
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

To Ban or Allow Social Media Use by Students Under 16 in Saudi Arabia: Perspectives from Parents and Teachers

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| ABSTRACT

In December 2025, Australia became the first country to officially ban the use of social media platforms as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X, and Threads by students under 16, aiming to protect teenagers from psychological harm and bullying. Educational and health services such as Google Classroom and assistive technology apps are exempt from the ban. About 20 countries have also introduced policies that restrict or prohibit students' access to social media. Although the Saudi Ministry of Education has not yet considered banning students under a specific age from using social media, this prospective study aims to assess parents' and teachers' attitudes toward banning or restricting social media access for students under 16 in Saudi Arabia. Responses to an open ended survey showed that 50% of participants support the ban, believing it enhances students' wellbeing; protects them from social disconnection and isolation from family and community; prevents the adoption of behaviors or values inconsistent with local culture; preserves students' ability to concentrate, focus on learning, achieve academically, and engage in productive hobbies; increases attention and responsiveness; protects them from inappropriate or harmful content; prevents moral corruption or exposure to unethical material; reduces childhood obesity and encourages physical activity; and shields students from receiving medical, religious, or general information from fake or unreliable sources. By contrast, 50% oppose the ban—either fully or partially—preferring parental guidance. They argue that technology and social media have entered every home, and preventing students from using them is unrealistic. If parents ban access, students may create accounts secretly. Parents, they believe, can set appropriate rules themselves. They also argue that students should not be isolated from the world; rather, they should be allowed to explore, meet new friends with similar interests, develop communication skills, stay informed about local and global events, and discover and develop their talents and hobbies. By engaging parents, teachers, and policymakers in evidence based dialogue, Saudi Arabia can move toward frameworks that protect students' wellbeing while supporting their digital literacy, autonomy, and healthy participation in an increasingly connected world.

| KEYWORDS

Social media ban, social media access, students under 16, parents' views, teachers' views, social media harm, digital wellbeing, online safety, policy restrictions, digital literacy.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In December 2025, Australia¹ became the first country in the world to officially ban social media use for children under 16. The legislation aims to protect young people from psychological harm, bullying, and sexual exploitation, while "restoring parental

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/australia-europe-countries-move-curb-childrens-social-media-access-2026-07-21/>

control” over children’s digital environments. The ban targeted platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), Threads, and Kik. Educational and health-related services—such as Google Classroom and assistive technology applications—are exempt. Under the new law, technology companies such as Meta and TikTok are required to take “reasonable steps” to prevent minors from creating accounts. Platforms that fail to comply may face fines of up to AU\$49.5 million. Importantly, the law does not penalize children or their parents. The law sparked widespread debate, with parents and child-rights advocates have welcomed the move, while technology companies have criticized it, and digital-rights advocates have raised concerns about its effectiveness and potential privacy implications.

Following Australia’s decision, numerous countries began introducing similar restrictions. According to an Agence France-Presse (AFP) tally², around 20 countries have proposed or introduced measures limiting children’s access to social media, with five nations already enforcing such rules. China has restricted minors’ access to social media and gaming platforms since 2019, expanding time limits and curfews to streaming platforms in 2023. Indonesia and Malaysia imposed similar bans for under-16s effective March and June 2026, respectively. Türkiye passed legislation in April 2026 barring under-15s, effective late 2026. The United Kingdom³ is expected to finalize an under-16 ban by the end of 2026, with implementation beginning early 2027. Brazil introduced a law in March 2026 requiring platforms to link accounts of users under 16 to a parent’s account and to verify users’ ages. France⁴ enacted an under-15 restriction effective September 2026 for new accounts and January 2027 for existing ones. The United Arab Emirates announced a ban for children under-15s, scheduled for implementation within a year.

While global policy debates and international empirical studies continue to gain momentum, understanding how these restrictive measures are perceived within specific cultural and educational settings remains critical. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where rapid digital transformation under Vision 2030 intersects with exceptionally high social media adoption rates among youth, any proposed age-based restriction directly impacts both household dynamics and classroom environments. However, the current literature predominantly reflects Western policy models and public sentiment, leaving a noticeable empirical gap regarding Middle Eastern contexts. Because parents and educators serve as the primary enforcement agents, mentors, and observers of children’s digital habits, their perspectives are vital to evaluating the feasibility, cultural appropriateness, and potential outcomes of a social media ban. To address this gap, this study investigates the views of teachers and parents in Saudi Arabia regarding whether children under 16 should be banned from social media platforms.

In the wake of Australia’s policy, a substantial body of research has emerged examining the implications, challenges, and potential outcomes of banning children and adolescents from social media. The first group of studies has examined Australia’s landmark decision to introduce the world’s first nationwide social media ban for children under 16. The studies include Chen (2025) who provides a foundational overview of the Online Safety Amendment Bill, emphasizing its unprecedented strictness and its global ripple effects. Complementing this, Wu (2026) critically examines the policy’s rationale, highlighting concerns about algorithmic manipulation, compulsive design features, and adolescent developmental vulnerabilities. However, Wu also notes that account-based restrictions may fail to shield minors from harmful content accessible in “logged out” modes. Will banning kids from social media protect them from harm? Conroy (2024) questions the evidence base supporting the ban, arguing that empirical support for its effectiveness remains limited. Fardouly (2025) situates the ban within broader political and public debates, noting strong public support but also significant academic opposition. French (2024) provides an independent legal examination of the ban’s feasibility, while Singh (2024) critiques similar legislative efforts in the United States, framing youth social media bans as forms of censorship that may not resolve underlying mental-health concerns.

The second group of studies report public opinion toward social media bans across countries. Survey-based studies reveal substantial public engagement with the question of whether children should be restricted from social media. In Australia, Horwood (2026) documented the mixed expectations of parents and adolescents, though without reporting percentages. In Greece, several large-scale surveys provided detailed quantitative insights. Galanis (2026a & 2026b) reported that 69% of the participants supported the ban, while 86.5% believed additional measures were necessary. Another 69.2% agreed with the ban, 92.7% demanded more information, and 86.5% supported for additional measures such as digital literacy and parental involvement. Katsiroumpa et al. (2026a; 2026b) found that 50.8% of young adults supported the ban, 91% wanted more governmental information, 84.4% believed supplementary measures were needed, 93.4% expected children to circumvent restrictions, and only 9.8% believed platforms would fully comply. Among parents, Katsiroumpa et al. also found 68% supported for the ban, 91.8% demanded more information, and 89.3% endorsed supplementary measures. Beyond social media, Kharazi

² <https://www.turkiyetoday.com/world/countries-move-to-restrict-social-media-access-for-children-3224320?s=1>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-media-restriction-pilots-qualitative-research-with-13-to-17-year-olds-in-the-uk/social-media-intervention-research-2026-social-media-restriction-pilots-qualitative-research-with-13-to-17-year-olds-in-the-uk>

⁴ https://newscord.org/article/frances-parliament-approves-social-media-ban-for-children-under-15-macron-backs-story_20260721_Francesparliamentapp2e9a7cb2

(2026) illustrated how media narratives shape public attitudes toward digital restrictions in educational settings, reinforcing the broader societal debate around youth digital safety.

