance writer Virginia Tapscott titled 'Smartphone, stupid social media: why I'm for the ban'. The writer uses her limited experience of social media as an adolescent to suggest some of the dangers she believes make the ban desirable.

The full text can be accessed at 


On December 3, 2024, The Guardian published an article titled 'Protecting or restricting? The effect of social media bans on the big dreams of young Australians'. The article presents the views of several teenage Australians who have used social media to help establish themselves in areas they are passionate about. All argue that the impending ban would have prevented them achieving what they have.

The full text can be accessed at 


On December 1, 2024, educator Richard Rogers posted a comment on his education blog Richard Rogers: Decrypt. Define. Delineate. The opinion piece is titled 'Australia's Social Media Ban for Under-16s: A Bold Step with Educational Benefits'. The comment outlines several the advantages for young people of being removed from social media.

The full text can be accessed at 

On November 29, 2014, Griffith University published a comment by Professor Jennifer Alford titled 'Why banning social media for under 16s is not a good idea'. The article list seven alternatives (other than a ban) which could reduce the negative impact of social media on young people.


The full text can be accessed at 

On November 28, 2024, The Conversation published a comment by Lisa M. Given, Professor of Information Sciences & Director, Social Change Enabling Impact Platform at RMIT University. The piece is titled 'Australia's social media ban for kids under 16 just became law. How it will work remains a mystery'. The opinion piece examines several of the implementation issues that the social media ban will face.


The full text can be accessed at 

On November 26, 2024, Crikey published a list of links to six groups supporting a ban on those under 16 accessing social media and seven groups opposed to such a ban.


The annotated list is headed 'Advocates argue children need time to develop before venturing out on social media, while detractors say the bill has been rushed and that freedom of expression is at risk.'

The full text can be accessed at 


On November 6, 2024, The West Australian published a comment from Lorraine Finlay, Australia's Human Rights Commissioner and Anne Hollonds, the National Children's Commissioner. The opinion piece is titled 'Lorraine Finlay & Anne Hollonds: Social media ban will not keep kids safe'. The author's condemn the lack of effective consultation before the law was passed, question its likely effectiveness and suggest it ignores some important children's rights.

The full text can be accessed at 


On November 25, 2024, The Australian published a comment by Toby Walsh, Laureate Fellow and Scientia Professor of Artificial Intelligence at the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of New South Wales. The opinion piece is titled 'How young people can still access benefits of social media if banned from adult zones'. Walsh argues that the ban could prompt the social media platforms to produce child-appropriate material for kid access.

The full text can be accessed at 

On November 21, 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission issued a statement outlining arguments for and against a social media ban for those under 16. The Commission concluded by stating its reservations about the measure.

The full text can be accessed at 

On November 21, 2024, The Guardian published an opinion piece by columnist Van Badham titled 'A social media ban for everyone is in the national interest - not just kids under 16'. The comment argues that social media is ultimately a damaging experience for all Australians, not only children and young adolescents.

The full text can be accessed at 

On November 18, 2024, Save the Children Australia, the Australian branch of a welfare organisation assisting children worldwide published a comment titled "'A band-aid on a gunshot wound': children and young people say social media ban for under 16s

won't stop online harm' The opinion piece, which represents the position of the Australian organisation opposes the ban considering inappropriate and likely to cause harm.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On November 14, 2024, The Educator published an article presenting the views of Dr Alexia Maddox, Director of Digital Education and Senior Lecturer in Pedagogy and Education Futures in La Trobe University's School of Education. The piece is titled 'Social media ban may impact vulnerable youth - expert'. Dr Maddox argues that for many vulnerable young people social media provides valuable support networks.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On November 12, 2024, StartUp Daily published a comment titled 'Looking at both sides of the Australian government's plan to ban under-16s from social media, it's more complicated than I first thought as a parent' by Ben Liebmann, the Founder of Understory - Business of Culture: Media and Entertainment, Brands, Restaurants and Hospitality.

The opinion piece examines ten arguments commonly made against the ban and presents a counter argument for each.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On November 8, 2024, The Independent published an analysis titled 'How might a social media ban benefit under-16s - and are there any drawbacks?' The article looks at the views of a variety of experts some supporting and others opposing a ban.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On October 9, 2024, 146 academics and organizations associated with the Australian Child Rights Taskforce signed an open letter to the Prim Minister, Anthony Albanese, in which they expressed their reservations about the impact of a ban on those under 16 accessing social media.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On October 4, 2024, The Australian Academy of the Humanities published an opinion piece by Professor Axel Bruns and Dr Aleesha Rodriguez titled 'An age ban on social media is unworkable - what are the alternatives?' The article explains some of the impracticalities of the ban and suggests other ways to improve young people's online experience.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On October 1, 2024, The Westsider published a comment by Marty McGauran, a cyberbullying educator. The opinion piece is titled 'A social media ban for kids; A band-aid solution or a necessary step?'

The article supports the ban as a beginning step but argues that it must be followed by education for both parents and their children.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On September 18, 2024, The Guardian published a comment by Chanel Contos titled 'Until social media giants take responsibility for the harm they cause, I support Australia's age ban'. Contos is the founder of Teach Us Consent and the author of Consent Laid Bare. The opinion piece argues that the harm caused by social media makes a ban necessary.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On September 10, 2024, Scimex published the opinions of twenty Australian academics on the government's proposal to ban those under 16 from accessing social media. Scimex (the Science Media Exchange) is an online news portal aimed primarily at helping journalists cover science. The opinions are headed 'EXPERT REACTION: Australian government to impose social media ban for kids'. The twenty academics represent a range of views.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

Arguments in favour of banning those under 16 from social media?

1. Social media platforms present a threat to the mental health of young users

Those seeking to ban young people from social media want to protect them from the adverse psychological effects social media exposure can have. These effects are likely to be particularly harmful for the young.

