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THE DANGERS OF UNRESTRICTED ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA BY YOUTH AND MEASURES TO REDUCE CONCERNS: RECENT AUSTRALIAN BANS ON YOUNG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS AND LESSONS RELEVANT FOR THAI SOCIETY.

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ABSTRACT

Currently, children and youth in every country around the world are negatively affected by the use of social media platforms. Many countries have recognized the educational and health problems for their youth and are starting to implement measures to protect them from harmful effects. Australia, in particular, has taken serious action to address this issue by enacting the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, which came into effect on December 10, 2025. This legislation contains some of the strictest measures for controlling youth social media use in the world, despite some limitations, such as rights to information individual privacy and student safety, of this law. Significant results of these Australian restrictions on young users will take up to several years to become apparent; however, the lessons learned will be highly relevant for Thailand, where penetration of social media is also very high. Public pressure will almost certainly move Thailand toward more regulation of social media; so the Australian experience will be very useful for government planners in designing access strategies, user account requirements, exemptions, platform responsibilities, industrial liaison, complaint procedures, and legal compliance - to maximize benefits and safety for Thai users.



INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of communication technology, social media has become an integral part of daily life for people of all ages, especially young people. They use social media through various applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Line for communication with individuals, groups, and organizations, as well as to access and search for all types of information. This allows individuals to stay informed, follow events, and enjoy content that interests them. Therefore, social media influences the behaviour and attitudes of young users in many ways, such as creating online identities, expressing opinions on topics of interest, getting to know others, participating in online activities, or making purchasing decisions based on online advertisements. While social media is very important and beneficial for young people, it is also a double-edged sword with both positive and negative aspects. Many young people are negatively impacted by social media in various ways, including changes in their ideas and personal behaviors, leading to increasing social problems. Being surrounded by content that can both benefit and harm simultaneously means that many young people are affected more negatively than positively by social media, such as carrying their mobile phones everywhere, constantly checking social media, and becoming addicted to online games. The belief that one cannot survive without the internet, or the lack of attention given to studies, is increasingly prevalent among Thai children and youth. The dangers of online media threaten their well-being, including: addiction to games and violent content leading to imitative behavior, exposure to pornography leading to sexual abuse, online gambling, cyberbullying, depression, and suicide. These are widespread problems affecting young people (National Health Commission Office, 2020)^[8]

The main aims of this paper are:

- To briefly outline widely acknowledged problems of excessive use of social media;
 - To summarize measures taken, or planned, to protect children – internationally;
 - To explain the reasons for Australia's recent ban on access to social media by minors;
 - To discuss key points of Australia's ban, with notes on social media responsibilities, as well as legal loopholes and other criticisms.
- To list several general points about future management of social media in Thailand, to be incorporated in current government planning.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Dangers of Social Media

As youth are increasingly negatively impacted by various forms of social media use, parents, carers and teachers have become increasingly concerned for these vulnerable users. The Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHPF, 2021)^[12] has summarized the dangers of social media to children and youth as follows:

1. Online bullying: Children and youth are ridiculed, bullied, exposed, publicly shamed, humiliated, and ostracized from their peer groups.

2. Online stalking and harassment: Children and youth are monitored on social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram, and are contacted in a way that makes them feel afraid, harassed, unsafe, or uncomfortable.

3. Being lured into inappropriate sexual conversations: Children and youth are contacted or exchanged with inappropriate sexual content that they may not be interested in, did not request, or do not want.

4. Sexual blackmail: Children and youth are threatened or extorted for money or other forms of exploitation, by perpetrators using sexually explicit images or videos of the child.

5. Sexual exploitation: Children and youth are contacted by adults who build trust and establish a relationship in order to exploit them sexually.

6. Illegal/dangerous content. Children and youth may have access to pornography, gambling, drugs, violent weapons, inappropriate ideologies, values, and behaviours. They may imitate, possess, or disseminate illegal content.

