'Y4OS' SUBMISSION TO THE STATUTORY REVIEW OF ONLINE SAFETY ACT

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Introduction

'Y4OS,' abbreviated for 'Youth 4 Online Safety,' is a youth-led, social media-based advocacy initiative aimed at mobilising young people to address social and ethical concerns of the digital world. This initiative was conceived from the observation that young people are often not consulted in the policy-making process and thus existing regulations fail to neither capture nor effectively regulate their nuanced online experiences. As digital natives, young people from Gen Z and Gen Alpha have unique insights to offer. Making space for their voices to be heard will not only enrich the understanding of the problems but also significantly improve the effectiveness in minimising them through regulations. Additionally, recognising that young people are not a monolith, we believe that online space regulation needs to reflect this diversity.

Hence, this Submission is a collection of insights from twenty one young Australians aged 18-25 (with the exception of one 17-year-old), showcasing the diversity of their thoughts, experiences, and desired regulatory approaches to the online space (rather than presenting a consensus of Australia's youth). As such, the Review team is highly encouraged to read through every single survey response and interview note.

In this Submission, young Australians voiced their opinions through a Google Form survey and notes produced from one-on-one interviews. The online survey was widely shared through various youth organisations around Australia, but the majority of responses came from university students with specific understanding of law and policy. Meanwhile, the interviews

were conducted with young leaders who are accomplished in their professions from diverse fields and disciplines, and also have extensive experience working with other young people in their communities. The survey responses are included in full and have been edited only to correct typos and grammar. The interview notes have been edited for better flow and structure, with the interviewees' permission.

We are grateful to Reset.Tech Australia for their support in this submission.

Summary

Although the responses that we received are diverse and occasionally contradict each other; in processing the findings, we have observed these common themes from young people that would be critical for the government in reviewing the *Online Safety Act*:

The Rights of Young People in the Digital World

The freedom to access information enables them to explore their identities, understand the world, and express themselves. Social media platforms are essential for cultivating communities, maintaining friendships and fostering different social connections.The digital world also offers opportunities for networking, gaining professional experience, and pursuing emerging careers.

Additionally, these platforms allow young people to exercise their political rights, aligning with Gen Z's reputation for political activism and civic engagement. Restricting access to these digital spaces can be a violation of their rights and potentially harmful in the long run.

Most importantly, young people emphasised their right not only to access and participate in the digital world but also to have a voice in regulating it. They expressed dissatisfaction with ineffective policy proposals, attributing this to lawmakers' lack of understanding or personal experience with the digital world. As digital natives, younger generations like Gen Z and Gen Alpha can offer valuable insights and more importantly have the rights to feel represented in the policymaking process.

The Need for a Nuanced and Effective Policy Response

There is a strong desire for change in how the digital world is governed. At times, the responses might be at odds with each other (which further highlights the complexity of the issue and respectively the 'right' approach) but most call for a balanced regulation, where free speech is protected, but harmful content is effectively managed.

The overwhelming consensus is that Big Tech companies need to be more transparent with their decision-making process and take more responsibility in designing their platforms to not prioritise profits over user's wellbeing. Especially when it comes to emerging technology such as AI or any algorithm-driven system - how they're operated and being developed remains a

mystery to the public, and even more so the measures that are being taken to ensure ethical and safety standards. This aligns with the 'Safety by Design' principles advocated by the eSafety Commissioner.

Data collection, storage, and sharing practices are also major worries, particularly regarding privacy intrusion and data breaches, which can directly impact digital safety. This is especially critical for vulnerable or high-risk demographics, such as victims of domestic violence. It would be ideal, then, for the *Online Safety Act* to work in conjunction with other relevant policies dedicated to technology, most notably *The Privacy Act.*

Wider Social Implications and a Systemic Approach

Simply regulating platforms is not enough, as many digital issues stem from broader social problems is another main theme that many respondents have observed.

Digital literacy emerged as one of the promising solutions. Mentioned in almost every interview, digital literacy according to the respondents broadly includes critically evaluating information, respectfully conducting oneself and using the right toolkits to protect themselves as well as others from potential online harms. It would be a collaborative effort between the education system, public campaigns, and most importantly Big Tech. It is also imperative to note that this skill is attributed by many young people as a form of self-empowerment and self-determination in productively navigating the digital world, contrasting with access restrictive approaches that could undermine their agency.

Another popular pattern among the respondents is the link between the digital world and public health: from psychological (body image, self-harm, etc) to social (cyberbullying, isolation, polarisation, etc) and thus should be regulated as such. Many interviewees drew parallels of using social media with smoking, drinking, or gambling, and suggested that regulations of the digital world can learn from these issues.

Finally, a human rights approach is highly desirable, as many respondents made a strong case for the intersection of safety, social prejudice and exclusion. The wellbeing and unique experiences of historically marginalised communities must be taken into consideration.

Young people's perspectives

1. Surveys

Respondent #1 (ACT)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
I think I'm too involved with it, I can never seem to detach from my phone.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

I would like a place with less toxicity and a healthy balance.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

There should be harsher laws on online bullying and harassment and screen time should be better restricted for youth.

Respondent #2 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?

I use the digital world every day, for news, social media, gaming, communicating with friends and family, and learning new skills and keeping up to date with the world.I also use it professionally, for work. It's a huge part of my life and has been since I was a kid. To me the best part about the internet is the ability to have free speech and share knowledge and information with others so that we can continue to stay up to date and informed on all the issues going on in the real world.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

A digital world with free speech and acceptance of others ideas, however this also brings a blurry line of when/if misinformation should be censored? In my mind yes it should be censored, but does that go against free speech? Technically it does…

Less social media would be a good thing as well, especially for those under 18 who seem to get the most influenced by it.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

In the recent weeks with the whole twitter drama, I believe the government is going in the wrong direction, censoring current world events online makes us no better than China or North Korea, and adds a lot of hypocrisy to the government If they want to censor the Sydney attack, then why don't they censor other conflicts around the world? All of a sudden if they do that, we would be misinformed and not know what's going on in the world around us which is dangerous.

Now I do believe social media should be banned for anyone under a certain age, what that age should be, I'm not sure. To some degree social media just disappearing wouldn't be a bad thing 😂 Maybe 16?

Respondent #3 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?

