

Until social-media giants take responsibility for the harm they cause, I support Australia's age ban

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Take this short quiz about your social-media use. Discuss your habits and opinions with your classmates.

1. How often do you use social media?
 - a. many times a day
 - b. once a day
 - c. a few times a week
 - d. rarely or never

2. Which social-media platform do you use the most?
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Instagram
 - c. Twitter / X
 - d. TikTok
 - e. other (please specify) _____

3. How do you usually feel when you use social media?
 - a. happy
 - b. stressed
 - c. excited
 - d. angry
 - e. connected

4. If social media disappeared, how would you feel?
 - a. less stressed
 - b. disconnected from friends and family
 - c. bored
 - d. more present in my daily life
 - e. no different

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2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to match the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

ban

neutral

platform

social media

survey

- _____ make something impossible or illegal to do, say or make
- _____ websites and software used to connect with people and companies online
- _____ a study about people's views or behaviours on a particular topic by asking them questions
- _____ not supporting or helping either side in a problem or disagreement
- _____ the type of computer system or the software that is used

addictive

algorithm

consent

media literacy

socialise

- _____ a situation where two or more people communicate or react to each other
- _____, a set of rules that must be followed when solving a particular problem
- _____ causing a strong habit or dependence that is hard to give up.
- _____ the ability access, analyse, evaluate and create media in various forms
- _____ permission for something to happen; an agreement or approval given for something to happen or be done

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. Many schools now _____ phones in class.
2. In a relationship, both people should _____ to any intimate behaviour.
3. Social media can be _____. This can affect teenagers' sleep and study habits.
4. The schools added lessons on _____ to help students understand the content they create and watch.
5. It's very easy to take sides. It's much harder to stay _____.
6. Which social-media _____ do you use the most?

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Chanel Contos

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- 1 I support the Albanese government's age ban on social media, and so do many young people. A survey of 14- to 29-year-olds found that 42 per cent were positive about it, with 25 per cent neutral. But just a ban will not fix the real issue.
- 2 There have always been minimum ages on platforms, but they are easy to avoid. I signed up for Facebook at age 11. I don't think this will change, but I am concerned. If teens don't understand why there is a ban and without other ways to socialise online, children may find dangerous parts of the web.
- 3 Meta's "teen accounts" on Instagram for under-16s try to give parents more control. But the real issue is algorithms and how they are used against us. In 2014, on Instagram, you would see a message saying "You're all caught up – you've seen all new posts from the past 48 hours." This is a distant memory now. In 2016, Instagram switched to using an algorithm based on a user's habits.
- 4 In my experience, this is when platforms became addictive. Algorithms can harm children because they provide endless content. They can affect us all by telling us we are right, even if our facts are wrong. There is now more hate speech online. We are more divided. And there has been little to no education about media literacy to stop this.
- 5 This harms young minds the most. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram know that young men are interested in content about difficulties with dating and women. It understands this quickly and shows more content to support harmful beliefs.
- 7 There are many positive things too. The Teach Us Consent campaign began when I posted an Instagram story. This led to consent education in Australia, which gave young people a way to talk about sexual violence. For many with difficult home lives, it is helpful to have a community.
- 8 Social-media companies have known about the harm they cause. But they also know they benefit from our anger, different opinions and our time on their platforms. So I see the ban as a small but important step. If nothing else, it would be a warning to social-media platforms. It may also help parents decide when their children should join a platform.

Chanel Contos is the founder of Teach Us Consent and the author of *Consent Laid Bare*.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What percent of young people were positive about the age ban on social media?
2. Why does the author think that just an age ban will not solve the issue?
3. What two reasons does the author give for why teens might find dangerous parts of the web?
4. Why did Meta start "teen accounts" on Instagram for under-16s?
5. When did Instagram switch to an algorithmic feed?
6. What is the algorithmic feed based on?
7. According to the article, what effect do algorithms have on children?
8. How do these algorithms affect all users negatively?
9. What positive effect did social media help have in Australia?
10. Why does the author think the ban is a "small but important step"?

4 Key language

a. Add the suffixes *-ful* and *-less* to the words below.

- | | <i>-ful</i> | <i>-less</i> |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. harm | _____ | _____ |
| 2. care | _____ | _____ |
| 3. hope | _____ | _____ |
| 4. colour | _____ | _____ |

b. These words can use either *-ful* or *-less* but not both. Which one is correct? Guess and write.

1. end _____
2. peace _____
3. home _____
4. beauty _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Young people cannot live without the internet."
- "Algorithms have made social media unhealthy and addictive."
- "Social-media companies must protect people's safety and wellbeing."

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about the effects of social media on people's health and wellbeing. Answer these questions.

- What are some of the positive and negative effects of social media?
- What are some of the problems around children and teens using social media?
- How can social-media use become an addiction?
- What are social-media companies doing to make this better?
- What have some governments done to protect people?
- In your opinion, what is the right thing for social-media companies to do?

b. Report your findings to the class and share the facts you learnt, as well as your opinions. Include facts and statistics that support your research. Give reasons to support your answers.