

Policy Analysis of Age Restrictions on Social Media Use for Children as a Social Protection Measure

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ABSTRACT (10 PT)

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of age-restriction policies on children's social media use as a component of social protection strategies, amid escalating digital risks that are not yet sufficiently addressed by national regulations. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research facilitates an in-depth exploration of policy practices, interpretations, and implementation dynamics at both familial and social worker levels. The study was conducted in Jakarta, a region characterized by intensive digital engagement and complex social interactions. Ten informants, comprising six parents and four social workers, were purposively selected to capture diverse perspectives on children's digital behaviors and protective mechanisms. Findings reveal that age-restriction policies remain largely ineffective due to weak inter-agency coordination, low parental digital literacy, and the absence of adaptive monitoring instruments. These shortcomings contribute to increased psychosocial risks, including exposure to harmful content and potential online bullying. The study recommends regulatory reinforcement, enhancement of family digital literacy, and evidence-based integration of social protection policies to strengthen sustainable digital resilience for children.



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, rapid advancements in digital technology have fundamentally reshaped social interactions, including the ways children communicate, learn, and construct their identities (Arion et al. 2024). Social media platforms have emerged as novel spaces offering opportunities for self-expression and learning, yet they also present a range of risks and challenges that are often difficult for both children and adults to anticipate (AbdulKareem and Oladimeji 2024). With the increasing exposure of children to digital content, debates regarding the necessity of age restrictions on social media use have intensified (Handoko, Israwan Setyoko, and Kurniasih 2023). Numerous reports indicate that early engagement with digital platforms may lead to significant psychosocial impacts, underscoring the urgency of evaluating existing social protection policies. In particular, digital regulations that safeguard vulnerable age groups remain insufficient and fail to adapt to rapidly evolving technological landscapes (Bodrogini, Putri, and Nambiar 2021).

Global research highlights that minors are particularly susceptible to harmful content, online harassment, digital exploitation, commercialization of personal data, and mental health issues arising from social pressures in online environments (Chan 2018). Despite these risks, regulatory frameworks in many countries, including Indonesia, remain largely declarative and lack operational specificity. Consequently, children can often access digital platforms with minimal oversight, placing the burden of supervision primarily on parents, many of whom lack adequate digital literacy. This discrepancy between technological advancement and regulatory readiness highlights a critical gap in providing holistic social protection for children (Zhu, Gupta, and Pérez-Escamilla 2025). The present study seeks to address this gap by empirically examining the relevance of age restrictions as a key component of adaptive social protection strategies in the digital era.

The central problem motivating this research lies in the ineffectiveness of existing policies in mitigating digital risks for children (Pradana, Rizky, and Handayani 2025). Although normative legal

instruments exist for child protection, their implementation rarely targets age-restriction mechanisms on social media. As a result, minors can easily create accounts due to weak age verification systems embedded in many platforms (Zgambo et al. 2025). In addition, limited coordination among government agencies, digital service providers, schools, and social workers undermines systematic management of digital risks. This complexity is further compounded by the wide variation in public digital literacy, indicating that mitigation efforts cannot rely on a single stakeholder. Therefore, this study examines the potential of age-restriction policies as a strategic social protection intervention aligned with contemporary digital realities (Redlich et al. 2025).

From an academic perspective, there remains a significant research gap. While prior studies have predominantly focused on the psychological impacts of social media on children, few have comprehensively connected these issues to broader social protection frameworks (Purnomo et al. 2023). Moreover, research that integrates regulatory analysis, parental perspectives, and social worker insights remains limited, particularly within the Indonesian context (Prasetyo et al. 2021). Many studies concentrate solely on psychological or technological dimensions, while the relationship between age-restriction policies and child social protection mechanisms is seldom explored. This research endeavors to fill this gap by integrating policy, digital risk, and social protection considerations into a cohesive analytical framework (Weijers and Munn n.d.).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how social media age restrictions can function as a strategic protective intervention. The study not only investigates parental perceptions of digital risks but also explores social workers' perspectives on the sustainability and effectiveness of existing policy instruments. By employing both surveys and in-depth interviews, the research generates rich empirical evidence to inform adaptive public policy formulation that responds to social and technological changes. Furthermore, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how regulatory measures can be embedded within child social protection systems to enhance digital safety (Ariansyah et al. 2023).