My generation is the first to have our whole lives documented by the digital world. Hence my life is very interconnected with the digital world. My identity does not come from the digital world but it is recorded and portrayed in it. It's responsible for maintaining almost all of my relationships with friends and family and it's the large majority source of my consumed information.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

Platforms where I consume content that I know I can trust (verified news and facts). Security

of private messages. I also don't want the growth of the digital world to be too inhibited by government policies so I think there is a balance.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

I do not know the scope of the *Online Safety Act* and I do not know the policies that already exist so that should be noted. I believe companies share a lot of data, possibly often without our consent so I would appreciate some regulation for data selling and sharing. Pressure on social media and news sites to verify facts, news and other info.

Respondent #4 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?

I have been integrated with the digital world through social media since I was 13, it is a huge part of my social, romantic and familial relationships. It's also the medium through which I access news, job opportunities and most of my university education and professional work experience. I try to create distance between the digital world and my personal life but it is becoming increasingly harder to do so. While I appreciate the entertainment, knowledge and opportunities to be creative afforded to me by the digital world, I think it has damaged my mental health and attention span. It is something I cannot avoid but try to limit as much as I can. My ideal digital world must be safe, even if that is sacrificing functions of platforms that I enjoy, like speed, variety of content and unfettered access to digital content. My ideal digital world has strict limits on what children can access, and protects children's identity even if their parents fail to protect them from online harms.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

My ideal digital world does not use aggressive algorithms that foster political and social extremism that filters into the real world. My ideal digital world would also offer protections against cyber-attacks, intimate image abuse and other harmful digital content. In my ideal digital world the decisions of private companies providing digital services for a profit does not impede on democratic processes and basic human rights.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

The *Online Safety Act* could introduce a tort of invasion of privacy, specifically referencing the harms that can be done through the digital world. The *Online Safety Act* can also impose strict reporting obligations, fines and even criminal penalties on businesses and executives operating in the digital space if they fail to protect children in the digital world. The *Online Safety Act* should be modelled on the *UK Online Safety Act* and either create a new authority or give powers to the ACMA to enforce the Act and ensure compliance. The Act should draw on the same concepts of offences and illegal content as the UK Act. Australia does not have an enshrined freedom of speech, which legally supports an Act which requires digital platforms to remove harmful but not illegal content. Concerns over encryption and freedom of speech should be considered against the documented harms to children that proliferate online platforms.

Respondent #5 (NSW)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
I am very dependent on the digital world and I need to use the digital world for my job/career.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
A safe environment where I can learn, grow, make friends, and express myself without harmful factors.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
Some measures I believe can help:

- Better content management
- Address privacy concerns (using your photos to train A.I, data leak, non-consensual data collecting, etc.)
- Better cyber security measures (Require Tech companies to ensure their customers' rights)
- Content restrictions for certain age group
- Internet awareness education for both the young (Under 12) and the elder (Above 65).

Respondent #6 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
I have a personal and work relationship with digital media shared online publicly. Through using it for social media content creation (marketing) at work and using it as a personal connection for friends/family in different locations. I also use it as a public platform to share Art & Mixed Media with a bigger audience as a younger creator.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
An ideal digital world would consider apps that don't require legal verification to be made illegal & require users to prove their Age, Face & General Location (Not Address, but States & Countries). Especially for dating and media apps that can contain sexual content that doesn't require any legal verification to younger audiences but only asks for an individual to be truthful about their age which can be lied about.

I would also love to see media that is created on public platforms to be legally copyrighted by the individual and not the company. For example, some sites may hide in their terms and conditions that when you upload content to their site, they have free roam to use your content on the platform in any way shape, or form. This digital footprint that some individuals are required to use for work can be seen globally and available for free.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
Legally improve its standards and re-evaluate yearly as our technology advancements change rapidly. I would love to see our social media act to be handled by individuals who do research and use social and online media to understand its full potential. I don't agree with members of parliament making decisions on social media and online digital footprints when they do not use "Social Media" or understand the advancements of technology on their own behalf.

Respondent #7 (VIC)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?

It's been pretty close. Almost my entire life has been absorbed into the digital world whether that be in organising my schedule, reading, socialising (or organising to socialise), music and entertainment. I believe for the average modern young adult including myself, the digital world is almost inseparable from our day to day lives.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

Ideally it would have strict regulation or limits to things like burner/bot accounts used to spread fake news/hate/or harassment. It would also include some sort of platform or body that regulates scams, particularly sex scams. A friend of mine has fallen for one and it's taken a heavy toll on his mental health.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

More safety for young users. Less harassment, less bullying.

Respondent #8 (ACT)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?

My relationship with the digital world is continually evolving and I characterise the nature of this relationship as both a blessing and a curse. The reason I describe my relationship with the digital world in this way is because of the continuous growth, development and opportunities that the digital world has afforded me; without access to the digital world, i would have never been able to access university and thus, i would have never started a career in social work or undertaken tertiary studies - which is a blessing given the context of coming from a disadvantaged background. Simultaneously, the aspect of my relationship with the digital world which I describe as a 'curse'; is the inability to separate myself from the digital world due to studying full time online, as well as the majority of my full time work/employment being connected to the digital world. With full-time online studies and the majority of my work tethered to the digital sphere, I find myself inextricably bound to this virtual world, often longing for a respite to truly immerse myself in the tangible experiences of people, places, and the physical world around me - because at the end of life, I believe we depart with the core memories of treasured real world experiences, not our memories of digital information and experiences.

What does your ideal digital world look like?

My ideal digital world would be one that seamlessly integrates technology into our daily lives in an equitable manner, empowering us to reach our full potential while maintaining a healthy, informed and choice-based balance with the physical world to ensure we nurture human connection, our relationships, and the world around us. While harnessing the advantages of technology, it would also encourage us to disconnect periodically and immerse ourselves in the richness of the tangible world. This equilibrium would nurture our appreciation for both the digital and physical, allowing us to embrace the depth and authenticity of real-world experiences while benefiting from the convenience and opportunities offered by the digital sphere.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?

While addressing online harms is essential, the Act should include robust safeguards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Provisions like public interest exemptions and limitations on blocking powers can help prevent censorship and ensure the digital realm remains a space for democratic discourse and accountability. Encouraging platforms to prioritise user well-being, privacy, and safety in their design and algorithms can help create a more positive and responsible digital ecosystem.

Notably, the continued adoption of sexism and gender-based violence remains enabled by the digital world, which we have seen surface as the rise in the sphere of family and domestic violence. Additionally, we have seen more young people take their lives due to prolonged periods of exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and the development of mental health issues as a result of the 'perfect' realities exposed on social media. Comparison has truly been the thief of joy, and interpersonal social skills for our generation are lagging behind while tech skills continue to rise.