Many recent studies have noted an increase among young people in the incidence of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. Research has indicated that around 13.6 percent of Australian children aged 4 to 11 are experiencing a mental health disorder. It has also been found that children who are struggling are at greater risk of continued problems in adolescence and adulthood including long-term mental illness and poorer outcomes in education and relationships. It is estimated that half of all mental illnesses experienced in adulthood begin before age 14. [🔗](#) The recent National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing revealed that the prevalence of mental disorders in 16- to 24-year-olds rose by 50 percent, from 26 percent in 2007 to 39 percent in 2021. [🔗](#)

Studies have shown that young people with mental disorders are likely to be substantial users of social media. [🔗](#) Although a direct causal link has not yet been established, a 2020 study showed that people who deactivated their Facebook accounts were less depressed, less anxious, and reported higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction. [🔗](#) Another study of 6,595 US adolescents between ages 12 and 15 found that those who spent more than three hours a day on social media had twice the risk of symptoms of depression and anxiety as non-users. It also cites other studies that found reducing social media use led to improvements in mental health. [🔗](#) One of the suggested links between mental disorders among children and adolescents and social media use is sleep deprivation. Accessing social media at night can disrupt a child's sleep. One review of the findings of 20 individual studies found that bedtime media usage among children is associated with insufficient sleep duration, poor sleep quality and excessive daytime sleepiness. [🔗](#) Children between the ages of 5 and 16 should get between 9 and 11 hours of

sleep every night. Getting inadequate sleep can increase their risk for depression and anxiety. [↗](#)

It has also been suggested that social media use contributes to damaged self-esteem. The Social Media Victims' Law Center has noted, 'Facebook has been pinpointed as a social networking site that attracts adolescents with lower self-esteem yet worsens the problem as the teens engage in higher levels of social comparison. This can create an even lower, skewed self-image.' [↗](#) Dr Jill Emanuele, a senior psychologist in the Mood Disorders Center at the Child Mind Institute, has stated, 'Kids view social media through the lens of their own lives. If they're struggling to stay on top of things or suffering from low self-esteem, they're more likely to interpret images of peers having fun as confirmation that they're doing badly compared to their friends.' [↗](#) A group of United States child welfare experts recently wrote to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg urging him to close down Messenger Kids - a messaging app developed for children - saying it was irresponsible to encourage pre-teens to use the platform. It cited evidence of adolescents reporting severe mood changes because of social media use and girls as young as 10 facing body image issues because of the pictures they are bombarded with on platforms such as Facebook-owned Instagram. [↗](#)

Use of social media is also believed to be a contributory factor in the increase in eating disorders among children and adolescents. Recent studies indicate more than 1.1 million Australians, including one in five teenage girls, have an eating disorder. Experts warn that online toxic body image content is contributing to the 200 percent increase in cases among 10- to 14-year-olds and a 76 per cent increase among those aged 15-19-year-olds since 2012. [↗](#) Eating disorders are characterised by altered eating behaviour that damages a person's physical and mental health. They are particularly common among adolescents and young adults, especially girls. Dissatisfaction with body weight or shape is the primary contributing factor among adolescents and young adults. There is evidence associating prolonged media exposure and the development of eating disorders. [↗](#) A study has linked material frequently presented on TikTok to the development of anorexia nervosa and bulimia among young people. [↗](#) This type of content, which often takes the form of "thinspiration" or "fitspiration", can serve as a trigger for those already struggling with eating disorders. "Thinspiration" and "fitspiration" are terms that refer to content intended to inspire individuals toward achieving thinness or fitness. These campaigns can lead to unhealthy body image ideals. Thinspiration particularly focuses on promoting extreme thinness as an aesthetic goal. These promotions can encourage the development of distorted body image ideals in vulnerable children. [↗](#) Professor Tracey Wade of Flinders University has warned, 'Imagery is really a powerful communicator to our brain. It's much more powerful than the spoken word in terms of influencing emotion, which is why it has to be managed so carefully on social media.' [↗](#) Studies have found a significantly higher susceptibility to eating disorder-related behaviours and over-thinking of body weight and shape among girls with Snapchat and Tumblr accounts and boys with Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram accounts. [↗](#)

2. Social media platforms carry content inappropriate for young users



Those seeking to ban young people from social media want to protect them from the adverse effects of exposure to inappropriate material. Through social media children and teenagers can view materials which they lack the maturity, experience and psychological readiness to deal with. This exposure can cause them significant harm.

The Office of Australia's eSafety Commissioner has supplied a description of the types of inappropriate material to which young people can be exposed on social media. This can include sexually explicit material, false or misleading information, violent material, extremist views, or incentives to terrorism, and hateful or offensive material including racism and misogyny. [↗](#) A high proportion of young people aged 12 to 17 in Australia have encountered inappropriate or hateful content online. 57 percent have seen real violence that was disturbing, 33 percent have seen images or videos promoting terrorism and nearly half of children between the ages of 9 and 16 are regularly exposed to sexual images. [↗](#)


Exposure to violent material online presents children with harmful behaviour models, creates confusion, and causes fear and anxiety. Viewing violence feeds a perception that the world is a violent and dangerous place. It increases fear of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviours and a mistrust of others. Viewing violence may lead to real life violence. Children exposed to violence at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behaviour later in life than children who are not so exposed. Young children are particularly likely to be harmed by exposure to representational violence. Children under the age of seven or eight find it difficult to distinguish between fantasy and reality. To the young child there is little distinction between what is shown on screen and what occurs or might occur in real life. [↗](#)




Exposure to sexual material online, including pornography, can influence the sexual development of young people, causing confusion and affecting attitudes and behaviours. South Australian researchers Associate Professor Elspeth McInnes and Dr Lesley-Anne Ey have noted increasing reports of children under 10 years of age exhibiting harmful sexual behaviour towards each other. A 2016 report found that child-on-child sexual assaults in New South Wales rose from 44 in 2006 to 80 in 2015, while the number of indecent assaults between children more than doubled from 33 to 73 in the same period. In Victoria, referrals relating to children with problematic sexual behaviour increased from 10-15 in the early 2000s to more than 200 a year in 2016. The increase can be attributed to a range of factors, including sexual abuse and exposure to pornography. [↗](#)




The use of pornography by adolescents is associated with stronger permissive sexual attitudes. There is some evidence that exposure to pornography can increase the likelihood of earlier first-time sexual experience, particularly for those adolescents who consume pornography more frequently. Pornography can influence a young person's expectations about sex, for example what young men expect their partners to do and vice versa. It can shape sexual practices, with studies finding that young people may try performing common sexual acts seen in dominant hetero pornography such as anal intercourse. Adolescent pornography use is associated with stronger beliefs in gender stereotypes, particularly for males. Male adolescents who view pornography frequently are more likely to view women as sex objects and to hold sexist attitudes such as women "leading men on". Pornography may encourage sexual violence and violence against women. [↗](#)



