

The Internet Has a Child Safety Design Flaw—And No Country Can Regulate Around It Dr. Lisa Strohman, JD, PhD

Yesterday, [French senators](#) approved legislation which would ban children under the age of 15 from opening social media accounts. The bill (which will not receive a final vote until Sept) would require social media platforms to verify users' ages and close the accounts of those children under 15 who already have accounts.

France is simply the latest country to ban social media in a bid to protect children from online harm. In Dec 2025 [Australia banned](#) youths under 16 from social media apps. The UK, Turkey and Indonesia have also implemented or are planning to implement similar restrictions on children's use of social media. These governments are motivated by the same concern that parents have expressed for years now—social media platforms cannot be trusted to police themselves and protect children.

Unfortunately, although these government regulations are well-meaning, national bans of social media will not create a safe global internet for all children.

Laws are national in character. The internet is global.

For children online their digital identity travels with them, so if a child has access to the internet and to hardware and software through which to express themselves online, their identity is 'portable'. On the other hand, online services have physical servers located in countries around the world and are regulated according to the laws of individual countries. Consequently, it is quite possible for a teenager to engage with online services of all types in a matter of minutes. Parents are often unaware of this.

As a child and adolescent psychologist (and a law professor and attorney) I have spent more than two decades studying and writing about the negative impact of social media on children. The inadequate (and usually disingenuous) attempts by social media companies to upgrade protections for children have passed the tipping point for parents and, increasingly, legislators, which is a welcome change. However, for any real progress to be made, society must address the common denominator behind all social media platforms: design flaws.

For ex.,

- Unreliable and circumventable safety features: According to the CyberSafety Research Center, "60% of advertised child safety features failed independent testing"
- Ineffective age-verification tools
- Invasion of privacy through use of solutions such as biometrics

- Manipulation of users into compromising or fraudulent situations like romance scams or grooming by child predators
- Algorithms that conflict with safety objectives
- Social media platforms continue to hold out hope that with enough parental buy-in they can continue to operate online environments of increasing commercialization where children can socialize, learn and play online.

The reality is that the only way to guarantee children's online safety is through the creation of a neutral, privacy-preserving and globally operating trust infrastructure for families, for authorities issuing identities, and for companies providing services online.

The trust infrastructure would provide **one-time verified facts** to online services and request only the minimum information necessary, such as the following:

A child's verified age or date of birth.

Verified parent or guardian relationship.

Whether that verified parent or guardian has granted permission for a child to participate in specific online activities.

Only verified facts would be disclosed, not personal identifiers.

Online services would receive only the information required for its specific purpose.

The infrastructure would be comparable to what already exists in the financial services sector, where a customer's identity is verified when opening a bank account or when setting up online banking. Once established, every transaction the customer carries out is confirmed for that specific purpose without a record of identity information being stored for later tracking.

A massive governmental surveillance system is not the answer. Nor is censorship the route to take.

A neutral, privacy-preserving and globally operating trust infrastructure will provide parents (and society) with the ability to protect its children without waiting futilely for social media giants to voluntarily act in children's best interests.

[Dr. Lisa Strohman](#) is a clinical psychologist and attorney who is internationally recognized as a specialist on the intersection of psychology and technology (especially social media). She is co-author of two books on the subject: *Unplug: Raising Kids In A Technology Addicted World* and *Digital Distress: Growing Up Online*.