



SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD?

Social Media Policies in Germany and Australia

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INTRODUCTION

- A Survey conducted in 2021-22 in 40 countries among adolescents aged 11-15 years showed that 11% had signs of problematic social media behaviour (i.e., struggling to control their use resulting in functional impairment or negative psychosocial consequences) (Boniel-Nissim M et al, 2024).
 - Algorithm-driven content delivery may amplify exposure to harmful content and problematic use patterns (Ortutay & Haderao, 2024).
- However, active and supportive social media use could provide adolescents with opportunities for social connection, emotional support, access to mental health information, and a sense of belonging (Sala et el, 2024).
 - Germany already regulates youth online protection through the Jugendmedienschutz-Staatsvertrag (JMStV).

CURRENT PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS: AUSTRALIA



- Australia introduced a nationwide ban on social media access for children under the age of 16 in December 2025.
- The legislation places responsibility on platforms to prevent underage access through age assurance technologies, e.g., facial recognition, digital IDs.
- Companies could be fined approx. USD \$32–33 million for not enforcing the ban.
- Australia's experience suggests that large-scale implementation of age assurance requirements is feasible when supported by clear regulatory mandates.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR GERMANY

SOCIAL MEDIA & MINORS GERMANY

POLICY OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

RESTRICTION APPROACH

Stronger limits for under 16s



Age limits (14–16)

Minimum age requirements for access to social platforms.



Platform liability

Greater responsibility for platforms to protect minors.



Verification & enforcement

Robust age verification and consistent enforcement.



Potential risks

Impact on rights, privacy and inclusion if poorly designed.



Finding the right balance
between protection, freedom,
proportionality and enforceability.

EDUCATION & REGULATION APPROACH

Empower, inform and regulate



Digital literacy

Invest in education to build critical thinking and online resilience.



Parental empowerment

Better tools, guidance and support for families.



Safer design & transparency

Stronger privacy standards and age-appropriate design by default.



Open dialogue

Engage young people in shaping effective solutions.

CONTEXT & CONSIDERATIONS



Public support

Around 70% of Germans support stricter rules for under-16s on social media.*



Legal framework

Measures must comply with the Basic Law, EU law and children's rights.



Implementation reality

Age verification is complex; bans are easy to bypass without global solutions.



EU & international context

Alignment with the EU Digital Services Act and ongoing European initiatives.

*Source: YouGov (DE), 2024

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The goal:

Protect young people while upholding rights, freedom and feasibility.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. EMPOWER

Adolescents as co-actors, not subjects

- Ensure meaningful inclusion of adolescents and parents in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social media policies and interventions.

2. INFORM

Make guidance usable, visible, actionable

- Raise awareness on mental health impacts of social media and promote digital literacy through co-created educational initiatives.

3. REGULATE

Implementation challenges in laws and policies

- Develop practical mechanisms and digital tools for age verification, platform oversight, and protection against cyberbullying and harmful content.

• AWMF: Guideline for the prevention of dysregulated screen media use in childhood and adolescence. 2023;1(awmf-register no. 027-075). URL: <https://register.awmf.org/de/leitlinien/detail/027-075>

• Boniel-Nissim, Marino, Galeotti, Blinka, Ozoliņa et al. (2024). A Focus on adolescent social media use and gaming in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/378982>. Lizenz: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

• Ortutay, B., & Hadero, H. (2024). Meta, TikTok and other social media CEOs testify in heated Senate hearing on child exploitation. AP News

• JMStV: https://www.kjm-online.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Rechtsgrundlagen/Gesetze_Staatsvertraege/JMStV/JMStV_english_version.pdf

• Sala, Porcaro, & Gómez (2024). Social Media Use and adolescents' mental health and well-being: An umbrella review. Computers in Human Behavior Reports, 14, 100404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100404>