Social media is also concerning because it does not represent a reliable or appropriate information source for children. Henrietta Fore, executive director of the United Nations Children's Fund has warned about the impact on children of a digital environment saturated with harmful information. The popularity of the internet, social media, and visual networks such as Instagram and TikTok among children has exacerbated the risks. The United Kingdom's Commission on Fake News and Critical Literacy in Schools concluded that 'fake news is a serious problem for children and young people, threatening their well-being, [and] trust in journalism and democracy itself'. In navigating the digital world, with their cognitive capacities still in development, children are particularly vulnerable to the risks of mis/disinformation.  The lack of an appropriate filter on social media also allows for children to have access to material that can lead to direct physical harm. Clinical researchers from Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust have reviewed the international research evidence regarding the impact of viewing images of self-harm on the internet and in social media. This indicates that viewing such images usually causes harm. This included an increase in self-harm, such as through triggering urges to self-harm, and enabling social connections with others who are self-harming, which can reinforce an individual's personal identity as someone who self-harms. 



3. Social media is one of the major digital platforms where cyberbullying occurs



Those seeking to ban young people from social media want to protect them from the adverse effects of cyberbullying. The United States public service site stopbullying.gov states, 'The most common places where cyberbullying occurs are social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok, text messaging and messaging apps on mobile or tablet devices and instant messaging, direct messaging, and online chatting over the internet. 

Cyberbullying is the use of technology, primarily the Internet and social media, to defame, insult, or intimidate someone.  Cyberbullying can take many forms. New South Wales police includes among the different forms of cyberbullying abusive texts, online posts and emails; imitating others online using fake profile and other methods; spreading rumours and damaging telling lies online; making hurtful comments; making threats or comments designed to intimidate online; repeated unwanted messages; people using a victim's account to send fake posts; people sending photos or videos of their victim to others to embarrass or humiliate them and excluding others online.  United States data suggests the most common type of harassment youth encounter online is name-calling. Some 42 percent of teens say they have been called offensive names online or via their cellphone. Additionally, about a third (32 percent) of teens say someone has spread false rumors about them on the internet, while smaller shares have had someone other than a parent constantly ask where they are, who they're with or what they're doing (21 percent) or have been the target of physical threats online (16 percent). 

A high percentage of Australian children and adolescents have experienced cyberbullying. This high incidence seems entrenched and has increased greatly in a decade. In 2020 the Headspace National Youth Mental Health Survey found one in two Australian young people have experienced some form of cyberbullying in their lifetime (51 percent). In 2018 the rate was similar at 53 percent. Experiences of cyberbullying remain stable among young women, young men, and for each of the age groups.  The current figure is much higher than it was ten years previously. In 2011 it was reported to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety that over a 12-month period, between 10 percent and 20 percent of children and young people had been cyberbullied, with 10-15 percent of students experiencing cyberbullying more than once.  Current Australian figures replicate the incidence of cyberbullying in the United States where in 2018 a Pew Research Center survey found that 59 percent of teenagers had personally experienced at least one of six types of abusive online behaviours. 

Cyberbullying can result in significant harm to the children and adolescents who suffer because of it. The Australian Human Rights Commission has stated, 'Cyberbullying, can have serious impacts on individuals, organisations, and communities. Cyberbullying can be detrimental to a person's mental and physical health. Victims can experience significant social isolation and feel unsafe. It can lead to emotional and physical harm, loss of self-esteem, feelings of shame and anxiety, concentration and learning difficulties. Incidents of young people committing suicide have also occurred.  Cyberbullying may be particularly detrimental to youth because individuals who cyberbully can access their victims more readily. For young people, traditional bullying generally takes place at school, whereas with cyberbullying, the aggression can be perpetrated at any time of the day or any day of the week and without the direct presence of the victim. Children and adolescents who are bullied through electronic means are also less likely to report their abuse or to seek help than victims of traditional bullying. Cyberbullied youth who suffer in silence perceive that they are supported less.  The




The United Nations has also warned of the threat of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents. In its statement regarding Child and Youth Safety Online, it warns, 'It has never been easier for child sex offenders to contact their potential victims, share imagery and encourage others to commit offences. Some 80 percent of children in 25 countries report feeling in danger of sexual abuse or exploitation online.  A research article published in October 2024 by The Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health stated, 'With the rise of technology, social media consumption by young children has become part of normal life. The ease of fabricating an online persona also means children become accessible by predators, placing them at risk of exploitation including the production of child abuse material, online grooming and child sexual abuse. 




Another extremely concerning issue related to cyberbullying is the growing incidence of suicide among Australian young people. The Australian Competition and Commission in its 2019 Inquiry into Preventing and Policing Cybercrime (Cyberbullying) in Australia noted 'There is extensive evidence available from multiple credible sources within Australia and internationally, which demonstrates an increasing number of cyberbullying recipients committing suicide per annum, across all ages.' The Commission also noted that cyberbullying was a major contributory factor in at least three suicides per week among Australian youth.  In a resource released by the Edith Cowan University on May 25, 2023, it was noted 'Messages such as "you should just kill yourself" can be common in cyberbullying.  Cyberbullicide is a new term for a subclass of suicides that was coined by prominent cyberbullying researchers Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin in the 2000s. The term describes suicides that are directly or indirectly influenced by online aggression or cyberbullying. Studies have demonstrated that students who are involved in bullying and cyberbullying (both offenders and victims) have a significantly elevated likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts, suicide


attempts, or completed suicide. 




4. Social media can impede the development of real-world social skills and limit academic performance

Those seeking to ban young people from social media want to encourage them to develop real-world social skills and avoid distractions that restrict their academic performance.

