

**Should Social Media be Restricted for Children Below
18 Years**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) commands that no matter the circumstances, every child should enjoy the right to be protected from abuse, exploitation, and violence. Following this fundamental need, national and international organizations have developed child protection systems that connect children to vital social services and protection from birth to the age of majority. Most developed and developing nations arbitrarily set the age at 18 years, after which an individual is considered an adult liable for his actions and self-protection (Jones, p. 261). Whereas the traditional outlook of child protection has largely focused on physical dangers such as wars and conflicts, poverty and disasters, child trafficking and child labor, and mental and physical disability, social media has created a digital street with all forms of dangers for adolescents and children. This essay argues that given the dangers associated with the use of social media by children and adolescents, there is a need to restrict the use of social media for children below the age of 18.

On one end, social media has been instrumental in building skills and knowledge that may not be available in traditional face-to-face interactions (O'Reilly et al., p. 985). Social media has also enabled adolescents and children to enjoy collaborative learning, as they are able to share educational content with peers, particularly through class WhatsApp groups and other educational forums. Furthermore, social media has enabled creativity and enabled connection to extended family and friends. Despite these potential benefits, the negative effects of social media negate all the need to explore them. Its impact on adolescents and children, if not restricted, can be so detrimental that there may be no generation to enjoy the benefits. The internet and social media in specific is a treacherous space for the adolescent mind and safety in the same manner as a city street infested with drug peddlers, organized gangs, and paedophiles is dangerous to children and teenagers.

Children and adolescents spend an average of 6 hours every day on social media, exposing them to a myriad of cyber bullies and disturbing content (Riehm et al., p. 1268). Adolescents and children are exposed to upsetting and inappropriate content such as violent, sexual, mean, and aggressive images and comments. Such images are potentially traumatizing and character-damaging, effects that may affect their development and interfere with their potential. Because of the mental immaturity of children and adolescents, they are prone to uploading inappropriate content, such as provocative or embarrassing videos and photos of themselves. Other than suffering momentary embarrassment following the uploading of private content on social media, the mistake can be more damaging if inappropriate content, such as nude pictures or videos, land in the hands of cyberbullies.

Essentially, the social media space opens up an adolescent to all forms of criminals keen on taking advantage of their naivety. Adolescents are bombarded with hundreds of targeted marketing and advertisement. There is a need to protect children and adolescents from these negative influences till the age of 18, universally accepted as the age when an individual makes informed decisions. At this age, one becomes aware that he is individually answerable for his actions. This knowledge not only deters a teenager from engaging in risky online activities that could be harmful to himself, but also ensures that the individual acts responsibly within the social media space to avoid endangering other users.

Works Cited

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