7. Online gambling: Online gambling comes in forms that are easily accessible to children and youth, such as sports betting, in-game betting, and participation in activities to win prizes, making children familiar with gambling and taking risks.

8. Game and internet addiction: Excessive video game use by children and youth without parental supervision can lead to mental health problems, financial losses, deviation from academic goals, and other problems. Excessive online time that affects work, health, social life, irritability when not using it, and failure to reduce online time is considered internet addiction.

9. Underage media use: Parents allowing children to use online media too early without supervision and guidance can have negative consequences. Children and youth lack the critical thinking skills to differentiate information, and their online friendships may lead them to believe fake news, be lured into dangerous situations, or be targeted for harm.

10. Excessive personal information disclosure: Disclosing personal information can put children and youth in danger, such as being criticized, having their images manipulated for damage, or having their information misused or used inappropriately. Being contacted or harassed by strangers, young children may be abducted or their images used for sexual exploitation.

Measures to Protect Children – International Survey

The problems listed above have affected children and youth in every country around the world, leading many countries to become aware of the dangers of social media. This has resulted in many countries establishing regulations to control the use of mobile phones in classrooms, such as China, the UK, France, Australia, the United States, Singapore, Finland, Greece, Israel, and Uganda, among others. In addition, several countries in the European region have clearly expressed their stance and have pushed for legislation regarding social media for youth (Reuters, 2025)^[10] including:

- Denmark pushing for legislation to ban the use of social media for children under 15 years old.
- Norway preparing to set a minimum age of 15 years for the use of social media.
- Ireland developing a Digital Wallet to verify the age and identity of social media users.

- Spain urging parliament to consider a bill to raise the minimum age for using social media to 16 years.

- France considering banning social media for children under 15 years old and proposing a similar concept for older teens; with digital curfews prohibiting nighttime online use for teenagers aged 15-18 (ref.).

- The Netherlands has advised parents to block their children's use of social media until they turn 15 (ABC News, 2026)^[1]

- The European Union (EU) is calling for a ban on social media use for children under 16 unless parents allow it.

- The United Kingdom last year attempted to push through legislation to restrict social media use for children under 16, but this was ultimately softened, leaving only a promise that the government would study the issue further (Branco, 2026^[3]; Marsden, 2026)^[6]

- Malaysia has announced plans to ban social media use for children under 16 for child safety, expected to take effect in 2026.

- China's cyber regulatory authority has launched a project called "Minor mode" is introduced to limit screen time based on age 14.

Many states in the United States have also announced regulations limiting social media use for youth, including:

- Utah requires parental consent for users under 18 and limits nighttime use.

- Florida has passed a law banning use for children under 14.

- Virginia limits social media use to one hour per day for children under 16.

- Georgia, Tennessee, and Louisiana have enacted laws requiring parental consent.

While many countries have expressed concern and worry about children and youth and are planning or have taken various measures to protect them from the dangers of social media, Australia has taken serious action by enacting a national law, called the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, which came into effect on December 10, 2025. This law aims to protect children from the dangers of social media (Turnbull, 2025)^[13] and places more responsibility for user safety back on to media platforms.

Reasons Why Australia Banned Minors from Social Media

Australia's ban on minors (Australian Government, 2025)^[2] from using social media is considered one of the strictest in the world compared to measures designed by other countries. This is due to the desire to reduce the negative impact of social media on youth, as it is believed that young people spend excessive time, consuming content on various social media platforms. This content is designed to attract young people to spend increasingly longer screen time, and exposure to inappropriate content can negatively affect their physical and mental health and quality of life. This is supported by research from various relevant agencies. For example, statistics from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) show that between 2021 and 2022, there were 36,000 cases of online child sexual abuse involving children under 16, more than double the number from the previous year. Furthermore, a study by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that young people who are victims of online crime suffer severe

psychological and emotional consequences. Victims often face long-term problems such as depression, anxiety, and a higher risk of repeated abuse. A study by the Australian government throughout 2025 found that 96% of young people aged 10-15 used social media, and of these, 7 out of 10 had been exposed to various forms of harmful content, ranging from misogynistic and violent material to content promoting eating disorders and suicide. Furthermore, 1 in 7 of this age group had experienced manipulation or coercion by adults or older children. More than half of the children studied reported being victims of cyberbullying, reflecting the increased risks associated with daily social media use.