There is concern that restricting social engagement largely to online experiences prevents young people developing a valuable set of real-world social skills. Face-to-face contact between young people has been shown to have dramatically reduced. In the United States, a 2022 study by the Pew Research Center found that teenagers' access to smartphones has increased from 73 percent in 2014 to 95 percent at the time of the study. When questioned 35 percent of those surveyed claimed to use at least one of the top five social media platforms 'almost constantly'.  In Australia 97 percent of Australian teens aged 14-17 reportedly using social media. On average, Australian teenagers use four different social media services and spend more than three hours per day on their favored sites.  Research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies has found that half of all Australian teens now spend more time, or as much time, online with their friends as seeing them in person. The findings showed 46 percent of 16-year-olds and 36 percent of 14-year-olds spent the same time engaging with friends via Snapchat, video gaming, Instagram or TikTok as seeing them face-to-face. 





Clinical psychologists have examined the effect that reduced face-to-face interactions has on the social development of young people. Dr Catherine Steiner-Adair, a clinical psychologist and author has stated, 'As a species we are very highly attuned to reading social cues. There's no question kids are missing out on very critical social skills. In a way, texting and online communicating puts everybody in a context where body language, facial expression, and even the smallest kinds of vocal reactions are rendered invisible.'  The limited range of social cues available online is believed to impede young people's social development. Research has shown that children who understand emotional cues in social settings can develop superior social skills and more positive peer relationships. Non-verbal, affective cues are much stronger when it comes to communicating in person rather than digitally. Face-to-face communication (specifically eye contact and pointing) has been shown to be crucial when teaching children about social interaction and the world around them.  It has also been suggested that interacting largely online can reduce empathy. Restricted social cues can cause young people to become more callous, anxious, and insecure. 

There is also evidence to suggest that increased screen time among very young children hinders their language development. The Hanen Centre, a Canadian not-for-profit organization working to promote language, social and literacy skills in young children, has highlighted a 2020 review of 42 studies that found that children who spent more time on screens had lower language skills. Another study of 157 toddlers found that children who spent more time on screens had lower language skills. Similarly, a 2022 study found that children aged 17 - 36 months who spent more time viewing screens had smaller vocabularies. 

It has also been claimed that social media use can harm young people's academic performance. A 2023 study conducted by the University of Delaware analysed survey data from 1,459 middle schoolers in the northeast United States and found that their academic achievement decreased as their Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter (now known as X) use increased. He researchers concluded 'Social media likely poses a distraction to early adolescents. Attention that they would typically invest in their schoolwork is diverted to social media use, which ultimately affects their ability to perform well in school. But lower academic achievement may also result from other aspects of development that are affected by social media use. For example, social media use can disrupt healthy family functioning or peer relationships, which can then lower early adolescents' performance in school.'  A 2020 study published in the journal Computers & Education found a 'significant negative correlation between late-night social media use and academic performance'. The researchers suggested that social media notifications and the constant urge to check updates can disrupt study flow and lead to sleep deprivation, ultimately hindering focus and academic achievement.  It has also been noted that social media becomes a vehicle through which students can ongoingly compare their performances. This heightens student stress and anxiety. Statistics from a 2023 study by the American Psychological Association reveal a concerning link between social media use and increased stress levels among students. 

5. Parents appreciate the government's help in protecting their children from the harms of social media as social media platforms are not doing enough to safeguard young users

Those seeking to ban young people from social media argue that a ban is necessary because parents are unable to give their children adequate protection. They further claim that the various social media platforms have not protected young users and therefore they need regulatory pressure placed upon them by governments.

Many parents have complained that it is extremely difficult to successfully regulate their children's access to social media platforms. Jane Rowan, the chief executive of Eating Disorder Families Australia, has stated, 'Parents are really crying out for some help, we're struggling. It's like trying to stop a tsunami on most days and when you're up against that algorithm . . . it's impossible.'  Bushra Khan, a lecturer in the School of Health and Society at Wollongong University, has warned of the difficulties parents face when they try to monitor their children's social media use. She states, 'It can make teenagers feel that their privacy is being invaded, leading to resentment and secrecy.'  Forms of parental control that adolescents see as a restriction on their freedom of expression also increase secrecy.  For young people seeking to avoid parental monitoring there are numerous strategies available. Sam Black, marketing manager for a company that sells Internet filters and online trackers, has stated, 'To hide, a child or teen may create alternative names, nicknames (or) secret email addresses, and access social media sites from alternative devices such as phones, gaming devices or even a library computer.' 

It has been argued that one of the reasons young people resist parents regulating their social media access is that the material is presented to them in ways that prompt addiction. Social psychologist Professor Jonathan Haidt has argued that digital platforms were less harmful in their original formulation; however, he has stated, 'Everything changed beginning in 2009 when Facebook added the like button and later the share button.' Instagram followed in 2010 and likes and shares are now key

features of other social media platforms. Professor Haidt claims, 'You have so much engagement data that you can use algorithms to feed stuff to people based on what will engage them.' Technology engineer Aza Raskin, who helped design the infinite scroll feature of social media apps, has noted, 'It's as if they're taking behavioural cocaine and just sprinkling it all over your interface and that's the thing that keeps you coming back and back and back. . . Behind every screen on your phone, there are generally. . . a thousand engineers that have worked on this thing to try to make it maximally addicting.'

Many Australian parents have expressed their gratitude for the Australian social media ban on those under 16. They claim it will help them to protect their children. One Melbourne mother interviewed by an ABC reporter said a ban would give her a more powerful reason to say no when her younger daughter asked her to join social media. She stated, 'It's a blanket rule - it's like my kid wanting to go and get a cigarette, it's not happening. It's black and white and that's what I think, as parents, we are really craving at the moment.' A freelance writer and mother similarly wrote to The Australian, 'With my oldest having just turned nine, this is one fight I am glad I will never have to have. What a blessing that my kids will be spared this toxic space for a few more precious years...The social media ban for children has restored my faith in our ability to see reason and for common sense to unite us...Finally, a law that prioritises our most vulnerable above profits and political gain.'

There is also concern that the social media platform providers are not doing enough to protect young people. This complaint has been made by several former employees of these companies. Arturo Bejar, a former Facebook technician has described his disappointment over his daughter's experience of using Instagram. He stated, 'I really can't imagine a world where, as things stand today, these things are safe for a 13-year-old to use. At that age, you're still developing in so many ways, and you experience the world so intensely. And then you have an environment that really doesn't provide the right safeguards on time spent or what happens when someone makes a comment that makes you uncomfortable, or what happens if you get bullied.' After complaining unsuccessfully to Meta, Bejar concluded, 'Companies like Meta will need to be compelled by regulators and policymakers to be transparent about these harms and what they are doing to address them.' A former TikTok employee and parent of a four-year-old has similarly stated, 'The foundation of what drives this industry is fundamentally against the safety of our children. When it comes to child safety, it's always an afterthought. It's always after a million mistakes happen and a ton of pressure gets put on you by regulators and parent groups. So, you have to come up with solutions to keep children "safe", but it's never foolproof.'