The third group of studies focused on the negative effects of social media ban on students' mental health and development and the harms associated with excessive digital engagement even before the Australian ban was declared. Kurz & Jahng (2022) explored political motivations behind proposed bans in Texas, linking them to concerns about teen wellbeing. Tuncay (2018) contrasted "virtual" and "physical" sociality, documenting misuse and problematic behaviors that justify restrictions. Welsey Smith & Fleming (2025) argued for precautionary regulation due to consistent evidence of small but meaningful harms. Wiederhold (2019) highlighted cognitive and academic impacts of smartphone presence. Zhang, (2026) situated bans within broader mental health trends, noting rising distress among youth. Extending the debate to AI, Robbins & Blundell (2026) argued that early regulation of generative AI is necessary to prevent repeating past mistakes. Ebster et al. (2026) examined neurocognitive consequences of short-form video consumption. Further studies highlighted the psychological and developmental risks associated with early social media exposure, particularly anxiety, cyberbullying, and sleep disruption (Champion, 2025; Coyne, 2025; Redlich, 2025; Welsey Smith & Fleming, 2025).

Another group of studies argued against social media bans. Although these are fewer in number, but they challenged the effectiveness of bans. Fardouly (2025) contended that bans oversimplify complex digital ecosystems and may infringe on youth rights. Similarly, Conroy (2024) emphasized the lack of robust evidence demonstrating that bans reduce exposure to harmful content. Ellis et al. (2019) argued that banning smartphones for children may overlook deeper cyberpsychological issues. Holly (2024) indicated that bans oversimplify digital harms, while Orben (2026) highlighted scientific uncertainty surrounding youth digital risks. Few more studies reported why bans fail and highlighted the challenges of enforcing social media bans. Wu (2026) added that adolescents can still access harmful content without accounts, and that recommendation algorithms shape behavior regardless of login status. Greek studies by Katsiroumpa, et al. (2026a; 2026b)) showed that over 90% of participants believe children will circumvent bans. Galanis (2026a) documented doubts about platform compliance and calls for clearer governmental communication. Kharazi (2026) illustrated how enforcement varies across contexts, complicating policy implementation.

The last group of studies emphasized that bans alone are insufficient and offered alternatives and recommendations for safe digital use. Greek studies by (Galanis, 2026a; 2026b) consistently recommended digital literacy education, parental involvement, content regulation, and restrictions on addictive platform features. Welsey Smith & Fleming (2025) advocated for age verification and safer design standards. Robbins & Blundell (2026) called for proactive regulation of emerging technologies. Wiederhold (2019) suggested controlled use policies rather than blanket bans. Adams (2019) argued that schools can protect children by banning smartphones in specific contexts while still embracing technology in pedagogically meaningful ways.

In Arab countries, a considerable body of research has examined the risks associated with Arab students' use of social media, often revealing recurring patterns across different educational contexts. Omar Waqaa (2020) documented the widespread prevalence of cyberbullying among school students in Sohag, Egypt, and linked this rise to weak parental monitoring, violent digital games, and family-level disciplinary gaps. Similarly, Al-Adeeli & Bin Khalifah (2022) found high levels of cyberbullying among university students in Al-Baha, Saudi Arabia, driven by intensive use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Their study emphasized statistically significant differences in cyberbullying levels across age, academic year, and college major, recommending preventive awareness programs to mitigate risks. In the UAE, Naamah & Sarmani (2025) reported a weak but positive correlation between internet addiction and exposure to cyberbullying, particularly among students in scientific majors, highlighting the psychological vulnerabilities associated with excessive digital engagement.

Beyond cyberbullying, Arabic studies consistently found academic distraction, social consequences and declining well-being resulting from unregulated social media use. Ghabashi & Nevin Ahmed (2018) concluded that Egyptian university youth experience significant time mismanagement, linguistic decline, and increased isolation due to prolonged online engagement, noting that students spend an average of six hours daily on the internet. In Saudi Arabia, Mahmoud Basha et al. (2021) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between social media addiction and social isolation among adolescents. Likewise, Shahin & Al-Deek (2023) found that both social media addiction and social isolation predict higher levels of psychological loneliness among university students, with isolation explaining over 70% of the variance in loneliness. Additional studies, such as Ikram et al. (2024), reported negative effects on academic achievement and mixed effects on social relationships among secondary students, reinforcing the need for parental guidance and time-management awareness. Collectively, these Arabic studies reveal a clear pattern: while social media offers opportunities for connection and learning, their excessive or unsupervised use poses substantial risks to students' psychological well-being, academic focus, and social development.

Despite the growing international concern about the impact of social media on students' wellbeing, existing research on public attitudes toward banning or restricting social media use for minors remains geographically limited. While recent Arabic studies

conducted in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have examined students' digital practices, parental mediation, language development, digital reading, online learning, and the broader cultural and educational implications of social media use, none of these studies have investigated public support for banning or restricting social media access for students under 16. Thus, although the Arabic literature has expanded substantially, it continues to focus on students' digital behaviors rather than societal attitudes toward regulatory measures.

Globally, most empirical studies addressing public attitudes toward youth social-media bans have been conducted in Australia and Greece, highlighting mixed public support, concerns about enforcement, and calls for complementary measures such as digital literacy and parental involvement. However, no research has examined how such policies are perceived within the cultural, educational, and regulatory context of Saudi Arabia, where social norms, family structures, and schooling practices differ significantly from Western settings. Moreover, although teachers play a central role in monitoring students' digital behavior and wellbeing, their perspectives remain largely absent from both international and Arabic literature.

Although the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has not banned social media use among students under 16, little is known about how Saudi parents and teachers perceive the possibility of regulating or restricting access for this age group. This gap limits policymakers' ability to design culturally appropriate and educationally feasible guidelines for youth digital safety. Therefore, this study examines parents' attitudes toward banning, approving, or restricting social media use among students under 16 in Saudi Arabia. It addresses the following questions: (i) How do parents in Saudi Arabia view a social media ban for students under 16? What proportion support the ban, oppose it, or approve it with regulations? (ii) Are there significant differences in parents' attitudes toward allowing or restricting social media for students under 16 based on gender, area of specialization, educational level, or employment status? (iii) What concerns do parents have regarding the risks of social media use among students under 16, and what benefits do they believe social media provide? (iv) What alternative measures (e.g., digital literacy, parental monitoring, school policies) do parents prefer instead of a complete ban, and what recommendations do they offer for the safe use of social media by students under 16?

This study fills a clear gap in the international and Arabic literature on youth social media regulation. Although recent Arabic studies have examined students' digital practices, parental mediation, language development, online learning, and cultural aspects of social media use, none have explored public attitudes toward banning or restricting social media access for minors. Existing international research has focused almost exclusively on Western contexts—particularly Australia and Greece—leaving Saudi Arabia entirely unexplored despite its distinct cultural norms, family structures, and educational expectations. By incorporating the views of Saudi parents and teachers, this study provides context-specific evidence that has been missing from global discussions on digital safety.

The study also contributes uniquely by including teachers, a group largely absent from previous research. Teachers observe students' digital behavior daily and are directly affected by any policy changes related to social media use in schools. Their perspectives offer practical insights into how bans or restrictions might influence learning, wellbeing, and school environments.