To truly strike a balance between human life and critical experiences, the Online Safety Act should:

- Prioritise Mental Health and Well-being - The Act should mandate that online platforms implement robust measures to protect the mental health and well-being of users, particularly young people. This could include enforcing age-appropriate content restrictions, promoting positive body image and self-esteem, and providing easily accessible mental health resources and support services.

- Stop Cyberbullying and Harmful Content - Stringent measures should be put in place to combat cyberbullying, hate speech, and the spread of harmful content that can negatively impact individuals. This could involve empowering users to report such content, implementing effective content moderation practices (i.e stop young kids accessing pornography), and holding platforms & persons accountable for failing to address these issues.

- Promote Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking - The Act should emphasise the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking skills, particularly for young people. Educational initiatives and resources should be developed, mandated free access, become a part of curriculum to help individuals navigate the digital world responsibly, evaluate information critically, and develop a healthy relationship with technology and social media.

- Promote Offline Engagement and Social Connections: While acknowledging the benefits of the digital world, the Act should encourage individuals to maintain a balance between online and offline activities. This could involve promoting community-based initiatives, outdoor activities, and face-to-face social interactions, which are crucial for developing interpersonal skills and fostering meaningful connections.

- The Act should empower users with greater control over their digital experiences and personal data. This could involve implementing robust privacy protections, providing transparent data collection and usage policies, and offering user-friendly tools to manage their online presence and digital footprint.
Ultimately, the goal should be to strike a balance between the benefits of the digital world and the essential human experiences that shape our identities, relationships, and overall well-being.

Respondent #9 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
Very much entwined. I communicate online just about as much as I do in person.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
Safe, I want to feel like I have ownership of the content I store on my devices and that they won't be viewed or accessed by people I don't send them to.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
Make a requirement of platforms to say whether they are going to use your content for training ai models etc, and to ensure cloud based documents won't be opened.

Respondent #10 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
Having grown up in a digital space for most of my life I feel like I have grown with the internet. I have a love for information and the social aspects of the internet but it can often be taxing on my brain with keeping track of trends and declines. Growing up in the 2000's I feel like I've seen such a change in the way people interact and behave on the internet.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
Kinder mostly. Navigating digital spaces with the knowledge that all information isn't simply created through AI would be nice. It's getting harder to tell which information is true or false thanks to AI.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
Put in laws about AI images, content and harsher penalties for people that post negative/false information that could be extremely harmful to younger people. We don't need to be sheltered, just not everything needs to be created and put on the internet.

Respondent #11 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
I'm a very online person, there are a lot of digital communities that I'm a part of and it's how I share my passions like my artworks and writing.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
One that's safe and fun for everybody, devoid of hate speech and grossness but also where people are free to express themselves.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
It gives a bit more strength in cracking down on hate speech but I think an overly monitored internet isn't really a good thing. For many young people the internet is an escape from real life, to have their every move monitored and controlled sounds awful to me.

Respondent #12 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
Pretty good, I think I'm well educated and safe.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
Everyone being safe, everything being easily accessible, and everyone having fun.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
Crack down on scams and illegal activity. Get rid of online predatory business practices.

Respondent #13 (WA)

How would you describe your relationship with the digital world and why?
It depends on what I'm doing; some of the stuff is useful or fun, but sometimes things can be stressful online.

What does your ideal digital world look like?
I would love it if the individuals online were more inclusive, but I wouldn't change much else.

Reflecting on your previous answers, how could the Government and the Online Safety Act help create your ideal digital world?
I don't know; everyone should be able to have opinions, even if I disagree with them.

2. Interviews

Interviewee #1: Gavin (VIC)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I'm is the 2024 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations. I'm also a part of Amnesty International's Global Youth Collective and recently attended the Amnesty International Youth Summit on Digital Rights in Argentina. Last year I spent six months at the University of Hong Kong studying the regulation of digital technology and social media.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

I started to use Instagram in highschool. The social setting changed dramatically after high school and into university when I no longer see friends daily. Social media became a crucial tool to stay in touch with friends and acquaintances especially during COVID-19. However, this increased accessibility sometimes blurred boundaries, creating pressure to reply to messages immediately. Additionally, my grand-uncle experienced a hacking incident, further highlighting my concern with the susceptibility of our identity and security online.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

When it comes to working with overseas colleagues in advocacy and human rights, most of our communications are done through Whatsapp and Signal as it ensures privacy when discussing sensitive political information but also with instant access and speed (unlike emails).

With my international advocacy work, I've observed an interesting contrast when it comes to online regulation in Australia versus abroad. In Australia, there's significant abuse of freedom of expression, with slurs and hate speech targeting marginalised communities. Internationally, and especially throughout South-East Asia, there's more restrictions on freedom of expression, often accompanied by blatant digital surveillance from the authorities , resulting in imprisonment and sometimes execution of journalists for reporting on sensitive information. A sensible legal framework to balance these aspects guided by human rights (freedom versus respect and safety) is vital.

On a domestic level, last year I ran a social media campaign for the first time to raise awareness for the Voice Referendum, and was managing a team of volunteers. Our team encountered numerous troll comments, which we had to delete or respond to. These comments specifically relied on polarising political messaging and was rife with misinformation—some half-true and some completely false. It was shocking how false information could spread without sensible measures in place.

I must put an emphasis on how crucial freedom of expression is, especially for political communications, which are constitutionally protected rights in Australia. However, there must be limits, especially to discern when such rights become an excuse to be abusive towards others.

Moreover, algorithms on social media tend to bring users down a rabbit hole, creating echo chambers and silos of community. Some of the concerning effects is how extremist political views are normalised, particularly among young men, which over time foster a toxic and radicalised culture with unhealthy and intolerant attitudes towards others.

Other risks include scams, identity theft, and online impersonation. New migrants and young international students are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, especially from across Asia, where cultural expectations of obedience to government regulation make them susceptible to scams pretending to be from governmental services like myGov.

Instances where extremist and radicalised contents merges with online impersonation can result in sexual violence against girls, women, and fem-presenting non-binary individuals (find more statistics and references).

Another risk is unhealthy screen time, especially among young people. During a consultation in Canberra with 15-16 participants from my Listening Tour, roughly 80% reported an average online usage of 7-10 hours per day. Opinions on restricting access to screen time and social media were split: one-third agreed, one-third disagreed, and one-third were unsure. This indicates the complexity of the issue, suggesting that nuanced solutions are needed rather than broad restrictions.