Arguments against banning those under 16 from social media?

1. The ban will remove the social and mental health benefits that social media can provide for young people

Opponents of a ban on social media claim this is a crude measure which ignores the many social and mental health benefits that online interaction can provide. They also argue that it exaggerates the role social media may play in the development of mental disorders among the young.

Social media can provide many social benefits for young people. The Mayo Clinic has outlined some of the benefits that social media can provide. These include providing social support for those who lack connections offline and are lonely. Social media can also provide contact for people undergoing stress. This includes finding support from people undergoing similar difficulties. The Mayo Clinic also notes that social media can supply connections for people who belong to groups that are often socially marginalised or discriminated against, such as racial minorities, the LGBTQ community and those who are differently abled. Finally, the Mayo Clinic suggests that social media can help people with long-term medical conditions find support, again often from among those with the same condition. On December 16, 2024, the parenting segment Kidspot published a comment by Pilar Mitchell. She explained her 13-year-old son's distress when she told him that by the end of 2025, he would no longer be able to use Snapchat. He replied, 'But how can I talk to Will and Hamish?' Mitchell then explained further, 'Henry is autistic, and making friends is a long, sometimes bumpy process. . . For my son and for countless other neurodiverse kids, the social media ban is going to isolate a group of kids already at high risk for loneliness.'

The Mayo Clinic noted that social media can relieve some of the social issues that are a particular problem for many young people. Social media can offer an avenue for self-expression for young people for whom that is not available in their off-line world. It can allow them to make connections (sometimes across long distances) if they live in remote or socially isolated areas. The Mayo Clinic also noted that social media can help those suffering with mental disorders. An article published in the Journal of Technology and Behavioural Science in April 2020 explained some of the ways in which social media can assist those with mental health issues. These included 'Online peer support helps [young people] seek information, discuss symptoms and medication, share experiences, learn to cope and for self-disclosure.' It suggested that social media also allows 'individuals with mental disorders [to] establish new relationships, feel less alone or reconnect with people.'

Those supporting continued access to social media dispute that it is the primary cause of the mental challenges many young people face. Professor Bridianne O'Dea, who is involved in mental health and technology research at Flinders University, has stated, 'Decades of research has shown very clearly that mental illness and suicide are extremely complex. Attempting to identify a single cause oversimplifies the nature of mental illness and is a very dangerous path to take. . . From a research perspective, the internet and social media have been around long enough for us to examine some of the impacts they have had on the community. Let me say upfront that there is almost no quality scientific evidence showing a direct causal link between social media, suicide, and mental illness. The general consensus among both researchers and clinicians globally is that online interactions can actually have a positive impact on those experiencing a mental health problem.' Professor O'Dea explained further, 'Social media enables broad dissemination of [quality] information. Reputable mental health organisations such as Black Dog Institute and Beyondblue have large Facebook and Twitter followings and they use these to regularly share helpful and relevant advice. Other organisations, including headspace and SANE, provide online forums where people can obtain more tailored support from clinically qualified moderators.'

Mental health services have warned that sudden withdrawal of the online support and social contact currently available through social media could be very harmful for young people. Tracy Adams, the director of Kids Helpline has warned, 'Kids Helpline have

a social channel and we are concerned that a blanket ban could shut down things that are safe and working. Young people are worried that they'll lose those connections.' A similar point was made by Professor Catriona Davis-McCabe, president of the Australian Psychological Society. Professor Davis-McCabe, has warned of the effect of a withdrawal of social support, stating, 'Everything is based around social media now, and I think that a lot of young people who use it on a daily basis have formed habits and dependencies around it. By removing the source of constant stimulation, it does have the potential to lead to withdrawal symptoms, and that can include things like anxiety, restlessness, and irritability. A complete ban could isolate some children, especially those who do use social media to stay connected with people and friends in the community.'

2. The ban will remove the creative, and entrepreneurial benefits that social media can provide for young people
Opponents of a ban preventing those under 16 accessing social media argue that such a ban ignores the some of the many benefits that social media offers young users. Among these opportunities are creative outlets and business experience. Many young people have claimed that without the opportunities provided to them through social media they would not have been able to achieve their creative and career goals.

Social media greatly expands the opportunities for young people to develop and exhibit their creativity. A study published in January 2024 from the University of Media and Arts Raipur on the role of social media in the creativity of youth concluded, 'Social media serves as a potent catalyst for creativity, offering young individuals unprecedented access to diverse content, instant feedback, and collaboration opportunities. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube empower youth to showcase their talents, build personal brands, and engage with a global audience, fostering an environment where creativity can thrive. The interactive nature of these platforms not only enhances creative skills but also promotes cultural enrichment and innovation.'

Pew Research Center study released in 2018 found that 71 percent of the young Americans surveyed stated that social media platforms gave them 'a place to show their creative side'. Another study released in 2019 considered the effect of social media on creativity for adults and children. It noted, 'If creativity can be influenced by those that we choose to interact with, then increasing the number of people who have access to social media would be beneficial and enhance creativity. Specially, exposure to different points-of-view in the form of opinions, audio-visual materials, news-stories, stories and other emotionally salient material may be useful as it allows individuals to engage with content they might not normally chose to be exposed to, and in so doing, broaden their horizons.'

Many developing young artists consider that social media contact is an important part of their inspiration. British visual art student, Olivia Turner, has noted, 'The wide variety of art of different mediums found on social media is . . . a nice way to be reminded of loads of different ways of working other than the status quo.' Another British art student, Jade Emsley, has stated, 'I do think that social media had increased the number of aspiring artists who exchange ideas and techniques, providing encouraging comments and feedback under certain art posts. I also think it has made the online artworld a much more collaborative place with challenges such as inktober [a world-wide art challenge held each year in October] and collaborative videos with various art youtubers.'