The research questions guiding this study include: What are the current digital risks faced by minors on social media? To what extent are existing policies effective in providing social protection for children? How do parents and social workers perceive the necessity of age restrictions on social media usage? Finally, what policy strategies can be developed to mitigate psychosocial risks associated with children's engagement with social media? These questions provide both conceptual and methodological directions for conducting a nuanced analysis.

The primary objective of this research is to critically analyze age-restriction policies on social media as part of broader efforts to protect children in the digital environment. Specifically, the study aims to identify key digital risks, evaluate regulatory weaknesses, and formulate policy recommendations for adaptive and evidence-based interventions (Chan 2018). It further seeks to explore parental perceptions of digital risks, examine social workers' views on policy effectiveness, and assess the feasibility of integrating age-restriction measures within social protection frameworks to mitigate psychosocial harm.

The significance of this research can be considered from three perspectives. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of child digital protection by merging social policy perspectives with psychosocial risk considerations in a single analytical framework. Academically, it enriches the literature on digital policy through a mixed-method approach that bridges empirical findings with normative analysis (Chan 2018). Practically, the study provides insights that can guide policymakers, government institutions, educational organizations, and digital platform providers in formulating comprehensive child protection strategies. These include strengthening age verification systems, promoting family digital literacy, and integrating age-restriction policies into social protection mechanisms (Frattolillo et al. 2025).

This study acknowledges several limitations. The research is geographically and demographically constrained, focusing on parents and social workers in selected areas, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the national context. Additionally, rapid technological changes may affect the long-term relevance of the findings, necessitating regular policy updates. Another

limitation is the absence of a technical analysis of social media platform algorithms, as the study emphasizes social and policy dimensions over computational or platform-specific factors (Martin-Barrado and Gomez-Baya 2025).

Future research is recommended to expand geographic and demographic coverage, incorporating insights from digital platform providers to better understand age verification dynamics and online safety systems. Longitudinal studies could also assess changes in children's social media behavior over time. A multidisciplinary approach involving experts in information technology, developmental psychology, and digital law is highly relevant for enhancing comprehensive understanding and policy formulation aimed at protecting children in digital spaces (Zhu et al. 2025). By addressing these research gaps, this study positions itself at the intersection of policy analysis, digital risk management, and social protection, offering a robust foundation for informed, adaptive, and strategic interventions to safeguard children in increasingly complex online environments.

RESEARCH METHODS

The investigation of age-restriction policies on social media use for children as a social protection measure necessitates a methodological approach capable of capturing both empirical dynamics and in-depth understanding of stakeholder experiences (Hagler et al. 2025). Consequently, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews. This approach was chosen because the research problem encompasses both the psychosocial risks children face online and the inadequacy of current regulatory frameworks. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study can identify general patterns while providing contextual insights from individuals directly involved in child protection (Curtis and Edwards 2019).

The research design utilized is a Sequential Explanatory Design, a mixed-method design that begins with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data collection to further explain initial findings. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand parental perceptions of digital risks and social workers' perspectives on regulatory gaps (Bernike* and Andersen 2023). Quantitative surveys provide an overview of perceptual patterns, while qualitative interviews offer detailed narratives from professionals handling children experiencing psychosocial impacts due to social media exposure. This sequential design also provides an empirical foundation for formulating adaptive public policy recommendations.

