

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society,

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen with vested interests in the well-being of our society, particularly our younger generation. The influence of social media on Australian society cannot be overstated, and it is imperative that we address the Terms of Reference with the gravity they deserve.

Firstly, the use of age verification to protect Australian children from social media is paramount. The developing minds of children are highly impressionable, and the unregulated exposure to social media can lead to serious consequences, including cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and the early onset of mental health issues. By implementing a robust age verification system, we can ensure that the digital playground is as safe and nurturing as the physical one.

Also, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) seems relevant to this matter, particularly Articles 16, 17, 19, 34, and 36. As does Article 10(3) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Secondly, the decision of Meta to abandon deals under the News Media Bargaining Code is a significant setback for Australian journalism. It is essential that we support our local news outlets and ensure they are fairly compensated for the content they produce. This not only sustains the industry but also combats the spread of misinformation by upholding journalistic standards of truth and integrity.

Furthermore, the role of Australian journalism, news, and public interest media in countering misinformation and disinformation is critical. In an era where fake news can spread faster than the truth, supporting our journalists is supporting the backbone of our informed democracy.

The algorithms and recommender systems of digital platforms have a profound impact on what Australians see online. These systems often prioritise engagement over the well-being of users, leading to a distorted view of reality that can exacerbate mental health issues. It is crucial that we demand transparency and ethical considerations in these corporate decisions.

Regarding other issues related to harmful or illegal content, such as scams, age-restricted content, child sexual abuse, and violent extremist material, the need for positive identification is clear. By requiring users to provide verifiable identification to hold or open social media accounts, we can significantly reduce the anonymity that enables such detrimental behaviour. This measure would not only deter trolls and the spread of disinformation but also aid in holding individuals accountable for their actions online.

There have also been cases of social media being used for various nefarious reasons, including (for example) interference in democratic processes, such as elections, and such as by foreign entities. All Australian citizens need protection from these types of activities.

In conclusion, the committee's work is of utmost importance, and I urge you to consider these points with the seriousness they warrant. The future of our society and the mental health of our citizens depend on the actions we take today to regulate social media responsibly.

Thank you for your time and consideration.