To further illustrate how complicated the solution can be in addressing these problems, BeReal is the perfect example. The new social media app originally aimed to reduce social media use/screen time by allowing users to take one photo and then log off. However, it morphed into something that kept users online longer by adding features like a reward system through bonus points, thus monetising user engagement via paid sponsorship - which ironically contradicts its original goal.

On the topic of Big Tech, it is also important to point out the lack of robust regulation for this particular industry. I assume this is because the harms or ramifications of Big Tech's negligence or problematic operation are less visible and apparent in comparison to 'traditional' companies. For example, mining companies when blowing up Indigenous cultural sites or failing to ensure safety in their procedures would have a very 'physical' and tangible impact, thus easily garnered public attention and thus political will, and finally legislative actions. The case is almost the opposite for Big Tech, so neither the public nor policymakers doesn't fully pay much attention to the issues until some kind of crisis happens.

I think it is therefore necessary for emergency mechanisms - increasing adaptability and agility to deal with 'hot' issues, more adjustment specifically for the spike of this particular issue. For example, during COVID when misinformation can be fatal, we immediately deployed extra fact-checkers and reliable information sources and flagged them in any posts that are related to COVID on social media. The same principle/mechanism should apply for other cases, for example the crisis of online gender-based violence in Ballarat and how we can swiftly intervene.

Another caution is the influence of Big Tech and especially their leaders in the decision-making process. There should be more barriers in place to protect the integrity of public policy from the very effective lobbying efforts and 'star-power' from these charismatic and wealthy tech leaders such as Elon Musk.

In saying this, I also must acknowledge the fact that political institutions are increasingly reliant on Big Tech to get their messages out to the public, thus on a certain level are subservient to these companies.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

The digital world offers significant benefits, particularly in access to education and health services for rural and regional communities, as Australia is a large country which could be a huge barrier for these particular demographics. However, this also means that ensuring stable and reliable internet access would be absolutely necessary. Algorithms can also promote positive trends like sustainable fashion and drive behavioural changes.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

We urgently need to develop a stronger and more comprehensive curriculum that incorporates digital literacy across all subjects - English, Maths, Science; as digital technology arguably now intersects deeply with almost every single aspect of our lives.

This also specifically includes raising awareness among young people about their digital rights, for example the introduction of the right to disconnect. Particularly the intersection of

child rights and digital rights need to be explored and codified into written laws.

Although it might be slightly outside the scope of the Online Safety Act, policy-makers can devised it in-conjunction with the upcoming Federal Human Rights Act to have something enshrined with digital rights, or at least a guidance to balance between the discourse of freedom of expression versus infringement on somebody else's safety and wellbeing.

We also need to invest in cybersecurity infrastructure to protect Australians from any cyber attacks. Identity needs to be verified in some ways, too, to reduce the risks of online impersonation and identity theft. I don't have the answer for the exact implementation, but potentially bank account, certain photos, etc.
Big Tech specifically needs to engage with people from all backgrounds and ages to understand the myriad of digital experiences. They also need to increase transparency - how certain decisions are made and what those processes are like.
Big Tech also has a responsibility to its users to invest in training resources that equip its users with digital literacy and how to safely and respectfully use their platforms.

I'd like to raise a specific point that it used to be easier to get help when it comes to users' safety, and now it is incredibly unfriendly for users to navigate - the design aspect needs to be adjusted. This also touches on the broader 'safety by design' principles that should be further pushed for Big Tech's adoption.

I highly welcome initiatives such as eSafety Youth Council in amplifying youth leadership for safer online spaces.

I also wish to see the Online Safety Act to invest more in risk mitigation beyond this generation and take into account the harms of emerging technology, including but not limiting to AI, deepfake, etc that might not be very obvious now but potentially can be detrimental in the future.
Especially with AI, which is now broadly viewed as a market advantage for countries to compete with each other, it is important that we have a standardised system for AI to uphold international cooperation. I propose we take the legislative approach to AI similar to global commons such as space or Antarctica.

And thus it would be ideal for domestic policies such as this Online Safety Act to be devised with the broader, international framework such as the Global Digital Compact in mind.

Interviewee #2: Grace (QLD)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I'm currently studying a Master Degree in Suicidology and Prevention at Griffith University. With my own lived experience with anxiety and depression, I've worked in the mental health space for 5-6 years now, with my involvements spanning from Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC), Headspace, Beyond Blue to Queensland Health and LGBTIQ+ Roundtable.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

My relationship with social media and the digital world has evolved significantly over the years. Growing up in the early 2000s, the digital world was becoming more accessible, though not as widespread as it is today. I started using computers in primary school, when the internet was still a bit of a wild west, quite decentralised. The closest thing to social media that I had back then was Club Penguin, which is an online game as I was really into gaming.

As a kid with social anxiety starting around the age of 8 or 9, the internet became a crucial source of social connection for me. Unfortunately, this sometimes led to inappropriate connections with random people online. Although these interactions were not abusive, there were no safety mechanisms, moderation, or prevention measures in place at that time.

The nature of online identity can be quite murky, and it was normal to lie about your age to appear more mature. This reflects the broader issue of online personas often being detached from reality, allowing people to pretend to be someone they are not. The ability to go online and create an entirely different identity was both a fascinating and a dangerous aspect of my early internet experiences.

Around the age of 12 or 13, social media began to play a much larger role in my life. This brought new challenges, like self-comparison, body image issues, and dealing with the pervasive influence of celebrity photoshop. It felt like we hadn't even solved one problem in the tech world before we were faced with another.

These problems are now significantly reduced: I matured over the years, equipped myself with more knowledge and understanding, as well as having access to appropriate psychological support - all certainly play a role in such improvement.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

The rapid growth of AI has brought significant privacy concerns. Platforms often use user data to train AI, and opting out is rarely an option. This includes the harvesting of biometric data, such as images, which feels like a severe intrusion into my privacy and humanity. Having my face used for digital products is vastly different from just tracking my search history, and it makes me deeply uncomfortable.

The use of social media and online resources for self-harm is alarming. Additionally, online impersonation to damage reputations is a growing problem. The in-house complaint processes of many platforms lack transparency and are not very responsive. For instance, in the U.S., some insurance companies use AI instead of humans to handle claims, raising concerns about the training data and the fairness of these systems.