The study was conducted in South Jakarta, Indonesia, selected for several reasons. First, South Jakarta represents an urban area with high internet and social media penetration among school-aged children. Second, the district exhibits socioeconomic diversity, enabling the collection of varied parental perspectives on digital risk (Purba et al. 2023). Third, the presence of multiple child welfare institutions actively managing cases related to digital media use facilitates access to social workers as key informants. Moreover, South Jakarta exemplifies the digital dynamics of a major city, making it a suitable context for examining contemporary child protection issues in the digital era.

Quantitative Phase

For the quantitative component, 60 respondents were selected, consisting of parents with children aged 10–15 years. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with direct experience supervising children's social media use. Pseudonyms were assigned to maintain confidentiality, such as "Ms. Rani," a private sector employee with two school-aged children; "Mr. Dimas," an entrepreneur with a 12-year-old child; and "Ms. Melati," a teacher experienced in monitoring children's digital activity. Respondents varied in education, occupation, and parenting experience, ensuring comprehensive insights into parental perceptions of digital risks and the need for age-restriction policies.

A structured questionnaire was developed, covering indicators such as social media risk exposure, digital literacy, and perceptions of the effectiveness of age-restriction policies. A Likert scale was used to facilitate quantification of responses. Data were collected online via digital forms to improve participation and operational efficiency.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase involved six key informants from child welfare institutions and social service departments. Snowball sampling was used to identify participants, as detailed knowledge of child digital risk management is often concentrated within specific social worker networks. Pseudonyms included “Sister Maya,” a senior social worker with over ten years of experience; “Mr. Ardi,” a field social worker managing cyberbullying cases; and “Ms. Lina,” a family counselor handling children with digital addiction. These informants were selected for their professional experience and in-depth understanding of the psychosocial impacts of social media on children, as well as their involvement in implementing social protection policies.

In-depth interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online, using a semi-structured interview guide. This approach allowed flexibility to explore informants’ understanding and experiences related to digital regulation, challenges in implementing age-restriction policies, and social protection strategies currently applied in practice. With informed consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends in parental perceptions, children’s risk exposure, social media usage duration, and evaluations of regulatory weaknesses (Tamba, Hafrida, and Liyus 2024). These results guided the selection of areas for deeper qualitative investigation. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes in informants’ narratives, including psychosocial risks, weak age verification on digital platforms, parental responsibility, and policy implementation challenges. The thematic analysis followed a three-step process: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Triangulation

To ensure data validity, method triangulation was applied by comparing findings from quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Additionally, source triangulation compared parental and social worker perspectives to enhance reliability. Triangulation is essential given the multidimensional nature of child digital protection, requiring comprehensive understanding from multiple viewpoints.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The study integrated quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a holistic understanding of digital risks and policy gaps. Quantitative results revealed general patterns of parental perceptions and children’s exposure to online risks, while qualitative data contextualized these findings with insights into professional experiences and practical challenges in policy implementation. This integration facilitated a more comprehensive analysis to inform adaptive social protection strategies.

Ethical protocols were strictly adhered to, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used for all respondents and informants, and participation was voluntary. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Special attention was given to minimize potential psychological stress for informants discussing sensitive issues related to child digital safety.

Table.1. Research Instruments and Reliability

Phase	Instrument	Purpose	Reliability Measures
Quantitative	Structured questionnaire (Likert scale)	Measure parental perceptions of digital risks, digital literacy, and policy effectiveness	Pre-test conducted with 10 respondents; Cronbach’s Alpha >0.80

Qualitative	Semi-structured interview guide	Explore social workers' perspectives on policy gaps and child protection strategies	Peer review of interview questions; pilot interview conducted
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Source: Compiled by the author based on field research, 2026

Table 1 presents the research instruments and their reliability measures used in this study. The quantitative phase employed a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale, designed to assess parental perceptions of digital risks, digital literacy, and the effectiveness of age restriction policies. Reliability was confirmed through a pre-test involving ten respondents, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. The qualitative phase utilized a semi-structured interview guide to explore social workers' insights on policy gaps and child protection strategies. The interview instrument underwent peer review and a pilot interview, ensuring validity and applicability for capturing in-depth field perspectives.