Following these findings that free or unrestricted use of social media by young people led to numerous problems, the Australian government enacted legislation banning access to social media for children under 16, recognizing its potential dangers to youth and believing it would reduce avenues for online harassment and bullying. This law could also help reduce or limit access to minors by groups that exploit underage individuals, a major cause of mental health problems and suicide among youth in Australia (Najjar, 2025)^[7]

Key Points of Australia's Ban

This Australian law (Australian Government, 2025)^[2] known as the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, is one of the strictest measures in the world for controlling youth social media use compared to previous child social media prevention measures in other countries. The details of this law consist of three main points (Turnbull, 2025)^[13]

1. Children under the age of 16 are prohibited from using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, TikTok, and X, with the exception of access to messaging services, online games, or platforms that support health and education issues, such as YouTube Kids. This measure will not grant exceptions for children with parental consent or those who already have accounts.

2. The responsibility for enforcing the age restrictions falls on technology companies and platforms. After the law comes into effect, platforms will have one year to comply. Failure to comply by social media companies can result in fines of up to A\$50 million (approximately 1,147 million baht) for repeated violations, including the unauthorized use of personal data for other purposes.

3. The government has tasked the Age Check Certification Scheme (ACCS) with piloting technologies such as biometric facial analysis and age verification systems. The trials are expected to be completed by mid-2025. The technology will be able to scan faces, fingerprints, and use AI to detect age. Biometric technology is highly accurate, reducing the chances of age falsification.

Under this law, social media platforms will have to take reasonable steps to prevent children under 16 from accessing their platforms. One of the key requirements of this law is that platforms should use more than one form of age assurance technology, which may include identity verification with government-issued identification, the use of facial or voice recognition technology, and a technique called "age inference," which analyzes online behavior, usage patterns, and interactions to automatically estimate the age of users (Dick, 2025)^[4]

Australian Social Media Platforms – Responsibilities

A survey of social media usage among Australian youth found that approximately 440,000 Australians aged 13-15 have accounts on Snapchat, 350,000 on Instagram, 200,000 on TikTok, and 150,000 on Facebook. However, Australian legislation banning minors on social media has identified 10 popular platforms used by youth: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, Twitch, X (Twitter), and YouTube. These platforms must cease operations for minor accounts to prevent unauthorized access by children under 16. The eSafety Commissioner oversees and regulates this process. If any platform provider is found to fail to block access for underage users, they face fines of up to almost A\$50 million (Najjar, 2025)^[7]

In determining whether a platform will be subject to regulation under this law, it must meet three main criteria:

- The platform's primary purpose is to be a social media platform that allows for online social interaction between two or more users.
- Users can interact with all or some other users on that social media platform.
- The social media platform allows users to post or publish content.

Although Australia's child social media ban already restricts the use of 10 social media platforms by minors, the criteria set forth exclude certain types of social media platforms, namely YouTube Kids, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp, because the Australian government considers these platforms not to meet all the specified criteria. Therefore, children under 16 can still view content on these online platforms. While social media platform services don't require user account registration, this legislation also allows minors to continue accessing social media platforms used for messaging or gaming, including Messenger, WhatsApp, Discord, GitHub, Google Classroom, LEGO Play, Pinterest, YouTube Kids, Steam and Steam Chat, and Roblox, as the eSafety Commissioner considers them solely platforms for messaging or gaming (Dick, 2025)^[4]