Furthermore, as policymakers in Saudi Arabia increasingly confront questions related to digital safety, mental health, and responsible technology use, this study provides empirical evidence that can inform future guidelines, awareness campaigns, and school-based digital literacy initiatives. Understanding whether parents and teachers support bans, prefer moderated restrictions, or favor alternative measures is essential for designing policies that are culturally appropriate, feasible, and aligned with community expectations.

Finally, by offering a non-Western perspective on youth digital regulation, this study enriches global debates on online harms, age verification, and platform accountability. Insights from Saudi Arabia highlight how cultural context shapes attitudes toward students' social media use and broaden the international evidence base.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A total of 276 parents were randomly selected from the author's social media followers (approximately 15,000). The sample reflects a wide range of demographic and professional backgrounds. Mothers constituted 87% of the participants, while fathers represented 13%. Regarding employment, 48% were both parents and teachers, 35% were employed parents working in non-academic fields such as pharmacy, private business, and the private sector, and 17% were stay-at-home mothers. Participants also varied in educational attainment: 35% held a Ph.D., 26% an M.A., 33% a B.A., and 6% a high school diploma. Their area of specializations included: English & linguistics (20%), computer science (17%), education (15%), business (13%), accounting (4%), engineering (4%), Islamic studies (4%), pharmacy (2%), law (2%), international relations (2%), chemistry (2%), human resources (2%), dentistry (2%), economics (2%), computer graphics (2%), and not specialized (7%). The participants live in

different areas and cities across Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Dammam, Khobar, Jeddah, Makkah, Deba, and Tabuk. This diversity in gender, profession, education, and geographic location provides a broad representation of Saudi parents' and teachers' perspectives on youth social media use.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over 6 months, through an open-ended survey distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. The survey included demographic questions (educational level, specialization, employment status) followed by the central question: *Do you support banning students in the Kingdom under the age of 16 from using social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube? Whether your answer is yes or no, please provide at least three reasons.*

Some participants were contacted individually a second time when clarification was needed to ensure accuracy and completeness of responses.

2.3 Data Analysis

Participants' responses were sorted out according to a four-level continuum that reflects the diversity of parental viewpoints toward students' use of social media. The continuum includes the following categories:

(i) Group Supporting Restriction

Parents in this category advocate strong or full restriction, emphasizing protection and risk avoidance. Their arguments include: protection of values, identity, and cultural norms, exposure to inappropriate or harmful content, risks of exploitation, manipulation, and online harassment, attention fragmentation caused by short-form content, and cognitive overload ("brain rot"). This group views restriction as a preventive measure to safeguard students' moral, psychological, and cognitive development.

(ii) Group Opposing Restriction

Parents here reject full bans and emphasize empowerment and skill-building such as developing critical thinking and digital judgment, empowerment rather than prohibition, historical parallels with early television adoption, availability of meaningful, educational, and culturally rich content, and necessity of teaching digital skills rather than avoiding them. This group sees digital engagement as inevitable and believes students must learn to navigate it responsibly.

(iii) Parents' Supporting Purposeful Use Under Parental Supervision

A large portion of respondents (33) fall into this middle category, advocating conditional access supported by guidance and monitoring. Key features include: guided, conditional access, use of educational channels, language-learning content, cultural programs, parental co-viewing, supervision, and content filtering, and case example: Roudine Rasheed, a child activist whose social media presence is fully supervised. This group represents a balanced approach: neither full restriction nor full freedom.

(iv) Group Supporting Unregulated or Unaware Digital Freedom

This category includes parents who allow unrestricted posting or misunderstand "freedom" as absence of guidance: students posting inappropriate TikTok content; parents unaware of platform risks or privacy issues; and cases where high educational level ≠ digital literacy or awareness. This group highlights the risks of unstructured digital exposure and the gap between academic education and digital competence. Justifications provided by each subgroup were sorted, coded, and analyzed. Percentages were calculated to determine how frequently specific reasons appeared across demographic variables and within each subgroup. As a result, participants' opinions are presented using both quantitative indicators (percentages) and qualitative thematic analysis. To ensure reliability, the author conducted the coding and quantification process twice, with a two-week interval between analyses. Any discrepancies between the two rounds were reviewed and corrected to strengthen consistency and accuracy.

2.4 Delimitations of the Study

Data collection, coding, and analysis were conducted by the author. Therefore, using a very large sample (e.g., 400–600 participants) would be impractical. For a solo project, 276 detailed, open-ended responses represent a substantial and manageable dataset that allows for systematic analysis without compromising accuracy.

The study is exploratory and relies on open-ended responses supplemented by percentages. In this type of design, the primary goal is breadth of perspectives and thematic saturation, rather than producing precise national estimates. A sample of 276 participants is therefore sufficient to identify dominant patterns and recurring viewpoints among Saudi parents and teachers.

Additionally, data saturation was observed: similar justifications and themes appeared repeatedly across participants. This repetition indicates that the major arguments for and against banning social media for students under 16 were adequately captured, reinforcing the appropriateness of the sample size for the study's aims.

Moreover, the findings of this study reflect parents' and teachers' self-reported opinions, not performance-based measures. The surveys relied on perceptions, personal judgments, and lived experiences rather than standardized tests, diagnostic tools, or rating scales. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as an account of stakeholders' viewpoints rather than objective assessments of students' psychological, social, or academic outcomes.

3. Results

3.1 Parents' Views of Social Media Ban for Students under 16

Analysis of parents' reactions to the proposed ban showed clear variation in their positions, aligning closely with the four-level continuum identified earlier. Half of the participants (50%) fell into the group supporting restriction category, expressing strong support for banning social media use for students under 16. In contrast, 22% belonged to the group opposing restriction group, rejecting the ban entirely. Another 22% represented the group supporting purposeful use under parental supervision category, favoring a partial ban accompanied by specific regulations and parental oversight. A smaller group (4%) recommended lowering the banning age to 12 instead of 16, reflecting a nuanced position within the restriction-supporting continuum. Additionally, 2% supported the ban but indicated that they were unable to apply it in practice. Notably, the group supporting unregulated or unaware digital freedom category was absent in the sample (0%), as no parents reported allowing unrestricted or unsupervised digital access.

Additionally, data analysis showed that gender, area of specialty, academic degree, or employment status have no effect on parents' responses. Being the largest group, 26% of the teachers support the ban, 10% do not support the ban, and 8% support a partial ban with regulations, 4% recommended the banning age at 12 years. Similarly, 9% of the parents specialized in English and Linguistics support the ban, 4% do not support the ban, 7% prefer supervised use with regulations. 13% of the parents specialized in computer science support the ban, 2% do not support the ban and 2% support a partial ban with regulations. Similarly, 9% of parents specialized in education support the ban, 4% recommended banning students under the age of 12 not 16 and 2% support a partial ban with regulations. The same applies to parents with different employment status, whether they are teachers or work in non-academic fields.

