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Social media age bar stirs debate Social media bar

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: Australia's recent ban on social media for children below 16 has sparked conversations in Calcutta, raising questions about digital habits, maturity and the mental health of teenagers.

While many adolescents view the ban with apprehension, adults believe it recognises the role of maturity in helping young people navigate online spaces safely. Sixteen, they think, is an age where children are comparatively less impressionable and more capable of distinguishing right from wrong.

"At the age of 12-13-14, the entire sense of right or wrong is hazy. Teenagers look for instant gratification and the social validation that social

media provides," said Satabdi Bhattacharjee, principal of The Newtown School.

Screen dependence affects children's attention spans, disrupts sleep and increases truancy. "It is fanciful to expect children in Classes VI-VII to sleep before 1.30-2am when social media keeps them awake at night," Bhattacharjee added.

Gargi Banerjee, principal of Sri Sri Academy in Alipore, said that children often rely on online validation due to the absence of real-world social interactions. "Most are only children, growing up in nuclear families and living

more amongst help than family members. Social media becomes their go-to place," she said.

Teachers feel that without some form of restriction, children find it difficult to use social media or screens in moderation. In India, there is currently no formal age bar for social media usage, though experts advise parents to monitor children according to recommended platform minimum ages.

"Social media is detrimental for children because it gives a false view of the world. It creates a curated bubble, shaping perceptions without their awareness," said Tina Servata,

senior school principal at Calcutta International School.

The obsession is not limited to kids. "Even conscious adults struggle to stay away from screens. Most check their phones first thing in the morning, as if missing a few hours of updates is catastrophic," said Koeli Dey, principal of Sushila Birla Girls School.

She added that the compulsion to record every moment digitally can take away from the experience itself. "Instead of internalising an experience, one is busy documenting it, and the essence is lost," Dey said.

The impact on teenagers is significant. Many compare themselves with peers, feeling excluded from social circles curated online.

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"There is a constant comparison with perfect online lives. They feel their peers have it all while they don't," said Meghajit Mukherjee, father of a 13-year-old.

Dey added that overuse of social media is linked to unhappiness and mental health issues among children.

Metro had earlier reported that children as young as six or seven often have access to personal devices. Parents say this makes it difficult to monitor exposure to inappropriate content. "There is so much online content that you cannot fully

restrict usage. It would be foolhardy to believe everything my daughter sees is appropriate or study-related," Mukherjee said.

However, some educators caution against heavy-handed restrictions. "Forceful imposition may backfire. Children will revolt if something is taken away suddenly," said Seema Sapru, principal of The Heritage School.

She emphasised the need for teaching responsible and judicious use of social media. "We want children to be critical thinkers, able to question, but ironically, we also expect them to accept rules without objection," Sapru said.



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