Misogyny online, particularly against women discussing mental health and neurodiversity, is on the rise. While normalising these discussions is important, they are often met with online shaming and nasty comments. Meta, for example, admitted in a Senate Hearing that their

algorithms target content that provokes anger, exploiting our biological wiring to negative stimuli. This feeds controversial content on purpose, contributing to wider political divides and incentivising sensationalised content and misinformation. On a psychological level, this environment fosters distrust, loneliness, and isolation. Personally, encountering misogynistic content makes me instinctively distrust men, even though I know not all men are dangerous, which still leaves me feeling unsafe both online and in the real world, sadly so.

Younger people, in particular, also struggle to participate in physical spaces after spending too much time online. The behaviour of individuals can vary greatly in digital versus physical spaces due to anonymity and distance, and thus begs the question of how 'social' is the interaction in the digital world?

Younger people also experience high rates of social isolation, disconnectedness, and are more susceptible to extremist views, making it difficult to form genuine friendships.

Moreover, the lack of media literacy is a significant issue. We don't teach people to evaluate information critically, to question whether something is true or if they want it to be true.

With social media being an effective tool for Australian public institutions to communicate policy announcements and other civic activities, it now often attracts criticism from international sources, making it challenging to distinguish genuine feedback because they're simply not the constituents and such policy implementation doesn't directly affect their life. And yet occasionally they still hijack our local government processes in interacting with the people to propagate certain political agendas.

According to conversations we've had with young people at the Queensland Family and Child Commission, young people no longer get news from traditional sources due to convenience and accessibility. Western Sydney University found that four in ten children and six in ten teens receive news through social media, with teenagers accessing the news through social media more than traditional television. This calls for a more critical look into how we can still maintain integrity of information when our media and information technology is transforming into a new age with new rules. For example, mass layoffs and budget cuts in media companies are leading to fewer journalists or for their working resources to be greatly constrained, making it harder to combat misinformation.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

I've seen how digital technology demystifies information and knowledge for everyone, making learning more accessible. For those living with chronic illnesses, like myself, the digital world allows us to lead our lives more fully. The world still lags in fully utilising the online space for work, but it has immense potential, especially for those in regional areas where commuting can be expensive and inconvenient.

Education for children and young people in remote areas greatly benefits from digital tools, especially where teachers are scarce. The digital world also holds significant value for people with disabilities, providing access and opportunities that were previously unavailable.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

Reflecting on policies that the government can implement to better regulate the online space, I would like to challenge the effectiveness of imposing an age restriction for young people under 16. The enforcement of such restrictions is problematic—what if people use VPNs? Will the age verification technology still function effectively? Linking real-world identity to digital identity makes me feel uncomfortable, and more research is needed to understand the implications of this approach.

Moreover, it seems the government swings between extreme ends—minimal regulation or outright bans. There should be something in between these extremes, such as trial and error with different programs and regulatory frameworks. An outright ban might make the government appear weak and incompetent in imposing effective programs. It would also contradict their strategies in youth engagement. For example, the 'Office for Youth' at the federal level relies heavily on social media to reach young people—how do they plan to continue this if social media use is restricted?

Such a ban could also potentially violate the UN 'Convention on the Rights of the Child,' particularly:

- **Article 13:** Ensures the child's right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- **Article 17:** Focuses on the child's access to information, recognizing the important function performed by mass media and encouraging the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of children from harmful material.
- **Article 28:** While primarily focusing on the right to education, it implies access to various forms of communication and media necessary for supporting the education of the child.

Moreover, a ban would disproportionately affect young queer people. A report from the eSafety Commissioner called 'Tipping the Balance' details how young queer individuals, especially teenagers, use social media to seek community, support, and express their individuality and creativity—things they might lack in their immediate physical community.

Instead of age restrictions, here are some potential policy proposals:

Digital Literacy Education: Integrate digital literacy into the education system, focusing on evaluating information and identifying trustworthy sources. This should be a foundational skill

taught in high school since not everyone goes to university. Empower young people to conduct their own research and support teachers with actionable and accountable strategies.

Content Moderation: During the COVID-19 pandemic, information boxes for official sources were effective. Similar measures should be applied to other areas like domestic violence and mental health support in journals and news. If we moderate harmful behaviours in the real world, why not in the digital world?

Label AI-Generated Content: Clearly label AI-generated content to distinguish it from human-created content. This will be vital in combating misinformation perpetuated by AI. Working in conjunction with improved digital literacy, skills such as reverse image search and recognizing visual cues (e.g., AI's difficulty in generating realistic images of hands) will be useful.

Public Health Perspective: Reframe the regulation of social media from a perspective of public health. There is growing research into the impact of excessive social media use on mental health, akin to behavioural addictions. Similar to how gambling regulation evolved from entertainment to encompass mental health, economic security, and community well-being, we can adopt a similar approach for social media. For instance, regulate social media use like alcohol consumption: you're free to use it but not to the point of causing harm—hate speech, incitement of violence, etc. Context is crucial in moderating content, as language is fluid and ever-changing compared to rigid laws and policies.

Transparency: Finally, the lack of transparency of social media platforms is a significant issue. Platforms need to improve transparency in their operations and decision-making processes.

Implementing these policies can create a safer and more equitable online environment, balancing freedom with responsibility and protection.

Interviewee #3: Harrison (ACT)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I'm currently studying a double degree in Bachelor of Advanced Computing and Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy, and Economics - seeing the best way to solve complex problems of our tech-driven world is to integrate both the technical and social aspects in my approach.

I also have extensive advisory and leadership experiences, previously being a UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador, member of the inaugural eSafety Youth Council, and a delegate for ASEAN-Australian Youth Strategic Partnership 'Debate 2 Regulate Future Online Safety Leaders' in Bangkok.

I was also one of the Youth Consultants of 'Our Metaverse: Young People & The Digital Future', a collaboration between Project Rockit and Meta.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

My relationship with social media, for example, is ever-evolving. I started with Instagram midway through Year 9, mainly to communicate with my friends, although my parents were apprehensive about it. Fast-forward to now, I obviously expand to other platforms, each serving a different purpose: Instagram is my source of entertainment, while Reddit is where I have deep dive into public discourse and gauging the thoughts on a range of different issues. Facebook is arguably the most important as I use it exclusively to stay up-to-date with a lot of my University activities, academic and otherwise - from notice boards to student societies.

I'm proud to say that I have a very strategic approach to my time spent online, which upon evaluation I'd say remains a net positive one. Meaning most of the time when I spend online it is a productive, educational, and overall a positive experience. This is my approach to tech - when both using and thinking about it: I try to take a big step back and reflect on what kind of impact it has on me to re-center myself. There is obviously a lot of conscious effort that goes into this.