Young musicians have also noted the benefits that social media offers them. A Forbes article published on September 22, 2023, noted, 'Social media has also increased ways to collaborate and exchange music. Artists from different parts of the world can seamlessly connect and create songs together without ever necessarily interacting in person. . . {Additionally} social media's visuals [have] intensified the impact of music videos, making them a crucial tool for musicians to tell stories. . .'

Social media also offers young people opportunities to help them achieve hoped-for careers. As an example, young Australian digital journalist and news presenter Leo Puglisi was only 11 when he started an online news channel. Over four years Puglisi has recruited 10 teenagers from across Australia to run 6 News on YouTube, X, Instagram, TikTok and a website. Asked about the effect a social media ban for young people would have had on what he has been able to achieve, Puglisi stated, '6 News wouldn't have existed,' Puglisi concludes, 'It would have really just taken away something I love doing. It is something I'm passionate about. It is something people turn to now as a source of news. But that would have all been stripped away.' Another young person helped in this way is Maggie Perry, 15, who has been reporting for 6 News since she was 13. She claims that social media offers 'so many infinite possibilities that just don't exist in the real world'.

Another example of a young person for whom social media was very important in establishing her career is 17-year-old Mel TorreFranca. She is a YouTuber, writer, and editor for the Lost Island Press. Self-publishing her first novel at 13, Mel recently released the book Leaving Wishville. Mel promotes her work through a range of mediums - releasing trailers for her novel via YouTube, hosting giveaway competitions on her Instagram page, and posting artwork of her characters.

On January 22, 2024, girlsforbusiness.org explained some of the ways in which social media was helping young people establish businesses. The blog stated, 'Social media and rising platforms have. . . played a significant role in the rise of teenage entrepreneurship. These platforms have provided teenagers with a vast audience and the potential for their businesses to go viral. Teenagers can showcase their products or services to thousands of followers and gain recognition and support from their peers. . .'

3. The ban limits young people's access to several basic human rights

Many of those concerned about a social media ban being imposed on those under 16 argue that it is an unreasonable restriction of many basic human freedoms young people should be able to exercise.

The Australian government's social media ban for those under 16 has been condemned by several human rights organisations. Associate Professor Faith Gordon, director of the International Youth Justice Network at the Australian National University has stated, 'The social media ban is not compatible with international human rights instruments that Australia has signed up to. This blunt instrument has been rushed through without proper consideration.'

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has detailed the human rights that the new law is limiting. The AHRC has drawn on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to explain what rights are being restricted. These rights include freedom of expression and access to information, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to culture, leisure and play, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including through access to relevant information, and the right to privacy.

Critics claim that this ban on young people accessing social media undermines their right to information. Numerous studies have shown how important social media has become as a source of information for young people. In 2023, Western Sydney University published the results of a recent survey into how young people in Australia gain information about current events. Their research shows children and teenagers increasingly get news from social media. Almost four in ten children (37 percent) and more than six in ten teens (63 percent) say they often or sometimes get news from social media. When using social media to get news, half the children surveyed said they preferred YouTube, followed by TikTok (21 percent) and Facebook (13 percent). Teenagers preferred YouTube (31 percent), TikTok (24 percent) and Instagram (19 percent). For all groups surveyed, social media was a preferred information source over newspapers and more traditional news services. Similar findings were made in a 2022 survey in the United Kingdom where six in ten teenagers said they used social media for news with YouTube most widely accessed for this purpose. A 2020 United States study found that 77 percent of teenagers got their news and headlines from social media, with YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat as the most used sources. On November 21, 2024, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria released the results of an Australian survey of 1,000 young people's experience of social media. The Council noted, 'Young people spoke extensively about the benefits of being served healthy content bearing joy, culture, new interests and different ways of thinking and gaining new perspectives on socio-political issues. They also reported being served negative content. . . and age-inappropriate material.' There is a general recognition that social media can be a faulted information source with sites reflecting the biases of their users and providing a breeding ground for false information and fake news. However, critics argue that a ban is not the solution. Young users need to be taught how to compare sources and recognise what is credible information.

Critics also claim that this ban on young people accessing social media undermines their right to freedom of expression and gather to present their views. The international human rights organisation Amnesty International has stated, 'Governments must acknowledge that social media. . . allows young people to realise their human rights to freedom of expression, and to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.' One area where social media has become very important is in allowing young people to express their opinions on social and environmental issues such as climate change. The Child Rights International Network has noted, 'The internet has enabled children to become active politically and to mobilise for social and ecological causes, projecting their voices into the world with unprecedented reach.'

A recent survey of 500 young Australians conducted by researchers from Deakin University found that their adolescent subjects valued social media as an important source of information on climate change. They also saw it as valuable in organising protest action. The researchers concluded, 'There are a range of barriers that prevent young people from meaningfully engaging in climate discussions and decision making. While there are flaws associated with social media, it can provide a powerful tool for climate advocacy and action at a population-level.' The issue of rights for young gay people is another where social media has been important in allowing young people to express their opinion and campaign for just treatment. Shaneel Lal, a gay activist from New Zealand, is critical of the Australian ban on social media because she believes it will silence the views of young gay people. She has stated, 'It [social media] certainly helped me form my view of politicians and politics, and I think that young people should have as many resources as possible available to them to not only be informed but also to hold the government accountable . . . I grew up in a very conservative community that did not encourage young people, particularly young brown queer immigrants to have a voice. Social media allowed me to find my voice.'

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has explained that a social media ban would undermine young people's right to information and to freedom of expression and protest. The Commission has stated, 'Social media is a vital platform for young people to share their ideas and opinions, engage in dialogue, and participate in social and cultural activities. . . A blanket ban risks unjustly curtailing these freedoms.'

4. Implementation problems make the ban unlikely to be effective and undermine privacy

Critics of the Australian government's age-based ban on social media argue that putting it into effect will be difficult. They claim young social media users are likely to try to get around the ban and that the social media companies may struggle to cooperate. They further argue that the age-verification processes that will need to be put in place will threaten the privacy of all users, not simply children and adolescents.

