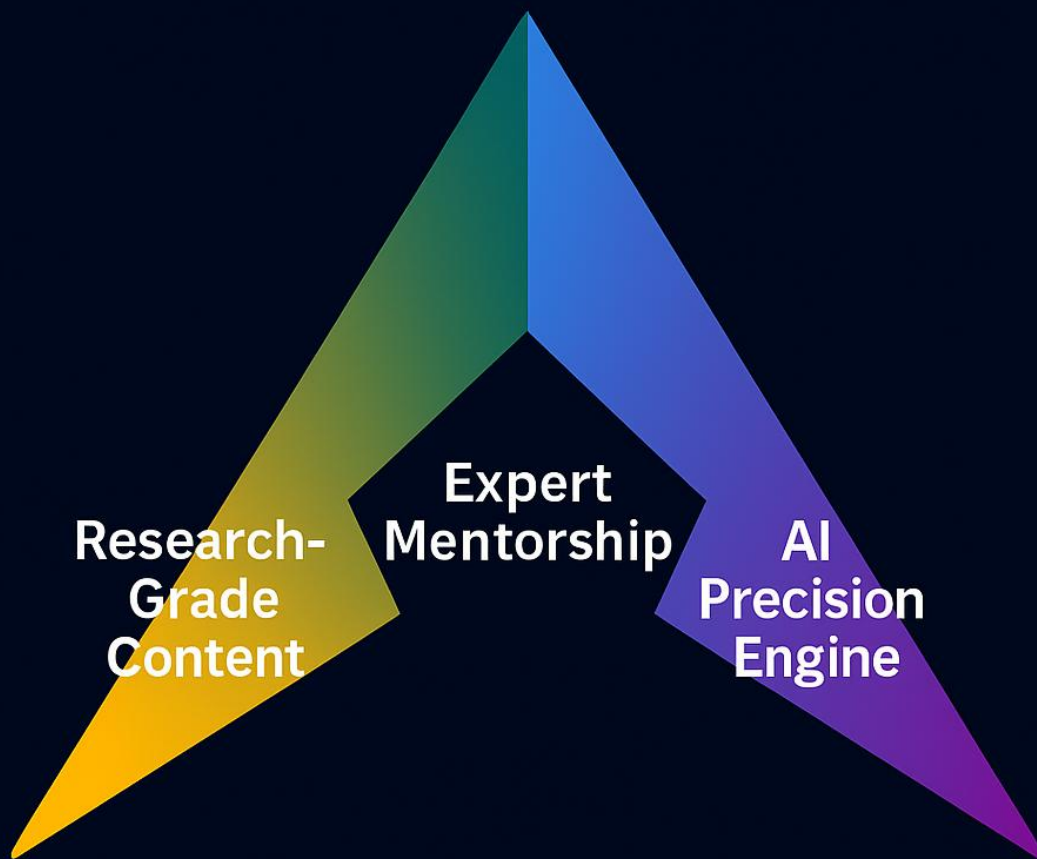


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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 17.06.2026

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. Regulating Social Media Use for Children

a. Introduction

The regulation of children's social media use has become an important governance issue across the world. Several countries, including Australia and the United Kingdom, are tightening restrictions on children's access to social media platforms. India is also examining a graded regulatory framework instead of imposing an outright ban.

The issue is significant because social media is no longer only a communication tool. It has become a powerful behavioural environment shaped by algorithms, personalised notifications, recommendation systems and design features that encourage prolonged engagement. For children, whose cognitive and emotional capacities are still developing, such platforms can create serious risks relating to mental health, privacy, safety and digital autonomy.

Therefore, the policy debate is not simply about restricting access. It is about creating a safer digital environment for children without denying them meaningful benefits of technology.

b. Key Developments

Recent global and Indian developments show a shift towards stronger child-safety regulation in digital spaces.