I notice how the algorithms of these platforms are doing a great job in holding my attention to keep me browsing these platforms longer than I should.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

Recently I've been doing research and reading into image-based abuse and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, which are risks that I think everyone should be generally more aware of.

I'd like to also highlight the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation (with the latter being a deliberate effort in spreading misinformation) in promoting extremism. Generally I see it often perpetrated by bad faith actors, but they are enhanced through the algorithms of social media when recommending the contents for users. The algorithm will prioritise contents that will get clicks/likes/shares, which often means the ones that are sensationalised and inflammatory. For example a Guardian article in 2021 detailed that terrorist and/or extremist contents tend to be better business and thus often are more favourable for the algorithm to push to the users as they generally aim to provoke strong reactions. Facebook's own researchers found that '64% of all extremist group joins are due to [their] recommendation tools'.

While specifics have doubtless changed since then, This leads us to the larger issue of misalignment, which consists of two parts:
1/ Technical misalignment: what we intend for AI to do versus what AI ends up actually doing
2/ Interest misalignment: the commercial interest (from Big Tech, advertisers, etc) versus social interests of the public

For the former, bias in these algorithmic-driven systems are a rising concern, which is often due to insufficient datasets reinforcing systemic prejudice against marginalised communities such as linguistic minorities or women. A famous example is when Amazon in 2015 sought to perform automated resume screening using AI. They found their model was trained to prefer male candidates above non-male candidates because their dataset consisted of overwhelmingly male resumes, reflecting the gender disparity of the tech industry. Being a

man has nothing to do with being the best candidate, but the algorithm reinforced the male-dominated status-quo precisely because the training data reflected this status-quo. Work to minimise algorithmic bias is ongoing, but it's a tough problem that, in my opinion, cannot be solved through technical means alone.

For the latter, the prioritisation of commercial gains, sometimes at the cost of public trust and safety, has been prevalent in recent years. The case of extremist content on Facebook I mentioned earlier is a good example. I don't think these two interests should be at odds with each other. We need to have trust in technology if we are to invest our time or money into it.

To add another layer of complexity into this discussion around AI ethics, I'd like to raise the question of whether it is fair or productive to attribute blame for the actions of AI systems entirely on developers, especially when generative AI tools enable users as creators. Although developers can (and should) put safety guardrails in place, the intention of users plays a significant role in the proliferation of online harms. There should be a shared social responsibility between developers and users of generative AI to use the technology for good.

Finally on the topic of how emerging technology might shape the risk landscape of the internet, I'd like to touch on the metaverse. Enabled by virtual reality, the metaverse is a three-dimensional extension of our current internet. Instead of interacting behind a screen, users can interact as we would if we met each other in the street. Due to this heightened level of realism, the impact of negative behaviour on victims may be intensified, and the types of harm that can be experienced are expanded. For example, there have been reports of users being groped in these spaces, which isn't something that can happen in the flat internet. The metaverse has enormous potential, but we need to be aware of these harms and work to mitigate them.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

It can provide wonderful online communities and support, especially for marginalised demographics like gender-diverse people.
Growing up in regional Queensland, I can testify how digital connectivity assists remote communities in accessing the same opportunities, especially after COVID-19 where we experienced a collective shift to having so many activities online. For example, I was able to attend a Model UN competition in this time period because it was moved online, and thus I didn't have to bear the burden of travelling costs and accommodation, etc to Brisbane just for this one program.
My current internship arrangement is mostly work-from-home, so I save a lot of time because I don't have to commute.

Undeniably, the internet is a powerful tool for public scrutiny of our world. We can be aware of situations internationally that we may not have heard about if we didn't have access to the internet. Journalists in undemocratic regimes can distribute their reportage that would otherwise be subject to censorship. The digital world helps us all enjoy and uphold our human rights.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

For Big Tech, trust is a difficult thing to build and gain, and thus two key design goals for any policy should be transparency and explainability. These elements go hand in hand, as it communicates the actions are being taken and more importantly why - to explain rationale behind certain processes or decisions.

This is especially crucial to content moderation. For example, the use of certain sensitive language or words in different contexts can be interpreted differently: it can be a slur, or self-reclamation/self-empowering or a form of satire/parody. Thus, having access to the decision-making behind why certain contents are being taken down (or NOT being taken down).

I think Big Tech/service providers have a responsibility to their users to ensure a safe digital environment, however, the line between harmful and hateful content, and content that is merely offensive, isn't always clear, and can vary between cultures and contexts. Establishing where we want this line to be is a huge problem if we are to uphold the rights of people to be safe online, but also to have the right to free expression.

A potential solution for this is to look at how we can democratise this process, where average, active users of these online platforms can be engaged in making these decisions. The goal for this is to feature as many diverse and representative thoughts and insights from the community as we possibly can, but also to embed human values into the way that the platform is designed and operated.

One way to do this could be through electing a 'representative board' that makes moderation decisions on the behalf of the community. These would likely need to be jurisdiction specific to account for local laws and values, although there is immense value in international cooperation for online safety and these boards do not preclude pursuing further international partnerships towards this end. However, like any democratic model for the internet, representative board elections face challenges in ensuring the process is free and fair and hence worthy of our trust.

Additionally, since our lives are now so deeply intertwined with the digital world, it is a big repercussion for users to be banned from online platforms. Thus, we might need to establish fair and just legal procedures that are appropriate to the digital setting. It doesn't necessarily mean going through the courts as that would be expensive and time-consuming, but rather we could use some kind of digital arbitration board, where they could look into evidence before issuing a 'verdict'. If unhappy with the 'verdict', users could appeal these decisions. Beyond ensuring fairness for users, this would also build trust as these oversights would be completely independent from Big Tech and can be properly scrutinised by the public.

Digital literacy, especially for young people, should be a policy priority. In particular, we need to look into mechanisms beyond relying on schools and traditional education environments to accomplish this. For a lot of public schools, teachers and staff are already underfunded and overworked, so it would be irresponsible to unload even more responsibility on them without proper support. One avenue I would propose for increasing digital literacy would be to learn from public health practitioners and how they successfully run education campaigns that reduce negative behaviours among the public, such as smoking or excessive alcohol consumption.