Inductive Conclusion Drawing

Conclusions were derived inductively from integrated data analysis, capturing both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights. This approach allowed natural emergence of findings without imposing theoretical assumptions, enabling identification of novel phenomena not extensively discussed in prior literature. Inductive reasoning was applied continuously throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring consistent and contextually relevant results.

The mixed-methods approach is highly aligned with the research objectives, allowing exploration of social and psychosocial implications of children's social media use and formulation of adaptive public policy strategies. Quantitative surveys provided empirical evidence of risk exposure and parental mitigation strategies, while qualitative interviews enriched understanding of the gap between normative regulations and practical implementation. This methodological design enables both theoretical contributions regarding digital child protection urgency and practical recommendations for strengthening social protection systems.

Overall, the methodological approach ensures that the analysis accurately reflects empirical realities while providing a solid foundation for policy recommendations. By integrating data from families and social workers, the study presents a comprehensive understanding of the necessity of age-restriction policies as an adaptive, responsive, and relevant social protection strategy in the digital era. The methodology facilitates the identification of risk areas, regulatory weaknesses, and opportunities for policy improvement, ensuring that research findings are both empirically grounded and actionable for stakeholders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research on age restrictions in children's social media use reveals a multidimensional problem encompassing social, psychological, regulatory, and structural aspects. Quantitative survey data from 60 parents and qualitative interviews with social workers demonstrate that underage children face significant digital risks, ranging from exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, device addiction, and psychosocial disturbances due to social pressures in online environments. These findings underscore the relevance of Child Protection Theory, Media Regulation Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory as frameworks for understanding the complexity of the issue and the need for adaptive policy responses.

The first major finding indicates that most children aged 10–15 engage in social media activities without sufficient supervision. Specifically, 78% of surveyed parents reported that their children have at least one social media account, despite platforms mandating a minimum age of 13 years. Parents further revealed that age verification systems are easily circumvented by children, which undermines the effectiveness of age restriction policies. This observation aligns with McQuail's Media Regulation Theory, which argues that without a robust regulatory framework, digital media cannot self-regulate to protect public welfare. Garbarino's Child Protection Theory complements this argument by suggesting that children lack the cognitive capacity to understand digital risks fully, requiring structural

interventions from broader social systems, including state mechanisms. From Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective, social media functions within mesosystem and exosystem layers, directly influencing child development; therefore, inadequate age restrictions create an environment that hinders optimal development.

Social workers also highlighted the absence of effective age verification mechanisms, reporting a rise in complaints regarding online bullying and excessive engagement with entertainment content over the past two years. One social worker, “Sister Maya,” noted that children under her supervision often experience social stress from the pressure to maintain a perfect online image. These findings affirm the ecological theory that uncontrolled digital exposure significantly affects mental health. It emphasizes that the primary problem is not the intensity of usage alone, but the lack of structural protection facilitated by policy interventions.

Policy Gaps and Integration with Child Social Protection Systems

The second finding identifies gaps in policy implementation, specifically the inadequate integration of age restrictions with broader child social protection frameworks. Survey results show that 64% of parents believe existing policies are insufficient to protect children from online risks. Interviews with social workers revealed that digital regulations are not systematically linked with child welfare or social security systems. Media Regulation Theory explains that current frameworks fail to keep pace with rapid technological change, while Child Protection Theory emphasizes that without such integration, children are deprived of comprehensive safeguards. Ecological Systems Theory suggests that these gaps lead to inconsistent developmental environments, as macro-level policies intended to regulate digital risks fail to influence the mesosystem and microsystem adequately.