This pattern is further illustrated by an example from the extended family context: even among highly educated and professionally experienced parents, attitudes toward banning social media vary widely. For example, one participant—an elementary, junior and senior high school principal with extensive experience in educational leadership—did not support the ban, emphasizing the importance of guided use rather than prohibition. In contrast, her relatives, both university faculty members, held opposing views: one advocated conditional restriction to maintain academic focus, while the other rejected the ban entirely, arguing for supervised digital autonomy. These contrasting positions within the same family highlight that parental attitudes toward social media are not determined by educational level or professional expertise alone. Instead, they are shaped by personal parenting philosophies, individual experiences with their children, perceived academic pressures, and differing interpretations of digital risks and benefits. This intra-family diversity reinforces the study's broader conclusion that the debate around banning social media is inherently complex, multifaceted, and deeply contextual.

3.2 Views of Parents Supporting a Total Ban

Results of the data analyses showed that 50% of the participants in the sample support the social media ban for students under 16. The reasons given by this group of participants are reported in the following categories:

(1) Psychological and Emotional Harm

Parents frequently emphasized the psychological risks associated with early social media use, noting increased anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional instability, and exposure to cyberbullying. They stressed that students lack the awareness to distinguish what can or cannot be shared online, which exposes them to mockery, harassment, and even risks of exploitation or criminal targeting. Many described how constant comparison with influencers and peers fosters dissatisfaction with their own life and weakens their sense of identity. The addictive nature of fast-paced content, driven by rapid dopamine release, was seen as a major contributor to mood disorders, impulsivity, and what some parents referred to as "brain rot." Collectively, these concerns reflect a strong belief that social media poses significant emotional and mental health threats to students under sixteen.

(2) Cognitive and Academic Impact

Parents reported substantial cognitive and academic consequences, including weakened concentration, reduced memory retention, and difficulty sustaining attention during study sessions. They observed that students increasingly prefer short, shallow content over deep learning, which undermines critical thinking and creativity. Several parents noted a clear decline in academic

performance, with students struggling to focus for even an hour and relying on unverified educational content from unqualified sources. Many also pointed out that students spend long hours consuming content that offers no real benefit, exposing them to negative ideas that distort their language, identity, and worldview. These patterns suggest that social media disrupts core cognitive processes essential for academic success.

(3) Social and Behavioral Consequences

A recurring theme involved the social and behavioral changes seen in students who use social media excessively. Parents described growing isolation, introversion, and withdrawal from family interactions, alongside weakened communication skills and reduced vocabulary. Some noted that students begin avoiding parents and relatives, preferring digital interactions over real-life relationships, which gradually weakens face-to-face communication skills. Exposure to profanity, imitation of influencers, and participation in risky online challenges were also common concerns. Some parents reported aggressive reactions when devices were removed, indicating emotional dependence. These observations highlight the disruptive influence of social media on students' social development and everyday behavior.

(4) Moral, Cultural, and Religious Risks

Many parents expressed deep concern about the moral and cultural implications of unfiltered digital content. They noted that students encounter scenes and ideas that conflict with religious values, promote inappropriate behavior, or undermine family norms. Some highlighted the normalization of indecent content and the spread of beliefs that contradict Islamic principles. Parents feared that early exposure to such material could shape students' moral judgment and weaken their ability to distinguish right from wrong, making this category a central justification for supporting a ban.

(5) Physical and Health Problems

Parents also pointed to several physical health issues linked to excessive device use, including sleep deprivation, obesity, lethargy, and reduced physical activity. Some mentioned neurological concerns such as seizures or increased neural stimulation. The lack of movement and prolonged screen time were seen as major contributors to poor physical fitness and unhealthy routines. These observations underscore the belief that limiting social media is essential for protecting students' physical well-being.

(6) Digital Safety and Online Risks

Digital safety emerged as a major concern, with parents highlighting risks such as exploitation, fraud, privacy violations, and communication with strangers. They described dangerous online challenges, unregulated interactions, and exposure to harmful content through open platforms. Many stressed that students do not possess the maturity needed to navigate these risks safely, making them vulnerable to manipulation and harm. This category reflects strong parental support for stricter digital protection measures.

(7) Time Wasting and Poor Self-Management

Parents consistently noted that social media leads to significant time loss and poor daily routines. Excessive screen time disrupts sleep schedules, reduces productivity, and encourages procrastination. Students spend long hours browsing, gaming, or switching between apps, leaving little time for meaningful activities. Parents observed that device use often replaces studying, hobbies, and family engagement, reinforcing the belief that restricting social media is necessary for healthier time management.

(8) Identity Distortion

A number of parents emphasized the impact of social media on students' developing identities. Exposure to unrealistic lifestyles, foreign cultural norms, and celebrity behavior was seen as distorting students' self-image and values. Some noted that students begin to desire luxury or fame, undervaluing education and hard work. Early exposure to conflicting ideas was believed to complicate identity formation, making this a significant justification for supporting a ban.

(9) Parental Control Challenges

Parents frequently described difficulties in enforcing limits on social media use. Students often resist restrictions, bypass parental controls, or consume endless streams of unfiltered content. Some parents reported extreme reactions—anger, screaming, or breaking objects—when devices were removed. Others noted that platforms constantly push new videos, making monitoring nearly impossible. Parents in this group added that students easily change their age during registration or use their parents' information—sometimes with parental approval—to access apps not suitable for their age. These challenges illustrate why many parents believe that personal regulation is insufficient and that stronger external controls are needed, such as linking devices to a child's national ID or legally requiring parental supervision.

3.3 Views of Parents and Teachers Opposing the Ban

Results of the data analyses revealed that 22% of the participants in the sample oppose banning social media use for students under 16. The reasons provided by this group are presented in the following categories.

Technological Reality and Inevitability

Parents who oppose banning argue that digital platforms have become an integral part of modern life, making complete banning from social media unrealistic and outdated. They emphasize that students today are born into a technologically saturated environment—smart TVs, smartphones, and AI-driven tools—which naturally shapes their curiosity and expectations. For these parents, social media is not an optional luxury but a core component of contemporary communication and learning. They believe that isolating students from such a dominant societal force would create feelings of exclusion and hinder their ability to adapt to the digital world.

(10) Negative Effects of Prohibition

A recurring justification is that strict bans often produce counterproductive outcomes. Parents note that “the forbidden becomes desirable,” meaning that prohibition may push students to use social media secretly, without guidance, and in unsafe ways. They warn that banning platforms can lead to hidden accounts, pseudonyms, and risky interactions, especially when students fear punishment for violating the ban. This secrecy increases vulnerability to exploitation, cyberbullying, and harmful content, ultimately making the ban more dangerous than regulated use.

(11) Educational and Developmental Benefits

Several participants who oppose the ban emphasized that social media and digital platforms have become important tools for learning and intellectual growth. They noted that some applications now serve as effective self-learning resources, offering tutorials, explanations, and diverse educational content. According to this group, exposure to digital tools is essential for helping students keep pace with rapid technological advancement and develop the digital awareness required in modern society. They also highlighted that social media enables students to explore global cultures and different learning approaches, broadening their perspectives and enriching their understanding of the world. For these parents, restricting access would limit valuable opportunities for discovery, curiosity, and meaningful engagement with the wider digital landscape.

