

1. Ban Social Media Use by Children –society

Karnataka has announced a ban on social media use by children under 16 in its latest Budget, and Andhra Pradesh is moving to introduce a measure that would prohibit those under 13 to use such service

1. Regulation / Ban of Social Media for Underage Children in India

1. Background and Policy Context

1. The debate on regulating social media use among children is gaining momentum in India due to rising concerns about digital addiction, cyberbullying, and online exploitation.
2. The Economic Survey 2025–26 recommended introducing age – based limits on social media usage for children and restricting digital advertisements targeted at minors.
3. It also suggested promoting simpler digital devices such as basic phones or education – only tablets with content filters and usage limits.
4. Though the Union Government has not yet introduced a central law, policy discussions have reportedly begun in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) regarding possible regulatory frameworks.
5. Some states have also shown interest in introducing regulations; for instance, Andhra Pradesh has indicated plans to bring state – level regulations within 90 days.

2. Need for Regulation / Ban of Social Media for Underage Users in India

1. Protection from Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

1. Children are frequently exposed to trolling, cyberbullying, and online harassment, which can severely affect their emotional well – being.
2. Studies show that cyberbullying can lead to depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies among adolescents.
3. Regulation could create safer digital environments for minors.

2. Safeguarding Mental Health and Psychological Well – being

1. Social media platforms use algorithm – driven engagement mechanisms that promote continuous scrolling and content consumption.
2. This often creates unrealistic beauty standards, peer pressure, and social comparison, negatively affecting adolescents' self – esteem.
3. Limiting exposure may help reduce digital addiction and improve mental health outcomes.

3. Protection from Harmful or Inappropriate Content

1. Children may encounter violent, explicit, extremist, or misleading content on social media platforms.
2. Such exposure can distort young users' perceptions of reality and morality, especially when critical thinking abilities are still developing.

4. Protection from Online Predators and Exploitation

1. Social media platforms can become channels for online grooming, child sexual exploitation, and trafficking networks.
2. Predators may manipulate minors by exploiting their lack of awareness and trust.
3. Strong regulatory measures can reduce exposure to such risks.

5. Reducing Screen Addiction and Improving Academic Focus

1. Excessive use of social media leads to reduced attention span, distraction, and decline in academic performance.
2. Children spending prolonged hours online may also suffer from sleep disorders, physical inactivity, and reduced social interaction.

6. Protection of Personal Data and Privacy

1. Children often share personal information without understanding privacy implications.

2. This can lead to data misuse, identity theft, targeted advertising, and behavioural manipulation by digital platforms.

7. Combating Misinformation and Radicalisation

1. Children are particularly vulnerable to fake news, propaganda, and harmful online challenges.
2. Without adequate digital literacy, minors may accept misleading narratives as facts, influencing behaviour and beliefs.

3. Challenges in Implementing a Ban on Social Media for Underage Users in India

1. Difficulty in Age Verification

1. Most platforms rely on self-declared age during registration, which makes enforcement weak.
2. Strict verification mechanisms may require government ID verification, raising concerns about privacy and data security.

2. Technical and Enforcement Challenges

1. India has hundreds of millions of social media users across multiple platforms, making enforcement complex.
2. Users may circumvent restrictions through VPNs, alternate accounts, or anonymous browsing.

3. Policy Inconsistency Across States

1. If different states adopt different age limits or regulations, it could create legal confusion and operational challenges for platforms.

4. Impact on Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression

1. Blanket bans may limit children's right to access information, express opinions, and participate in digital discourse.
2. International conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognise children's right to information and communication.

5. Risk of Migration to Unsafe Platforms - Restrictions on mainstream platforms may push teenagers toward less regulated or anonymous platforms, increasing exposure to harmful content.

6. Widening the Digital Divide

1. In India, social media platforms are often used for educational content, awareness campaigns, and peer learning.
2. Restricting access may disproportionately affect children from disadvantaged backgrounds who rely on free digital resources.

7. Gender Digital Divide - Social media bans could be misused by families to restrict girls' internet access entirely, worsening the existing gender gap in digital access.

4. Australia's Model of Social Media Regulation

1. Landmark Legislation

1. Australia became the first country to introduce a legally mandated minimum age for social media use.
2. The law was enacted through the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act.

2. Key Provisions of the Australian Law

1. Social media platforms must block users under the age of 16.
2. Platforms must identify and remove existing accounts belonging to under-16 users.
3. Platforms must implement systems to prevent new accounts or workarounds by underage users.
4. Mechanisms must exist to correct errors if legitimate accounts are mistakenly removed.

3. Rationale Behind the Australian Law

1. The primary aim is to protect children from online harms and psychological pressure.
2. The legislation was motivated by concerns about -
 1. Addictive platform design features
 2. Exposure to harmful content
 3. Rising cyberbullying incidents

A survey by the Australian eSafety Commissioner revealed that more than 50% of young Australians had experienced cyberbullying on social media.

5. Way Forward for India

- 1. Balanced Regulatory Framework** –India should adopt a balanced approach combining regulation, parental guidance, and digital literacy rather than imposing a complete ban.
- 2. Strong Platform Accountability** –Social media companies must be required to implement robust age – verification systems, content moderation, and child safety mechanisms.
- 3. Digital Literacy and Awareness** –Schools and parents should promote digital literacy programs that teach children about online safety, misinformation, and responsible digital behaviour.
- 4. Child – Centric Digital Ecosystem** –Governments can encourage child – safe platforms, educational apps, and restricted digital devices designed specifically for minors.

Conclusion

The regulation of social media for underage children is becoming a global policy priority due to growing concerns about digital addiction, cyberbullying, and online exploitation. While restricting access may help protect children from harmful online environments, an outright ban could raise challenges related to digital rights, enforcement, and the digital divide. Therefore, India must adopt a balanced and child – centric regulatory framework that combines platform accountability, digital literacy, parental involvement, and targeted safeguards to ensure children’s safety in the digital age.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/regulating-internet-is-centres-domain-social-media-ban-imposed-by-ap-karnataka-may-hit-jurisdictional-barrier/article70712213.ece>