Similarly, I suggest we need to look at how the platforms themselves can specifically promote

digital literacy, etiquettes, and provide guidance on how users can critically navigate the digital space. For new users or accounts signing up, this might look like tutorials and introductory courses to act as guidance and to help set a foundation. Although this might not be very exciting, think of how a computer game treats its new players. A game takes time to introduce the rules and mechanics for the beginner, and allow them to practise and familiarise themselves in a controlled environment. The player has a better experience because they understand the rules - it is a similar case for social media.

Interviewee #4: Jazmin (NSW)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I have extensive leadership roles at different youth organisations in Australia, especially in the field of international affairs and diplomacy.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

My relationship with the digital world is quite complicated. As a young professional with a busy and sometimes stressful schedule, I often use social media as a means to escape from reality and relax, especially during commuting time back home from work.

As an individual, I try to consume online media responsibly with a critical lens, discerning accuracy and hidden agendas and not simply take things for their surface values - which is something I notice a lot of people struggle with.

I also notice how easily algorithms and the recommendation system on social media just put you in a rabbit hole even if you only interact with one post. And in a closely related concern, I also personally observe that there's little to no middle ground anymore - everything on social media seems to be either black or white, very polarising and extreme.

People also seem to have a 'high' out of being negative and angry - it almost feels like we're living in an outrage culture where people enjoy getting upset over any issue at all.

This makes me quite pessimistic about any potential realistic change. Do people/users want to change such behaviour/culture to begin with? Then it's also the question of would Big Tech change their business model, which is the root cause of such outrage culture to thrive on, without any regards to ethical consideration at all. So in my opinion, we will not see adequate measures to regulate until it is too late.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

Speaking from my leadership experience specifically with the Young Diplomat Society: As the nature of our work, we discuss mostly geopolitics and social issues, which can be sensitive and at times controversial. However, the main value being we're empowering young people to engage in matters that are complex and also that have been historically exclusive for us.

And yet from a few times when we try to organise either an online or hybrid event with Q&A

sessions where people can submit questions anonymously, I learnt that this kind of online participation can be quite problematic. As the questions submitted are counter-productive, and sometimes feel like intentionally trying to provoke reactions. Sometimes the question would be directed to the experts or leaders in this field that we worked very hard to secure, who also volunteered their time to participate. It doesn't feel like a safe space.

Reflecting back on the concern with nuances being erased and there seem to be no middle ground anymore, people seem to be less interested in having a discussion and again, more into being outraged. And in this instant, I think one can see the effects of the digital world slowly seeping into the 'real' physical world, where the polarisation is starting to have a much more visible impact.

It is also important to point out that this kind of outrage culture doesn't allow any space for anyone to learn and grow from their ignorance and/or mistakes. I think it should be emphasise that nobody's

Not only the erosion of critical thinking, I think anonymity is another factor that emboldens people to say certain things, knowing that their identity cannot be verified thus there's no real repercussion for their words.

Additionally, a few years ago I wrote an article for Plan International Australia about data privacy. Which might not directly relate to the concern with online safety per se, but I think it is deeply interconnected: As users of social media, it is terrifying and concerning how much data points that we are being harvested and made readily accessible (location, etc). Thinking in long term, say in the next twenty years, and the fact that we know next to nothing about how these data are being used behind closed doors (especially data from children & young people in this case), what would happen if these data fall into the hands of malicious actors? Wouldn't this be a grave concern for online safety too?

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

Its connectivity is really amazing, the fact that I don't have to be physically in the same space with someone to foster or maintain a relationship.

Reflecting back to COVID times, I can still have access to education despite having to physically present. Speaking of education, beyond the traditional forms of education, the digital space opens up the opportunity to share and acquire knowledge (which obviously sometimes require additional fact-checking).

It is also incredibly useful to get tips when planning trips and gathering information about your travelling destinations. For example, I can easily learn about certain etiquettes and how to be respectful of the host country's culture before getting there.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

The first thing that I definitely want to see is better reporting mechanisms. I noticed that some options presented when you're looking to report contents don't accommodate the exact reason why such contents should be removed. Furthermore, when you click into these options, they lack the definition or guidance to help the users navigate which option might be

the best one. For example, when selecting 'hate speech', how exactly does one describe hate speech or what are the certain characteristics or criteria to help the users assess if this piece of content is indeed fit to the definition or not? Hypothetically, if I come across contents that express discriminatory views, or misogynistic/homophobic/racist tendencies, does this count as hate speech?

More importantly, as a young woman coming from an ethnic minority background, it is critical to point out that my definition of hate speech might contradict with the general consensus of a white-majority country.

Also I cannot stress enough the importance of digital and media literacy. Although this is definitely an issue of all ages, especially among young people I think we need to equip them with a better understanding of how to critically evaluate information circulating online. This encompasses the reliability and validity of the source, their intention (is there a hidden agenda or are they pushing a narrative? For example, is this content about certain diets simply just to promote healthy lifestyles or is it perpetuating stereotypes and unrealistic body expectations, etc). Remembering when I was younger, and computers weren't at all that mainstream yet, we would receive 2 hours per week training to know how to use a computer. Why wouldn't the same principle apply to social media? We have not seen any similar training despite how present it is in our society.

Similarly, it is also important to point out that often 'silly' internet trends are not at all that silly and they do have very real social ramifications. For example, the recent trend of 'girl math' which is often use to justify spending on clothes because 'girls need pretty things' are quite damaging as it further reinforce the gender stereotypes that women lack financial literacy and/or generally bad at maths, and less rational and logical when it comes to their decision making. Furthermore, it also encourages unhealthy spending habits and overconsumption on unnecessary and indulgent items such as fast fashion.

Or I recently learnt that the word 'bop' which used to be slang to describe a catchy song, is now being used by young children to describe a promiscuous woman with a misogynistic lens. This shows how problematic social prejudice can exist under the disguise of 'internet trends'.

Another ugly cornerstone of the internet is 'stan' culture, which means to blindly and unhealthily idolise a public figure, and oftentimes willing to commit online harassment on behalf of this public figure. I see 'stan' culture as a close relative to outrage culture that I've previously discussed. Some worrying examples include a relative of Megan Thee Stallion getting doxxed by Nicki Minaj's stans (both are famous US female hip hop artists), or most recently Elon Musk's stans doxxed eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant and her family.

The latter especially raises several concerns: How effective is a national legislative framework to regulate the online space considering its borderless nature? The fact that the eSafety Commissioner herself in addition to the doxing incident also receives countless harassment online from Musk's admirers, and most of them are not even from Australia. What can we realistically do/ how exactly can we enforce these laws to protect Australian online safety if the abuse and harassment is created by an overseas account?