(12) Social Connectivity and Emotional Support

Parents opposing the ban emphasize the importance of maintaining social ties. They believe social media strengthens communication with family and friends, especially in geographically dispersed communities. For students, these platforms provide emotional support, a sense of belonging, and opportunities to express themselves. Restricting access, they argue, may lead to social isolation and deprive students of meaningful peer interaction during critical developmental stages. In some cases, social media like WhatsApp or Telegram are a means of communication between teachers and parents and teachers and students.

(13) Digital Awareness and Critical Thinking

A central argument by some parents opposing the ban is that students must learn how to navigate digital spaces safely rather than be shielded from them entirely. Parents stress the importance of teaching critical thinking, responsible judgment, and digital awareness. They believe that students should be guided to evaluate content, distinguish between beneficial and harmful material, and develop independence in decision-making. According to this view, banning social media delays essential digital skills and leaves students unprepared for the realities of adulthood.

(14) Practical Challenges and Enforcement Issues

Many parents opposing the ban highlight the practical challenges of enforcing a complete ban on social media for students under 16. They explain that students can easily bypass age restrictions, create hidden accounts, or use parents' devices without supervision. In the Saudi context, some parents noted that families often register accounts with older ages to enable essential services such as Apple Pay or communication apps, making enforcement inconsistent and difficult. Because strict prohibition frequently leads students to create secret accounts, these parents argue that bans are ineffective and may expose students to greater risks. Instead, they prefer supervised and transparent access, believing that guided use—where parents monitor and set clear rules—reduces unsafe, unsupervised behavior and offers a more realistic and protective alternative to complete restriction.

(15) Historical Analogy and Media Evolution

Some parents opposing the ban compare social media to earlier technological shifts, such as the introduction of television. They argue that every generation faces new media challenges, and families gradually learn how to manage them. Just as previous generations adapted to TV content through selective viewing and parental guidance, today's families can adapt to social media through thoughtful supervision rather than prohibition.

(16) Holistic Child Development

A final justification centers on the belief that students must be equipped to face life's challenges—both offline and online. Parents argue that social media is one of many modern realities, and students should learn how to engage with it responsibly. They emphasize emotional support, open communication, and strong family bonds as the foundation for raising resilient, well-adjusted students who can navigate digital environments safely.

3.4 Views of Parents Supporting Partial Use with Supervision

About 22% of participants stated that they do not oppose students' use of social media as long as it occurs under parental supervision and guidance. These parents and teachers emphasized that responsible use, clear rules, and active monitoring are more effective than complete prohibition. They believe that balanced, supervised access allows students to benefit from educational content, develop communication skills, and explore interests safely while maintaining parental control over potential risks. Many parents therefore advocate structured regulation—parental controls, supervised access, time limits, and content filtering—arguing that this approach protects students, supports learning, and maintains social inclusion without resorting to full bans. They also stressed that effective regulation depends on active parental involvement: healthy parenting, religious and moral guidance, open communication, and trust-based relationships. Instead of banning platforms, these parents prefer guided exposure, family discussions about online experiences, and teaching students how to handle negative content. Abeer echoed this view, noting that social media is a communication tool of their era and should be regulated and monitored rather than prohibited. Further justifications are categorized and reported below:

i) Digital Citizenship and Technological Awareness

Parents in this group emphasize that complete prohibition is not the optimal solution and that students must learn digital citizenship and responsible technology use. They argue that raising a generation capable of navigating the digital era requires gradual exposure, training, and awareness. Abeer reinforced this idea by noting that technology and social media have become the “new language of the age,” making it essential for students to learn and engage with them rather than be isolated. According to this view, banning social media outright deprives students of essential opportunities to develop technological literacy and understand how digital environments function. Sumaya similarly noted that students must be taught how to think, evaluate content, and make responsible decisions online rather than be isolated from digital tools entirely. For these parents, guided exposure is essential for building awareness, judgment, and the ability to navigate a non-ideal digital world.

ii) Avoiding Secret Accounts and Unsafe Workarounds

A major justification for regulated use is parents' belief that strict bans push students toward hidden or deceptive behaviors. Parents note that when students are completely denied access, they often create secret accounts, use false ages, or access platforms without supervision. This covert use increases exposure to harmful content and eliminates parental oversight. Abeer highlighted the same concern, explaining that “everything forbidden becomes desirable,” especially for teenagers, and that total prohibition may push them toward unsafe, unsupervised use. Samia also emphasized that prohibition often leads students to hide their online activities, preventing parents from guiding them and increasing digital risks. These parents argue that supervised access is safer than forcing students into unmonitored digital spaces.

iii) Preserving Educational and Communication Benefits

Parents in the regulated use highlight the educational value of platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp, which provide tutorials, school communication channels, and collaborative learning opportunities. They argue that banning social media entirely would deprive students of meaningful educational resources that they can use in learning and hinder their ability to communicate with teachers and peers. Nadia supported this view, noting that some social media platforms offer positive, beneficial content that should not be ignored, and that students must be educated on how to use these tools properly. Sumaya explained that students often rely on these platforms to access explanations, exchange assignments, and stay connected with their learning environment. Guided use allows students to benefit from purposeful, constructive content while remaining under parental supervision.

iv) Teaching Responsibility and Moral Judgment

Parents who support regulated use believe that students must be taught responsibility rather than shielding them from all risks. They emphasize guiding students to distinguish beneficial content from harmful content, develop moral judgment, and understand that the digital world is not ideal. Through supervised exposure, students learn to make informed choices, cultivate self-discipline, and practice ethical digital behavior—skills that cannot be developed through complete isolation.

vi) Governmental and Parental Regulation

Parents in the regulated use group support a shared regulatory approach involving both parents and government. They argue that harmful content should be filtered at the national level, while families should set usage schedules, monitor content, and approve account creation. Setting time limits, parental controls, and content filtering are more effective than blanket bans, especially given the difficulty of enforcing total prohibition in real-world settings.

vi) Preventing Over-Restriction and Encouraging Healthy Use

Parents in the regulated use group warn that excessive restriction increases curiosity and makes social media more tempting. Maryam emphasized that banning platforms entirely increases students' desire to access them, making balanced alternatives necessary. They argue that regulated use—rather than prohibition—helps students understand what happens online without feeling deprived. Controlled exposure allows students to stay connected socially, develop general cultural awareness, and benefit from positive content, while avoiding the negative effects of overuse such as distraction, physical inactivity, and weakened family interaction.

vii) Supporting National Digital Transformation

Some parents in the regulated use group note that Saudi Arabia has embraced digital transformation and integrated modern platforms into education, communication, and public awareness. They argue that banning social media contradicts national efforts to promote digital engagement. Instead, they support structured, supervised use that aligns with the country's technological progress while protecting **students** from inappropriate content.

viii) Practicality and Realistic Implementation

Finally, parents in the regulated use group highlight the practical challenges of enforcing a complete ban. They point out that students can easily bypass restrictions, create alternative accounts, or misrepresent their age. Because prohibition is difficult to implement consistently, they believe that regulated use—with parental monitoring and clear boundaries—is more realistic and effective for ensuring safety.