It is likely that many young people under 16 will attempt to avoid the ban. 6 News Australia's 17-year-old founder Leonardo Puglisi has warned the government that young users of social media will try to sidestep the ban. He stated that many children would lie about their age to evade bans. Currently that is as simple as lying about a birthdate. This is putting pressure on the government to come up with more strenuous and reliable age verification methods to recommend to the social media platforms. Age verification mechanisms that cannot be dodged by young users will be vital if the Australian age-based social media ban is going to work. There are several other strategies that young people could use to avoid a ban. One of these is a VPN or Virtual Private Network, an online tool that allows the user to appear to be in a different digital jurisdiction. This would allow young Australia users to appear to be in a country where no social media ban applies. Many VPNs offer free trial periods or cost as little as \$3 a month. Other methods that could be used include using the device of an older friend or family member or going onto a platform without logging on (which some platforms allow).

The ban will be difficult to implement. It applies to all major social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). Initially the ban was intended to be applied within a year; however, on December 19, 2024, it was announced that the implementation period would be extended by two months. The eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, explained that the industry needs time to determine how the ban will be worked in with its existing restrictions.

One of the largest technical problems centres around accurate age identification. Without this it will be difficult to hold the tech companies accountable for young people illegally accessing their platforms. The legislation does not specify the technical method for proving a person's age. Options include providing ID and biometrics such as face scanning. The government is running an age assurance trial to assess all the methods. The trial is continuing into 2025. Based on the results of that trial, the eSafety Commissioner will make recommendations to platforms. The uncertainty of this process will make difficulties for the

tech companies and give them opportunities to delay implementation. Professor Daniel Angus, of Queensland University of Technology, has stated, 'Platforms, large and small, now face a daunting task: de-platform millions of young users while somehow avoiding violations of privacy, security, and anti-discrimination principles. Meanwhile, exemptions to services like anonymous forums and messaging apps remain just as accessible, rendering the regulation ineffectual at tackling many of the online harms it claims to address.'

Another major implementation issue is protecting the privacy of all social media users. According to the Australian Information Security Association (AISA), 'Implementation of a social media ban for teens will mandate the use of age verification or age assurance technological solutions which require the collection of identity information.' All the varying age-verification processes currently proposed require users to supply identity information they would rather have private. These include private documentation (for example driver's licence or passport data), biometric data (facial image or fingerprint) or pattern of Internet use data (sites typically visited used to estimate age). Many digital experts have expressed concern about the privacy risks involved in age-verification. Dr Justine Humphry, a Senior lecturer in Digital Cultures at the University of Sydney, has stated, 'Age assurance systems are experimental and require the sharing of sensitive personal documents such as proof of ID or biometric data. This will apply to all Australians, not just young people, and will likely result in significantly reduced data privacy and security. We found in our eSafety funded research that parents, and young people do not trust social media companies to be responsible with their personal information.'

Critics claim that the risks associated with privacy breaches are too great for the government to proceed with this ban. The Australian e-Safety Commissioner has already warned of some of the hazards that can occur when private information falls into the wrong hands. The Commissioner's warning re identity theft states, 'Scammers could set up fake accounts in your name or try to steal money from your bank account. Bullies and abusers could pose as you and share something embarrassing on your social media accounts. Doxers [someone who uses private information online to cause harm] might share your street address and name with people who want to harm or scare you.' Identity theft or the misuse of personal data has been identified as a growing problem in Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for 2022-2023 stated indicated that 2.5 percent of people (514,300) experienced an identity-based scam in that year. 1.0 percent of people (199,100) experienced identity theft. 2.1 percent of people (434,300) experienced online impersonation.

Critics note that the decision to impose an age-based social media ban requiring user age-verification contradicts a judgment the government made about a year ago. In August 2023, the federal government decided not to force adult websites to bring in age verification following concerns about privacy and the lack of maturity of the technology. The eSafety Commissioner state at the time 'It is clear from the roadmap at present, each type of age verification or age assurance technology comes with its own privacy, security, effectiveness or implementation issues.' Many experts opposed age-verification a year ago. Samantha Floreani, program lead at Digital Rights Watch, stated, 'Age verification is a terrible combination of being invasive and risky, while also being ineffective for its purported purpose. Methods that are less privacy-invasive are easily bypassed by tech-savvy kids, and those that may be more likely to work at restricting access to pornography create massive and disproportionate privacy and digital security risks.' Another expert with concerns about age-verification is Justin Warren, the chair of Electronic Frontiers Australia. He stated, 'A government that claims to be interested in evidence-based policy would listen and act on our advice.' Critics of the current ban claim that the privacy risks have not changed.

5. There are better means of protecting young people online than imposing an age-based ban on social media access
Critics of the Australian government's age-based ban on social media argue that this is a very crude management tool. Instead, they suggest there are ways that parents can be enabled to regulate their children's online experiences. They also argue that more should be demanded of social media platforms to ensure that young people encounter age-appropriate material.

Opponents of the ban argue that public education is a large part of the solution to the harms caused children by social media. Parents need to be educated in how to assist their children sidestep the pitfalls found online and children need to be educated within the home and at school on the dangers social media can pose and how to avoid them. Katie Maskiell, of the United Nations Children's Fund has stated, 'We want to see comprehensive digital literacy programs that empower children, parents, and educators to navigate the digital world safely. We believe that education and awareness are key to reducing risks and making a safer online environment for young people. It is essential to create an inclusive digital landscape where children can learn, connect, and thrive responsibly.' Australia's eSafety Commissioner has outlined three basic steps in the education of parents around eSafety for their children. The first step is that parents be involved and supportive. The recommendations including family playing of online games and open lines of communication about what is seen and done online. Children should know they can always come to parents with concerns. The second step is around setting family rules for children's digital experience. These should involve discussion and parents should model appropriate digital behaviour. The third step is that parents familiarise themselves with the safety features of different platforms. The e-Safety Commissioner has also warned about the area of danger online that children should be alerted to. These are categorised as contact risks, conduct risks and content risks. Children are advised what to avoid and how to respond. Teaching these risks and behaviours to children is the responsibility of schools and parents.

Critics argue that without such education children may be placed in even greater danger. Many will find ways to sidestep the bans and may find themselves in even more problematic digital environments. Professor Amanda Third of Western Sydney University has argued, 'A social media ban will . . .force children into lower-quality online environments.' She believes the ban may also undermine young people's trust in their parents as adults with whom they can discuss anything that concerns them online. Professor Third has stated, 'A blanket ban affirms parents "don't get it". Kids will find ways to get around the ban. And if their interactions turn sour on social media, the fact they were not supposed to be there will make it more difficult to reach out to adults for help.'