Global Developments

- Australia has moved towards restricting social media accounts for users below sixteen years of age.
- The United Kingdom is also considering stronger restrictions and child-safety measures.
- These developments reflect growing international concern over the impact of social media on children.

India's Approach

- India is considering age-specific safeguards rather than a blanket prohibition.
- This would allow different levels of protection for different age groups.
- The approach recognises that children's maturity and vulnerability vary across age groups.

Importance of a Graded Model

- Younger children may require stronger default protections.
- Older adolescents may need a balanced framework combining safety, autonomy, education and supervised access.
- A graded approach avoids the rigidity of a complete ban.

These developments indicate that social media regulation is moving from reactive control towards structured child-centric digital governance.

c. Why Regulation is Needed

The demand for regulation arises from growing concern over the harms associated with excessive and poorly regulated social media use.

Mental and Behavioural Health Risks

- Excessive use may cause sleep disruption and reduced concentration.
- It can contribute to anxiety, social comparison and emotional distress.

- Children may also face exposure to harmful or age-inappropriate content.

Addictive Platform Design

- Social media platforms often use engagement-driven business models.
- Features such as personalised notifications, infinite scroll, autoplay and recommendation systems encourage prolonged use.
- Children may find it especially difficult to exercise self-control in such an environment.

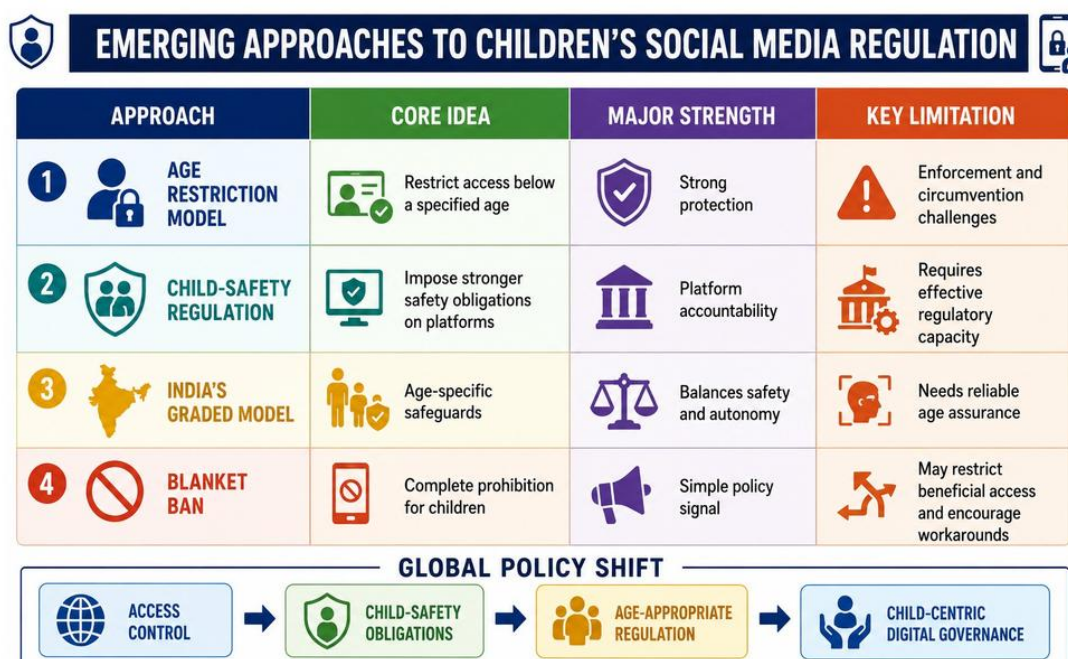
Fear of Missing Out

- Ephemeral content creates pressure to check platforms repeatedly.
- Children may feel compelled to stay constantly connected.
- This can weaken attention, rest and offline social engagement.

Safety and Privacy Risks

- Easy discovery by strangers can increase risks of grooming and manipulation.
- Cyberbullying and online harassment can affect mental well-being.
- Targeted engagement and data collection can compromise privacy.