Loopholes in this Law

The enactment of this law has had both positive and negative impacts. Many young people disagree because they use TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram daily for communication. Approximately 21,000 boarding school students across Australia feel cut off from their families due to their reliance on social media to contact friends and family. Some see benefits in reducing social media time, freeing up time for extracurricular activities, sports, or academic pursuits, as well as encouraging face-to-face interaction and increased connection. However, some young people believe the law has loopholes, such as the possibility of using VPNs or older siblings' identification cards to create social media accounts (Pearson, 2025)^[9]

A BBC report indicates that some teenagers were preparing to create fake accounts before the law came into effect, prompting the government to warn social media platforms to detect and remove such accounts. Meanwhile, some children opted to use shared accounts with their parents to circumvent the law's restrictions. Academics predict that after the law comes into effect, the use of VPNs, which help to mask user location, may increase. This situation has already occurred in the United Kingdom after similar age restrictions were enforced. (Najjar, 2025)^[7]

Comments and Criticisms

The enactment of this law has raised concerns from many parties about its stringency, arguing that it is too 'harsh' and that, in addition to cutting off young people from the online world, it may also affect their privacy due to the use of biometric technology, which violates the principle of data protection. Some have suggested using a Child Flag System, a system that notifies applications or platforms that the user is a child, instead, with parents being able to enable or disable this setting. However, this law uses technology to detect age without parental consent. Compared to measures in other countries that usually allow parental consent, such as in the United States or the United Kingdom, where platforms must notify users of how long they have used the platform, and where parents and children must discuss before sharing images of minors on social media, this law is still problematic. Although France has previously had a clearer policy than other countries, enacting a law controlling access to social media for children under 15 years old, allowing it only with parental consent (Whiteman & Watson, 2025)^[14]

Furthermore, this law has been questioned by many academics and experts regarding its limited scope. Some academics believe that this legislation does not go far enough; it does not cover online dating websites or gaming platforms that engage in sexually suggestive conversations with minors. There have also been recent criticisms regarding the dangers of AI chatbots that may induce or encourage children to commit suicide. In addition, stakeholders have called for the government to expand the ban to online gaming platforms such as Roblox and Discord, as both platforms lack age verification systems to ensure youth safety. Others argue that a more effective approach might not be a ban, but rather educating and equipping children and young people to use social media safely and responsibly (Dick, 2025)^[4]

ORIGINALITY AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This paper contributes to the emerging field of digital governance and youth protection by examining Australia's *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024* as a model for regulating youth access to social media. The originality of this study lies in its synthesis of international regulatory approaches and their applicability to the Thai context. The paper identifies five key dimensions of effective social media governance: age verification, platform accountability, parental engagement, digital literacy, and regulatory enforcement. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge on communication policy, media regulation, and youth protection, while providing a conceptual foundation for future policy development and research in Thailand and other developing countries.

CONCLUSIONS

While bringing many benefits and used extensively in Thailand, social media have as elsewhere, created some educational as well as behavioral and mental health problems among young users, due to to unrestricted access and the addictive nature of some platforms. Widespread concern among educational and medical authorities as well as parents / caregivers, in communities in a number of countries, has led to increasing pressure for more regulation and accountability by platforms for user safety. This culminated in a highly publicized legal case, against major platforms, in the US in early 2026; the companies were found

to have designed addictive products and found liable for damages (Dong & Yang, 2026^[5]; Schulze & Leib, 2026)^[11]

One of the most practical and feasible measures to alleviate identified problems is to restrict access to vulnerable young users; accordingly restrictions are now planned or have been implemented in a number of countries. However, Australia was the first to introduce strict, national bans on young users late in 2025. Regardless of any problems encountered in enforcing this law, parents, researchers, and governments worldwide are closely watching Australia's implementation, and other countries such as Denmark, the European Union, and Malaysia, are considering adapting it as a model for their respective jurisdictions (Dick, 2025)^[4] It is clear that effective management depends on cooperation between governments and platforms. Providers need to be accountable as good corporate citizens.