Parental consent mechanisms and parental controls are seen as important measures that remove the need for blanket bans.

Parental consent mechanisms and parental controls enable parents to manage and monitor their children's social media usage, including approving friend requests and setting time limits. [↗](#) This empowers parents to oversee their children's online interactions. Family account structures can also be implemented. Account hierarchies are created that link a child's account to a parent's, allowing the parent to monitor the child's social media activities. [↗](#) Measures such as these can be legally enforced. France, for example, has made it mandatory since 2023 for children under 15 to obtain parental consent to register on social media platforms, which are required to implement a system to verify whether that consent has been obtained. [↗](#) This legal support makes it far more difficult for children to access social media without their parents' knowledge and permission. Supporters argue that these devices not only monitor or regulate the onscreen experience but also allow opportunities for parents to discuss appropriate online content with their children. United States research indicates that only 39 percent of parents use parental controls or other technological tools to block, filter or monitor their teenager's online activities. [↗](#) Their uptake appears to be greater in Australia. A 2018 survey conducted by the Australian e-Commissioner found that 76 percent of parents agreed that 'Parental controls are important to how I limit my child's exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography.' [↗](#)

Critics of the ban also argue that it focuses unfairly on restricting the rights of children, rather than requiring the social media platforms to improve the quality of material accessible to all users, adults, and children. David Mejia-Canales, Senior Lawyer at the Human Rights Law Centre, has stated, 'The social media ban is a distraction, it's putting a band-aid on a growing wound. Instead of piecemeal age restrictions, we need an overarching duty of care that ensures digital platforms prioritise the safety, privacy, and wellbeing of all their users, not just the youngest.' [↗](#) The Australian government is planning to proceed with an online duty of care Bill placing obligations on digital platforms to protect users; however, it claims that extra measures need to be taken to protect young people. Critics of the ban disagree, claiming that bullying, hate speech, and misinformation are issues for all Australians and if a duty of care were enforced, a blanket age ban would not be necessary. David Mejia-Canales argues, 'The Government has already announced its intention to introduce an overarching duty of care for digital platforms. Instead of fixating on social media bans that will not work, it should prioritise delivering the duty of care and holding big tech platforms accountable for the harm their products cause.' [↗](#)

Further implications

At this point much remains uncertain about the impact of Australia's ban on social media access for those under 16.

It is immediately unlikely that the ban will not be imposed as it has the support of all state governments and the federal Opposition. This means that even if the Albanese government is defeated in the election to be held in the first half of 2025, the Liberal Coalition has promised to continue with the implementation of the ban. However, it is now unlikely to become operational until a month or two into 2026 as it was announced in December 2024 that the ban would be applied after 14 months, not a year as originally intended.

As the first time such a ban has been imposed, it is both a technological and social experiment. What technology will be recommended to the social media platforms for age verification has not been decided yet. The Australian government has set up an Age Assurance Technology Trial. The trial is reviewing age verification, estimation and inference technologies. These technologies will be considered as options to prevent access to online pornography by children and young people under the age of 18, and age-limit access to social media platforms for those under 16 years of age. The results are expected in June 2025. [↗](#) Once the trial is over, the results will be referred to the social media platforms with government preferences indicated. How the platforms then attempt to apply these tools will probably not begin to become apparent until the second half of 2026.



There will be many in the community keenly observing the impact these bans are appearing to be having. Researchers will be examining the extent to which children and adolescents appear to be circumventing the ban. There will also be intensive investigation of whether the bans are bringing benefits or harms in the areas of young people's mental health, social development and wellbeing and academic attainment. The community at large will be vitally interested in the impact that the age verification processes chosen has on user privacy. There is also likely to be careful monitoring of increased evidence of identity theft and related offences.

Australia's Social Media Minimum Age Act 2024 is part of a suite of measures intended to protect all Australian citizens from online harm. Australia's Online Safety Act includes basic online safety expectations for all providers of internet material. These include ensuring all end-users can use online services in a safe manner. They also include that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in the design and operation of services likely to be used by children and that the provision of unlawful and harmful material is minimised. They further require providers to facilitate user complaints about unlawful and harmful material and activity and to review and respond to these complaints. [↗](#) Industry codes are being developed by industry associations to prevent children and young people under 18 from accessing or being exposed to age-inappropriate material such as pornography, across many different types of online services. These codes must provide appropriate community safeguards before the eSafety Commissioner will register them. Codes are required to be submitted to eSafety for consideration by 28 February 2025. [↗](#)

More legislation is in the pipeline. A re-elected Albanese government will be likely to proceed with a Digital Duty of Care Bill. If passed into law, Digital Duty of Care would place the responsibility on digital platforms to proactively keep Australians safe and better prevent online harms. The duty of care model was a key recommendation of the independent statutory review of Australia's Online Safety Act 2021. [↗](#)

Another piece of legislation that a second term Albanese government might revisit is a Misinformation Act. On November 24, 2024, the Australian government withdrew a bill that would give a media watchdog power to monitor digital platforms and require them to keep records about misinformation and disinformation on their networks. The Government had not been able to get the support of other parties to pass the bill which the Opposition condemned as 'censorship laws in Australia'. [↗](#) The bill attracted both support and opposition from diverse groups within the community and would need to be substantially

reworked before it could be put before Parliament again.

One of the major questions hanging over all these measures being put in place by the Albanese Government to protect Australians online is will they be accepted by users and the big tech companies. Currently, the Social Media Minimum Age Act 2024 appears to have widespread popular support among the adult population. Whether the tech companies seek to undermine it remains to be seen. Elon Musk, the owner of social media platform X (formerly Twitter) termed Australia's failed online misinformation bill 'fascist'.  On January 7, 2025, Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive officer of Meta, announced that his company would get rid of its US factcheckers on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads. This is being interpreted as a bid to encourage user engagement. Social media columnist William Antonelli claimed, 'Studies show that false social media posts spread up to 20 times faster than true ones.'  Zuckerberg's action does not suggest a readiness to put further user protections in place on his platforms. It also raises doubts about the number of users who actually want them.