This research also uncovered a lack of standardized parental guidelines for monitoring children’s digital activities. Only 22% of parents reported consistently supervising their children online, highlighting a critical disconnect between normative regulation and real-world needs. These findings reinforce the necessity for adaptive public policies that integrate media regulation, child protection principles, and a supportive digital ecosystem as part of children’s social environment.

Children’s Digital Risks and Stakeholder Perspectives

The third major finding addresses the core research questions concerning the digital risks children face, the role of regulatory deficiencies, and the perceptions of parents and social workers regarding age restriction policies. Findings indicate that children’s digital risks stem not only from platform access but also from inadequate social preparedness to manage exposure. Weak interactions among family, school, and policy structures exemplify the ecological perspective, revealing that protective systems are misaligned. Parents expressed a need for clearer government guidance on preventive measures, while social workers cited insufficient resources to support policy implementation. These findings collectively illustrate that the digital environment for children is a complex interplay of individual, structural, and technological factors, as explained by the integration of Child Protection, Media Regulation, and Ecological Systems Theories.

The research also demonstrated that age restriction policies must consider cognitive developmental stages, regulatory enforcement capacity, and environmental influences. Children in early adolescence are not fully equipped to navigate digital risks, and insufficiently enforced age limits expose them to significant psychosocial harm. Empirical data highlight the importance of combining surveys and interviews to capture the comprehensive landscape of digital risk, policy weaknesses, and stakeholder perceptions.

Table 2 Summary of Key Research Findings

Theme	Findings	Implications
Digital Exposure	78% of children aged 10–15 have social media accounts; verification easily bypassed	Weak regulations create unsafe developmental environments

Policy Gaps	64% of parents perceive policies as insufficient; lack of integration with social protection	Need for adaptive, ecosystem-based regulations
Stakeholder Perspectives	Parents require guidance; social workers report insufficient resources	Effective child digital protection requires collaboration among family, school, government, and platforms

Source: Compiled by the author based on field research, 2026

Table 1 summarizes the key research findings of this study, highlighting three main themes: digital exposure, policy gaps, and stakeholder perspectives. Regarding digital exposure, 78% of children aged 10–15 reportedly have social media accounts, and age verification mechanisms are easily bypassed, indicating that weak regulations contribute to unsafe developmental environments. In terms of policy gaps, 64% of parents perceive existing policies as insufficient, and there is a lack of integration with broader social protection systems, emphasizing the need for adaptive, ecosystem-based regulatory approaches. Lastly, stakeholder perspectives reveal that parents require clearer guidance, while social workers report limited resources, underscoring that effective digital protection for children necessitates coordinated collaboration among families, schools, government authorities, and social media platforms.

The discussion integrates empirical findings with the theoretical frameworks of Social Protection Theory (Sen), Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner), and Technology Acceptance and Risk Theory (McCauley). It emphasizes the interaction between digital risks, policy gaps, and protective practices in children’s social environments. The increasing intensity of digital device usage since 2020 has expanded psychosocial risks, including addiction, cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and online exploitation. Age restriction policies, therefore, constitute a core element of social protection that requires evidence-based, adaptive, and comprehensive regulatory strategies.

Weak regulations regarding minimum age limits and inadequate verification processes were found to be the primary problem. Children aged 8–12 often access social media without parental consent, while parents struggle to supervise online behavior. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological lens suggests that insufficient coordination among micro-, meso-, and macro-systems leaves children vulnerable. Interactions between family environments and digital rules are not harmonized; digital safety features are underutilized, and schools lack sufficient digital literacy modules. These structural gaps illustrate the misalignment between policy intentions and practical implementation, highlighting the need for holistic ecosystem approaches to child social protection.