Therefore, the issue is not merely one of parental supervision. It is also about platform design, corporate accountability and the responsibility of the state to protect children in digital spaces.



d. Policy Debate

The policy debate requires balancing child protection with autonomy, privacy and access to beneficial digital opportunities.

Case for Regulation

- Children have limited capacity for informed digital decision-making.
- They may not fully understand data collection, algorithmic influence or long-term online consequences.
- A protective framework can safeguard privacy, mental health and healthy cognitive development.

Parental Control Limitation

- Individual parental control is often insufficient.
- Children may face peer pressure when friends are active online.
- The wider digital environment is designed to maximise engagement.

Risks of Blanket Ban

- A blanket ban may be difficult to enforce.
- It may push children towards unsafe workarounds.
- It may restrict access to educational content, peer support and beneficial digital opportunities.

Privacy Risks in Age Verification

- Age-verification systems may require additional data collection.
- Poorly designed systems can create privacy and surveillance risks.
- Verification must follow data minimisation and accountability principles.

Wider Child Well-Being Context

- Social media is not the only cause of mental health stress.
- Family environment, academic pressure, loneliness, poverty and lack of recreational spaces also matter.
- Social media regulation should therefore be part of a wider child well-being strategy.

India needs a balanced framework, not a simplistic choice between complete freedom and complete prohibition.

e. Design-Based Regulation

A major shift in policy thinking is the move from regulating only users to regulating platform design.

Meaning

- Design-based regulation focuses on how platforms are built and operated.
- It recognises that children's behaviour is shaped by the architecture of the digital environment.
- It shifts responsibility from children alone to platforms that design addictive systems.

Key Design Concerns

- Autoplay and infinite scroll can increase compulsive use.
- Addictive notifications can repeatedly pull children back to platforms.
- Algorithmic amplification and intrusive recommendation systems can expose children to harmful content.

Regulatory Value

- It reduces reliance on parental supervision alone.
- It creates safer default settings for minors.
- It makes platform accountability central to child protection.

Design-based regulation is therefore essential for addressing the structural causes of harmful social media use.

f. Way Forward

India should adopt a graded, rights-based and design-focused approach to regulating children's social media use.

Graded Age-Appropriate Framework

- Younger children should receive stronger default protections.
- Older adolescents may be allowed supervised and safer access.
- Regulation should avoid a one-size-fits-all ban.

Child-Safe Design Standards

- Platforms should provide stronger privacy settings by default.
- Addictive features such as infinite scroll, autoplay and unnecessary notifications should be limited for minors.
- Stranger contact and behavioural targeting of minors should be restricted.

Algorithmic Transparency

- Recommendation algorithms affecting children should be subject to transparency requirements.
- Independent audits should assess risks to child safety and mental health.
- Platforms should be accountable for harmful amplification.

Privacy-Preserving Age Verification

- Age verification should be robust but privacy-preserving.
- It should avoid unnecessary collection of sensitive data.
- It must follow data minimisation, consent and accountability principles.

Digital Literacy

- Children should be taught how algorithms work.
- Parents and schools should be trained to identify harmful content and online abuse.
- Screen-time management and reporting mechanisms should be part of digital education.

Rights-Based Safeguards

- Child protection should not become a justification for excessive surveillance.
- Regulation should avoid arbitrary censorship.
- The framework must preserve access to educational content, social participation and digital inclusion.

A successful regulatory model must protect children while also preparing them for responsible participation in the digital world.

Conclusion

The debate on children's social media use has moved from whether regulation is needed to how regulation should be designed. India's challenge is to create a balanced framework that protects children's mental health, privacy and safety without denying them the educational and social benefits of the digital ecosystem.

The most effective approach will be graded, rights-based and design-focused. It should place responsibility not only on parents and children, but also on platforms whose business models and design choices shape the digital lives of young users.

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While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

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This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

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