3.5 Views of Parents Who Support a Ban for Children under 12 not 16

Four percent of the parents and teachers support restricting social media use only for children under twelve, arguing that a complete ban until sixteen is excessive. They believe that by the age of twelve, children begin developing basic reasoning skills, social awareness, and the ability to protect themselves online. For these parents, age twelve represents a more realistic and developmentally appropriate threshold, whereas banning access until sixteen may isolate students socially and academically, especially since high-school students rely on digital communication for learning and peer interaction. The reasons provided by this group are presented in the following categories.

A key justification is the importance of allowing students to explore the world beyond their immediate environment. Parents argue that social media helps learners understand global events, discover new interests, and engage with peers who share similar hobbies. They view digital platforms as gateways to the “small global village,” enabling students to stay informed about local and international news, broaden their perspectives, and develop cultural awareness from an early age.

Parents in this group emphasize that controlled access to social media can enhance students' communication skills. They believe that interacting with peers online helps students practice expressing themselves, forming friendships, and developing confidence in social settings. According to this group, banning social media entirely may limit opportunities for social growth, while supervised use allows students to build healthy communication habits.

Another justification centers on the role of social media in nurturing creativity. Parents note that digital platforms help children discover their talents—such as photography, video production, or artistic expression—and provide spaces to develop and refine their hobbies. They argue that exposure to creative content can inspire students, support skill development, and encourage them to pursue meaningful interests.

Parents in this group also stress the importance of teaching students how to navigate digital environments responsibly. They argue that early exposure, under parental supervision, helps students develop digital literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to distinguish beneficial content from harmful material. According to this view, banning social media delays essential skills and leaves students unprepared for the realities of modern digital life.

Rather than supporting a full ban, these parents advocate for balanced supervision. They emphasize the role of parents in monitoring usage, offering guidance, and maintaining open communication. They believe that students should feel comfortable

discussing what they encounter online, and that trust-based relationships are more effective than strict prohibitions. For this group, healthy parenting—combined with periodic monitoring—is the key to safe digital engagement.

Finally, parents argue that excessive restriction may harm students' sense of autonomy and curiosity. They believe that children should be allowed to explore digital spaces within safe boundaries, as over-control may lead to rebellion, secrecy, or unhealthy dependence on forbidden content. Instead, they support gradual exposure, guided decision-making, and teaching children how to manage risks independently.

3.6 Absence of Unregulated or Unaware Digital Freedom

None of the participants expressed views that fall under the category of unregulated or unaware digital freedom. This absence is unsurprising, given the demographic profile of the sample, which consisted largely of educated parents and teachers who demonstrate high levels of digital awareness, active supervision, and clear concern for their children's online behavior. Their responses consistently reflected structured thinking, moral reasoning, and an understanding of digital risks—leaving no representation of parents who allow unrestricted or unsupervised access.

However, outside this sample, such cases do exist within the broader community. Some parents permit children to use smartphones and social media without limits, misinterpreting "freedom" as the absence of guidance or boundaries. These patterns often include unrestricted posting, exposure to inappropriate TikTok content, and a general lack of digital supervision. Importantly, these examples illustrate that high educational attainment does not necessarily guarantee digital awareness or responsible online parenting. Although this category was not present in the study sample, it remains relevant for understanding the wider social context and the continuum of parental digital engagement.

3.7 Participants' Recommendations for Safe and Balanced Social Media Use

Parents in the sample recommended structured regulation, supervision, and guided use rather than full prohibition. They proposed limiting screen time, supervising content, and using parental control tools to maintain a balance between social presence and safety. Many suggested allowing access only for educational purposes, such as watching simplified explanations on YouTube, exploring examples for school projects, or communicating through WhatsApp for classwork. They emphasized that regulated use helps students stay aware of the digital world while maintaining boundaries that protect their well-being. In line with this perspective, Deema stressed that although apps are age-rated, most students know how to change their age during registration or use their parents' information—sometimes with parental approval—to access platforms that do not match their developmental stage. She argued that this reality makes mere age-based restrictions insufficient and calls for stronger technical and legal solutions.

Moreover, parents who oppose the ban support a shared regulatory approach involving both parents and government. They argue that the government should filter inappropriate content, block harmful platforms, and enforce age-appropriate account creation. Families should set usage schedules, monitor content, and approve account creation. They believe that time limits, parental controls, and content filtering are more effective than blanket bans, especially given the difficulty of enforcing total prohibition in real-world settings. Rania reinforces this view through a parent-led advocacy lens: drawing on her experience in the UK, she referenced the "Smartphone Free Childhood" initiative, which calls for stricter governmental regulations on students' access to smartphones and social media. Her comment highlights the need for formal policies and collective action, rather than relying solely on individual parental control, to ensure safer digital environments for students. Noura proposed linking devices to a child's national ID and legally requiring parents to supervise their children's digital activity, ensuring that access to social media is both controlled and developmentally appropriate. Overall, these parents advocate a combined model of parental supervision, government regulation, content filtering, time limits, and continuous digital education—ensuring that students benefit from technology while remaining protected from its potential risks.

4. Discussion

4.1 Comparison with Prior Foreign Research

The findings of the survey in this study align closely with several strands of international research on social media bans for minors. As in Greek studies by Galanis (2026) and Katsiroumpa et al. (2026), participants in this study expressed mixed attitudes: half of the participants supported restrictions to protect students' wellbeing, attention, moral development, and mental health, yet simultaneously the other half emphasized the need for parental involvement, digital literacy, and stronger platform accountability. This mirrors prior work showing that public support for bans is often conditional and accompanied by calls for supplementary measures. Participants' concerns about harmful content, misinformation, addictive design, and psychological risks are consistent with studies such as Radunz (2025), Redlich et al. (2025), Carah et al. (2025), and Wu (2026), which highlight mental-health vulnerabilities, algorithmic manipulation, and exposure to inappropriate material. Similarly, current study respondents' belief that students would circumvent bans by creating secret accounts or using alternative platforms strongly

echoes empirical findings from Bursztyn (2026), Wise (2026), and Sundararaj (2025), all of which document widespread non-compliance and the ease with which adolescents bypass age restrictions.

The “against the ban” group in this study also aligns with prior studies advocating guided use rather than prohibition. Their emphasis on supervised access, parental rule-setting, open communication, and the development of critical thinking parallels recommendations in Champion (2025), Carah et al. (2025), Aneja & Gupta (2025), and Fatt & Fardouly (2025), which argue that safer design, digital literacy, and family engagement are more effective than blanket bans. Likewise, the participants’ view of social media as a gateway to the outside world—supporting exploration, hobbies, talent development, and communication skills—resonates with Wu (2026) and Coyne (2025), who describe social media as a central environment for adolescent identity, creativity, and social connection.