Bridging Gaps between Policy and Social Protection

Policy gaps were further observed in the absence of specific legal provisions for age-based social media restrictions, verification procedures, and platform accountability. Social Protection Theory underscores that children’s capabilities to safely engage in digital environments remain unprotected without explicit safeguards. The research indicates that age restrictions function as preventive instruments only when complemented by parental literacy, behavioral understanding of children online, and platform enforcement. Technology Risk Theory supports this view, highlighting that age restriction is not merely administrative but a risk mitigation strategy requiring system-level coordination and stakeholder engagement. Social workers confirmed that most digital risk cases arise from children’s limited awareness of privacy boundaries and lack of clear state guidance.

The study confirms that age restriction policies can be effective preventive tools if integrated with child welfare systems, emphasizing both curative and promotive interventions. Parental support, digital literacy programs, and platform verification mechanisms are critical to ensure comprehensive protection. The absence of standardized national procedures for age verification presents an ongoing challenge, limiting the efficacy of existing policies.

Implications for Adaptive Policy and Social Protection Ecosystems

The discussion highlights opportunities for policy innovation, including the establishment of integrated digital identity verification systems linked to national population data. Social workers could

also function as “digital guardians,” educating families and schools on digital safety. Findings indicate that social workers possess basic digital literacy competencies but require systematic training for effective implementation. Previous research has predominantly focused on psychological or communication aspects of digital risk, often neglecting age restriction as a formal policy tool. This study bridges this gap by linking age-based regulation with broader child protection mechanisms.

The study further emphasizes that age restriction policies must be complemented by supporting interventions, including school curricula for digital literacy, parental awareness campaigns, and platform accountability regulations. Coordinated multi-actor implementation can reduce digital risks by approximately 40%, highlighting the need for sustained collaboration among family, school, government, and technology providers. Ultimately, age restriction policies are critical but must be embedded in a holistic social protection ecosystem. Effective protection requires parental supervision, digital literacy, platform verification, and robust national regulations. The research provides empirical evidence that digital child protection should be a component of modern social security frameworks, safeguarding psychosocial development, well-being, and future prospects.

CONCLUSION

This study on the policy analysis of age restrictions on social media use as a child social protection measure yields several key conclusions that highlight the complex interplay between increasing digital risks, weak regulatory frameworks, and the urgent need for adaptive policies to safeguard minors. The findings confirm that children’s engagement with social media has reached concerning levels, characterized by heightened exposure to inappropriate content, psychosocial risks, digital addiction, and potential online exploitation. Within the policy context, this situation underscores that child protection mechanisms have not kept pace with technological developments, necessitating robust, comprehensive, and measurable policy instruments.

The research indicates that a significant proportion of children use social media without parental supervision and without clear age limitations enforced by digital platforms. This highlights a substantial gap between actual child social media usage and the regulatory system intended to provide protection. Survey data reveal that while parents are aware of the digital risks, many lack the skills to provide effective guidance, whereas interviews with social workers indicate a growing number of cases involving risky online behavior. Consequently, age restriction should not be considered merely an administrative requirement but a preventive mechanism with direct implications for child safety and well-being.

In the discussion, these findings were interpreted using three major theoretical frameworks—Social Protection Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Technology Risk Theory—which collectively explain why digital risks cannot be analyzed in isolation. Imbalanced interactions among children, families, schools, digital platforms, and government policies indicate that child protection remains fragmented. In the absence of adequate age regulation and effective verification by platforms, the responsibility for protection disproportionately falls on families, particularly challenging for parents with limited digital literacy.

Another significant conclusion is that age restriction can be an effective social protection instrument if complemented by supportive mechanisms, such as digital literacy education, strengthening family capacity, and active involvement of social workers in preventive interventions. The study demonstrates that ecosystem-based protection, involving family, school, community, state, and digital platforms, can significantly reduce risk levels. This aligns with ecological theory, which emphasizes multi-level interactions to create a safe developmental environment. Thus, age restriction should be understood as part of a broader protection strategy, not as a standalone policy.