Although Thai youth are affected by social media use just like those elsewhere, Thailand still lacks specific legislation directly regulating youth access to social media. While there are laws and measures related to protecting children from online dangers, such as media literacy education, internet safety promotion, and safe technology use, and efforts to push social media companies to impose age restrictions on their platforms, these efforts have not been fully effective. Youth can easily circumvent age restrictions through methods such as providing false information during social media registration, using other people's social media accounts, or using VPNs.

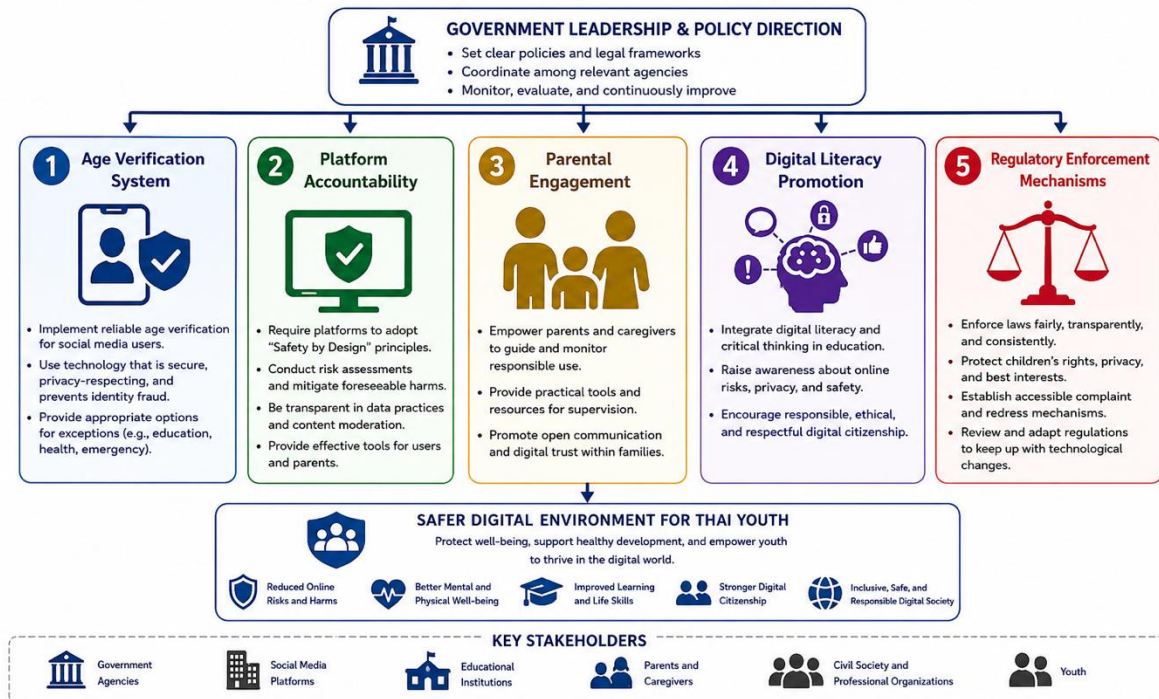
Therefore, Australia's enactment of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, presents an interesting example or model for Thailand. While significant results of the Australian initiative will take several years to become apparent, the lessons learned will be highly relevant for future planning, legislation and regulation in Thailand. Regardless of details it is clear that: more regulation, in co-operation with social platforms, is expected; increased emphasis on user safety is essential; and increased resources for ongoing platform regulation and compliance will be necessary to maintain socially acceptable norms and remediation protocols – possibly using some of the bureaucratic structures and exemption criteria that Australia has developed.

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Thai Youth Social Media Protection Framework (TYSMPF)

A Comprehensive Approach to Safeguard Young People in the Digital Age



Source: Image generated by ChatGPT [June 20, 2026]

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