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‘Social media age limit necessary to protect safety and development of minors’

Borneo Post (Kuching), Malaysia



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KOTA KINABALU: The need to restrict social media access for children under 16 is becoming increasingly critical, as Malaysian teenagers face growing online threats, especially sexual grooming and violent content.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities senior lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Haryati Abdul Karim said implementing a minimum age limit is necessary to protect the safety and development of minors.

She highlighted that a UMS and Unicef study titled ‘Communication for Development’ (C4D) found that most children as young as 13 already own smartphones and have unrestricted social media access, making online threats difficult to curb.

“Without strict controls, teenagers risk exposure to harmful content such as violence, pornography, scams, and extremist ideologies like racism and Islamophobia,” she told Bernama.

Since June 1, age verification

for social media accounts has been enforced under the Child Protection Code and Risk Mitigation Code, introduced through the Online Safety Act (Onsa) 2025, to protect minors under 16.

The C4D study found that Malaysian teenagers face at least six major online threats, including violent content that can shape behaviour and sexual grooming risks through online interactions.

Haryati said setting the age limit at 16 is reasonable, as those 17 and above are generally more mature in evaluating and filtering content.

She noted that this approach mirrors legal steps taken by countries like Australia, which has banned under-16s from social media accounts and imposed penalties for violations.

“However, age limits and laws alone are not a complete solution—teenagers can still bypass restrictions using VPNs (virtual private network),” she said.

Therefore, she stressed that

parents, families, and schools play a crucial role in boosting digital literacy. She also called for closer cooperation from platform operators to strengthen age verification and improve content filtering.

Meanwhile, Marius Kinsik, 46, a mechanic from Ranau, described the age restriction as a ‘shield’ that allows parents to firmly prohibit underage children from having their own social media accounts, especially in controlling his youngest child, aged 12.

“My two older children, 18 and 20, were lucky. They started using the internet when social media wasn’t so toxic. Now, watching over my youngest is a lot more worrying. So much harmful content, and online predators are becoming more cunning,” he said.

Echoing that view, a primary school teacher from Penampang, Tracey Justine, 44, a mother of two children aged 11 and 15, said the restriction is extremely important to protect the mental health of the young generation.

— Bernama



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SUMMARIES

KOTA KINABALU: The need to restrict social media access for children under 16 is becoming increasingly critical, as Malaysian teenagers face growing online threats, especially sexual grooming and violent content. Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities senior lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Haryati Abdul Karim said implementing a minimum age limit is necessary to protect the safety and development of minors.