On the other hand, the current findings diverge from some prior studies in meaningful ways. Western research tends to frame support for bans primarily around mental-health risks, addictive design, and algorithmic harms, whereas participants in this study placed stronger emphasis on moral, religious, and cultural protection, including concerns about value conflicts, ethical corruption, and exposure to culturally incompatible behaviors. This moral-cultural dimension is less pronounced in Australian, European, and American studies. Additionally, while some ethical analyses—such as Özçiftci & Demir (2026) and Robbins & Blundell (2026)—adopt a more paternalistic stance that stresses children’s vulnerability and the need for strong protective restrictions, the “against the ban” group in this study expressed greater confidence in students’ ability to develop critical thinking, evaluate content, and make responsible decisions under parental guidance. Finally, current participants’ belief that social media should not be entirely banned because “technology has entered every home” contrasts with studies like Dollmann (2026), where German adults supported bans for younger children but rejected bans up to age 16, reflecting different cultural thresholds for acceptable restriction.

Overall, survey findings in the current study are broadly consistent with international research on the complexity of public attitudes toward social media bans, yet they introduce culturally specific concerns—particularly moral and religious risks—and a stronger emphasis on guided autonomy, family-based regulation, and the social necessity of digital participation.

4.2 Comparison with the Previous Arabic Studies

It is noteworthy to say that the perspectives expressed by the participants in this study represent personal opinions and experiential judgments, not empirically measured outcomes. Their views reflect everyday observations, moral reasoning, and parental intuition about the potential risks of social media use among children. While these insights are valuable for understanding parental attitudes, they are not based on standardized instruments or scientific assessments. In contrast, Arabic studies have examined the effects of social media through empirical research designs, using validated tools to measure specific behavioral and psychological outcomes. For example, studies such as Ghabashi & Nevin Ahmed (2018), Mahmoud Basha et al. (2021), Shahin & Al Deek (2023), and Ikram et al. (2024) employed structured scales to assess academic distraction, time mismanagement, social isolation, and psychological loneliness. These studies provide quantifiable evidence of the negative impact of excessive or unsupervised social media use on students’ academic achievement, emotional well-being, and social connectedness. Therefore, while the mothers’ recommendations in this study align conceptually with concerns highlighted in Arabic research, they should be understood as subjective parental interpretations, not scientific findings. The empirical studies offer measurable data on how social media affects students’ behavior, whereas the current study contributes insight into how parents perceive and respond to these risks.

In addition, the themes⁵ that emerged from the participants’ responses in the current study align closely with issues currently discussed within the Saudi educational community. Public educational sources highlight similar concerns regarding the impact of social media on students’ concentration and academic achievement. These sources describe patterns such as distraction caused by constant notifications, reduced ability to retain information due to short-form content, sleep deprivation, social comparison, and weakened face-to-face communication skills — all of which appeared clearly in the qualitative data of this study. At the same time, these sources acknowledge the positive educational uses of platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp, which several participants also emphasized. They further stress the role of parents and schools in guiding students toward balanced and purposeful digital habits, echoing the practical recommendations offered by the sample. Overall, the participants’ insights reflect broader national conversations about digital behavior, suggesting that the findings of this study are consistent with real concerns and practices within Saudi schools and families.

⁵ تأثير السوشيال ميديا على تركيز الطلاب | دليل المدارس

4.3 Comparison with the author's Previous Studies

The findings of the present study show clear continuity with themes identified in the author's earlier research on Saudi children's digital engagement. In Al Jarf (2021a), mothers reported both positive and negative effects of early technology use: they viewed the iPad as a necessity that keeps children calm and supports rapid learning, yet expressed concerns about distraction, social isolation, addiction, temper loss, reduced physical activity, and eye strain—ultimately recommending time limits and parental supervision. These patterns closely mirror the current study's findings, where parents and teachers acknowledge the inevitability of digital exposure, recognize its educational and social benefits, and emphasize guided, supervised, and meaningful use to mitigate risks such as addiction, cognitive overload, harmful content, and social withdrawal. Similarly, Al Jarf (2022c) showed that families play essential roles in organizing, monitoring, motivating, and supporting children's digital learning, while also highlighting tensions between parental involvement and children's need for autonomy, responsibility, and self-discipline. This tension parallels the divided views in the present study: some participants support strict restrictions to protect wellbeing, whereas others advocate guided exploration to develop communication skills, independence, and real-world competencies. Across all three studies, a consistent conclusion emerges: Saudi families do not reject technology, but seek balanced frameworks that protect children's wellbeing while enabling developmentally appropriate, supervised, and educational digital engagement.

4.4 Social Media as a Pedagogical Tool: Insights from the Author's Previous Studies

Across the author's prior studies, social media consistently emerges as a powerful educational tool that can support learning, diagnosis, creativity, and communication when used purposefully. The author's linguistic studies—such as translanguaging on social media by educated Arabs (Al-Jarf, 2025b), English spelling of Arabic compound personal names on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2023c), non-conventional spelling in colloquial Arabic writing (Al-Jarf, 2023d), and impact of social media on Arabic deterioration (Al-Jarf, 2021e)—demonstrate that social media provides teachers with rich, authentic data for analyzing students' language practices, identifying spelling weaknesses, tracing interference patterns, and understanding real-world bilingual behavior. These platforms allow educators to observe natural language use outside the classroom, offering diagnostic insights that traditional assessments cannot capture.

The author's prior studies further highlight how social media and digital tools can enhance learning, motivation, and global awareness. Al-Jarf (2026; 2012a) shows that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Periscope, and YouTube can support EFL skills development across reading, writing, listening, and translation. Al-Jarf (2023a; 2023b; 2023e) reveals that social media encourages reading engagement and exposes learners to diverse genres. Research on how parents promote English and Arabic proficiency (Al-Jarf, 2022c) and iPad effects on language acquisition (Al-Jarf, 2021a) shows that digital tools can accelerate learning when used with guidance and time limits. Social media can also be used to promote students' knowledge of the target culture (Al-Jarf, 2020a; 2020b; 2014a). Arabic websites for preschool children (Al-Jarf, 2004) demonstrates how culturally relevant online content can support early literacy.

Other studies highlight social media's role in creativity, communication, and professional development. Blogging about sustainable development, global events, and Covid-19 (Al-Jarf, 2025a; Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2022b) enhances writing skills and global awareness; Facebook creative-writing communities (Al-Jarf, 2014b; 2015; 2018a) foster creativity and collaborative learning; combating hate and racism speech (Al-Jarf, 2021c) teaches critical digital citizenship; Facebook support teacher professional development (Al-Jarf, 2021d; 2013); Periscope and live streaming (Al-Jarf, 2018b; 2018c; 2020d; 2021f) expand access to lectures. Even student clubs on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2012b; 2012c) and translation practice on Twitter (Al-Jarf, 2020c; 2017a; 2017b) show how social media can build academic communities, support peer learning, and encourage authentic language use. Another prior study shows the importance of parental supervision in children's online classes in distance education and while using of the iPad at home (Al-Jarf, 2022d, 2021b). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that social media is not inherently harmful. It is a multifunctional educational ecosystem that can diagnose linguistic weaknesses, support skill development, enhance creativity, promote cultural exchange, expand access to learning, and strengthen teacher collaboration—when used intentionally, ethically, and under appropriate guidance.