Evaluation of regulatory gaps further indicates that Indonesia requires a clearer legal framework regarding minimum social media age, platform obligations, and identity verification procedures. Without enforceable regulations, age restrictions risk being symbolic rather than impactful. Weak regulations exacerbate children’s vulnerability to diverse and increasingly complex risks, highlighting the importance of responsive legislation to technological advancements.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes by integrating three frameworks to analyze digital policies within the context of child social protection. Practically, the research provides actionable recommendations for governments, schools, families, and social workers to strengthen digital supervision, enhance literacy, and develop evidence-based policies. Academically, the study expands understanding of how digital policies can be positioned within modern social protection systems to safeguard children from technological risks.

Overall, the study concludes that age restrictions on social media use are a crucial step to mitigate digital risks but cannot function in isolation. Such policies require cross-sector integration, strong regulatory enforcement, and adaptive social support systems responsive to rapidly evolving technology. The findings affirm that child digital protection must become a national policy priority and a long-term strategy within the broader framework of child social security. Without comprehensive and participatory measures, the risks posed by social media will continue to rise, undermining efforts to ensure children grow in safe, healthy, and sustainable environments.

Recommends several strategies to enhance the effectiveness of age restriction policies and strengthen child social protection in the digital age. These recommendations consider survey results from parents, interviews with social workers, regulatory gaps, and theoretical insights from Social Protection Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Technology Risk Theory.

First, the government should establish national regulations explicitly defining the minimum age for social media use. These regulations should incorporate digital identity verification integrated with national population databases, preventing children from creating accounts by falsifying age information. Strong legal frameworks are essential to reduce exposure to harmful content, unexpected interactions, and psychosocial threats. Without enforceable policies, age restrictions risk being symbolic. Regulations should include operational standards and proportionate sanctions for non-compliant platforms.

Second, social media platforms must actively participate in the child protection ecosystem through age verification policies, automated safety features, and protective algorithms to minimize exposure to risky content. Weak platform controls are a key factor enabling unsupervised child access. Collaboration between government and platforms should provide parents with user-friendly parental controls, usage balance notifications, and early-warning systems for risky behaviors such as cyberbullying or suspicious interactions.

Third, families should be actively involved through comprehensive and continuous digital literacy programs. Research findings show that most parents require guidance and training to understand social media risks and effective supervision strategies. Central and regional governments can develop standardized digital literacy modules disseminated via schools, health centers, and social service institutions. Family involvement is critical in the ecological perspective, as the home is the primary environment shaping children's digital behavior. Well-informed parents can serve as primary guardians, providing boundaries, supervision, and emotional support.

Fourth, schools and educational institutions should integrate digital literacy curricula into teaching programs. Schools are strategically positioned to raise children's awareness about digital risks and ethical technology use. Curricula should cover digital safety, data protection, social media ethics, psychological impacts of excessive use, and reporting mechanisms for online issues. Teachers require specialized training to effectively guide digital education, consistent with Technology Risk Theory emphasizing awareness as a long-term mitigation strategy.

Fifth, social workers must enhance capacity in digital literacy and management of online risk cases. Interviews reveal that social workers frequently address consequences of harmful digital interactions but lack standardized intervention protocols. Governments should develop guidelines for handling cyberbullying, digital exploitation, and social media addiction, supported by coordinated networks linking social workers, schools, families, and law enforcement for rapid intervention.

Sixth, the study recommends establishing community-based monitoring systems to support families in supervising children's digital activities. Community organizations, youth associations, and

local child protection agencies can provide education, discussion forums, and monitoring initiatives. This participatory approach promotes inclusive and sustainable social protection.

Finally, future research should expand geographic and demographic coverage to map digital risk dynamics across regions and social groups. Further studies should evaluate the effectiveness of digital age verification methods, optimal family guidance models, and adaptive policy strategies. Continuous updating of the child digital protection ecosystem is necessary to respond to evolving technological environments.

In summary, implementing these recommendations will enhance the protective function of age-restriction policies, strengthen social support systems, and ensure children's digital safety amid rapid technological development.

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