4.5 Real Life Examples

Several notable examples from outside the study further illustrate the potential of guided digital engagement of children in social media digital creation. For example, Roudine Rasheed, a Lebanese child who became a social activist at the age of four, is widely known for her eloquence, confidence, and public advocacy for human rights and social reform. Despite her very young age, she maintains a Facebook page under full parental supervision, using Facebook as a platform for expression, awareness, and constructive dialogue rather than entertainment. Her case demonstrates that, when digital use is carefully monitored and purposefully directed, even very young children can engage meaningfully and safely with online spaces. This example reinforces the study's broader argument that social media is not inherently harmful; rather, its impact depends on the type of use and level of guidance, supervision, and intentionality provided by caregivers.

Another illustrative example comes from Dr. Walid Shawqi, an Egyptian physician residing in the United States, whose children use social media for educational purposes under full parental supervision. His son and daughter—fluent in Arabic, English, and Spanish—manage a Facebook page where they teach young learners English and Spanish, correct pronunciation, and create short instructional videos. Their father frequently appears with them, ensuring that the content is accurate, safe, and pedagogically appropriate. In addition to supporting his children's page, Dr. Shawqi has a medical YouTube channel and Facebook presence, creating a family environment in which digital platforms are used for learning, community outreach, and multilingual development. This case demonstrates how social media, when embedded within structured guidance and intentional educational goals, can become a powerful tool for positive digital engagement. It reinforces the study's broader conclusion that the impact of social media on children depends not on age alone, but on the quality of supervision, the purpose of use, and the degree of parental involvement.

A further real-life example comes from a Saudi tenth-grade student, Abdulaziz, age 16, who participated in a scientific research competition at King Abdulaziz University and won first place. Despite his young age, he independently searched online for scientific information related to breast cancer, designed his research poster in English, and presented his work confidently during the competition. His school principal and classmates attended the event and honored him with flowers and gifts in recognition of his achievement. Abdulaziz's case illustrates how purposeful and self-directed digital engagement can empower students to access scientific knowledge, develop research skills, and participate meaningfully in academic environments. It also demonstrates that restricting students' access to the internet and smart devices would deprive them of opportunities for growth, creativity, and academic excellence.

Although Abdulaziz worked under the supervision of a university researcher—as is standard practice in youth scientific competitions—he demonstrated independent understanding of the concepts and did not engage in any procedures beyond his level of knowledge. He refused to ask his aunt's help with information, and preferred to search for information autonomously, interpret scientific terminology, and present his poster with confidence reflects genuine digital literacy rather than passive reliance on expert guidance.

Some parents shared real-life examples illustrating the educational benefits of early digital engagement. Ghina and Yumna, both four-year-old children, learned to speak English fluently through repeated exposure to YouTube cartoons without formal instruction. Their parents reported that the girls acquired vocabulary, pronunciation, and conversational patterns simply by watching animated content daily. This example highlights that, for some families, digital platforms function not only as entertainment but as powerful language-learning environments—reinforcing the present study's finding that parents recognize both the risks and the developmental opportunities associated with early social media and digital use.

In contrast to these guided or naturally beneficial cases, another example reflects unstructured early exposure. A 6-month-old baby who was able to unlock an iPhone, open the camera, take photos, navigate to YouTube, and select cartoon videos represents a textbook example of a born-digital child. In digital childhood studies, *born digital* refers to students who are introduced to technology at an extremely early age, often before developing basic linguistic or motor skills. These students acquire digital behaviors intuitively, not through formal instruction, and demonstrate early motor-cognitive coordination shaped by constant exposure to smart devices. This case fits squarely within unregulated digital freedom because the child's access occurred without structured guidance or age-appropriate boundaries. While her early digital fluency is remarkable, it also illustrates how digital mastery can emerge in environments where parental supervision is minimal or where digital access is normalized to the point of becoming invisible.

The findings of this study, supported by multiple real-world examples, demonstrate that students' use of social media does not necessarily lead to frivolous behavior or unproductive engagement such as dancing trends or superficial content creation. Instead, when digital use is guided, supervised, and purposefully directed by caregivers, social media can become a meaningful educational tool that enhances language learning, nurtures talents, supports creativity, and enables positive digital citizenship. The key determinant is not the platform itself, but the quality of parental guidance, the clarity of expectations, and the intentionality behind the child's online presence.

5. Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that the community remains divided on the issue of banning social media for students, with 50% supporting the ban and 50% opposing it. This division suggests that the challenge is fundamentally educational rather than purely technological. To address this gap, there is a pressing need for national digital-parenting awareness programs that equip families with the skills required to guide students' online behavior. The study recommends promoting supervised and meaningful use of social media, alongside teaching students safe and responsible digital practices that enhance their ability to navigate online environments with confidence and discernment. By fostering evidence-based dialogue among parents, teachers,

and policymakers, Saudi Arabia can move toward regulatory and educational frameworks that safeguard students' wellbeing while simultaneously supporting their digital literacy, autonomy, and healthy participation in an increasingly connected world.

Many students, teachers, and even parents continue to view social media primarily as entertainment platforms, overlooking their substantial educational value. In reality, social media environments provide rich learning opportunities across all subjects and grade levels, offering accessible content, expert explanations, language-learning resources, skill-building tutorials, and communities of practice that can significantly enhance students' academic performance. Because this misconception limits meaningful digital engagement, the study recommends implementing awareness programs for students, parents, and teachers to highlight the educational potential of social media and to guide families in using these platforms for supplementing the courses offered at school.

6. Directions for Future Studies

Future research should continue to explore students' digital engagement within the Saudi context by examining how evolving technologies, platform designs, and parental practices shape students' online experiences. Longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in students' wellbeing, digital literacy, and social development as they grow older and as new platforms emerge. Further work could investigate the effectiveness of national digital-parenting programs, school-based digital-literacy curricula, and community awareness campaigns in promoting safer online behavior. Comparative studies across regions, age groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds would provide deeper insight into how cultural norms and family structures influence attitudes toward social media bans. Additionally, future research should examine students' own perspectives—an area often overlooked—to understand how they interpret restrictions, autonomy, and online risks. Experimental and intervention-based studies could also assess which forms of supervised use, parental guidance, and platform-level safety tools most effectively balance protection with healthy digital participation.

Future research is also needed to examine how Saudi students actually use social media in their daily lives: the purposes for which they use different platforms, the amount of time they spend online, the types of content they engage with, and the problems they encounter while using these platforms. Such studies should identify the most popular applications among children and adolescents and explore how usage patterns differ across age groups. Age-based comparative research would provide valuable insights into developmental differences in digital behavior, helping educators and policymakers design targeted digital-literacy programs that align with students' needs, interests, and online habits.

7. Conclusion

This study reveals a community divided in its views on banning social media for students, reflecting a broader tension between concerns for wellbeing and the realities of an increasingly connected world. While half of the parents and teachers in the sample support restrictions to protect students from cognitive overload, harmful content, addiction, and social isolation, the other half emphasizes the importance of guided access that allows students to develop communication skills, explore interests, and engage meaningfully with the digital environment. The findings highlight that the issue is fundamentally educational rather than technological, underscoring the need for national digital-parenting initiatives and evidence-based dialogue among families, educators, and policymakers. By adopting balanced frameworks that combine supervision, digital literacy, and responsible engagement, Saudi Arabia can protect students' wellbeing while empowering them to participate safely and confidently in the digital age.

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