But also the fact that a tech billionaire is using his influence to meddle with the situation makes me sceptical even more and question how things would actually change? Almost any attempt to regulate the online world will receive backlash and spin by conspiracy theorists,

which sadly demonstrated how far we have been polarised.

I think the precise question in this debate between safety versus regulation, is this really how we want to use our freedom of expression?

There will always be a loophole for misuse and misunderstanding, no matter how good the regulation is, to sum it up at the end of the day. But that is not to say that we shouldn't try.

Interview #5: Dave (VIC)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I have worked in non-profit space for around 5-6 years, previously being a Non Executive Director of Data and Tech for roughly 3 years at Oaktree - Australia's largest youth-run organisation for international development. Currently I'm a Lead Consultant at Capgemini Invent - a large international consulting firm, overseeing sustainability and social impact portfolio.

At the moment, I'm in Spain writing a novel about the importance of language and how the erasure of complex words will have a detrimental impact on our society as it will also erode the nuances of our collective thoughts. It meant to be a social-political commentary on social media.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

My relationship with social media and the digital world has been shaped significantly by being a Gen Z, the first generation to be exposed to digital technology so early in life. Our generation was also among the first to navigate social media while still developing as adolescents and coming into adulthood - which brought tremendous pressure that was rarely discussed. Adults couldn't offer much advice at the time for us because they were just as baffled as we were.

The online space makes knowledge searching and acquisition so much more accessible, with many incredible platforms to learn and educate myself, both within and beyond my school's curriculum, including Khan Academy and Youtubers like Hank Green. Such freedom and accessibility also play a crucial role in our self-discovery journey, being able to research information around sexual health and identities for example.

On the flip side, social media also reinforced dominance hierarchies, with likes and followers being treated as currency for an immersive, constant popularity contest. These were incredibly important aspects for almost every young person, I'd say, and for some it still very much is. Cyberbullying is another aspect of this.

As a young man navigating the world myself, I can also speak to how issues like body dysmorphia and toxic ideas of hypermasculinity are rampant among boys and young men, as

social media is saturated with unrealistic, unhealthy and extreme contents promoting the image of certain body types or behaviour and attitude, especially towards girls and women.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue, with explicit contents being weaponsied as threats and black mail, etc. Also the lack of moderation also trickles down to young people being exposed to harmful contents depicting violence or cruelty, allowing us to see the worst aspects of humanity.

Even if it's education contents, for example a humanitarian crisis in someplace in the world - the complete lack of appropriate time and place of when these contents are being exposed to us, sometimes indeed constantly being bombarded with them, feels like we're navigating all the suffering in the world all at once and it can be a very overwhelming experience.

Navigating the collective suffering visible online can be overwhelming, increasing isolation and loneliness, especially among young people.

The internet is vast and large, but this expansiveness often leads to a sense of lost community. And alarming statistics about increasing loneliness and isolation in young people is a reflection of this.

Fake news and untrustworthy sources are another pressing, eroding trust among people, which further reinforce the loneliness and isolation crisis I mentioned above but also diminishing the reliability of information that we encounter. Generative AI and deepfakes further complicates this, making online impersonation and catfishing easier, and making online personas - which is already obscured - even more unreliable.

Speaking of which, the online space, especially social media, distorting reality is not a new observation but worth mentioning nevertheless. It is a culture where users are encouraged to present a heavily edited and often fake portrayal of life, reflecting only a surface-level reality. This curated content contributes to unrealistic expectations and comparisons, further isolating individuals.

Data protection is another critical concern, especially for young people. In the event of data breaches, the consequences can be severe. Additionally, digital literacy and critical thinking skills are seriously lacking, particularly among young people, making it harder for them to navigate and assess the complexity of the digital landscape effectively.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

 I've found it offers the ability to meet new people and stay in touch, opening up access to numerous opportunities. Internet culture, while sometimes toxic, can also be funny and serves

as a microcosm where people can express themselves and find communities in ways that aren't possible in person.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

I think we need to start with digital literacy. This should target both educators and young people. Yes, young people urgently need to equip themselves with these skills, but even more so the people who are teaching them. With the rapid rate of tech development, especially with AI, everyone of all ages must put in an effort to keep up. We can model ourselves after Scandinavian countries or Germany, where identifying fake news is incorporated into the curriculum (fact-checking needed). There needs to be an education reform focused on digital safety and belonging, helping children feel safe when navigating the online world. This includes teaching etiquettes and behaviours, similar to how consent and sexual health are taught in schools. It can definitely learn from public health campaigns.

A 2022 report shows that the majority of young people don't trust institutions (fact-checking needed) and the current debate on age restriction for 16 years old and under is the perfect reminder why this is the case. Access to the internet should be a human right, including social media. Any attempts at surveillance or restriction get tricky very fast. Regulating Big Tech is crucial, especially regarding transparency behind the scenes and their decision-making processes as they have been enjoying such impunity for way too long. But we shouldn't restrict young people's access to these platforms—they are incredible tools for accessing less censored and centralised information. More importantly, this is how young people mobilise, and advocate for a wide range of social and political causes. In fact, most of our notable, disruptive movements in recent years from climate to racial justice are heavily facilitated on social media. This activist attitude and digital-savvy is notorious among Gen Z.

Government's control of access to media and information flows is dangerous and anti-democratic. Democracy is supposed to be representative, then why isn't it representative for the desires and grievances of young people? Why do the adults, so-called experts and policy-makers, debate what's best for young people without consulting us? Why does their idea of 'protection' is all about policing us and robbing us from our agency?

Young people deserve a seat at the table. Especially the ones that are supposed to be for us.

We're well informed and have a sophisticated understanding of the world. After all, it is us who were the pioneering generation navigating the online space with all of its confusion and complexity.

We must also look into the advocacy efforts for such restrictions to be implemented and who is behind them. For example, the 'Let Them Be Kids' campaign. Does News Corp genuinely care about young people and families? If the Murdoch family could change the media landscape to make it safer, they could start with their platforms first, which are riddled with

misinformation and unethical journalistic practices. So why go after Big Tech? Is there a hidden agenda that profits them in the long run, strategically for business advantage?

Additionally, think of the future ramifications of the laws we introduce. How can it truly be protection when it is merely delaying access with no additional measures taken to ensure that once they turn 16, they can safely participate and engage with social media? Right now, collectively everyone has time to adapt and gradually learn to navigate the digital space. Thus is it not counterintuitive, is it not setting young people up for failure when we prepare them nothing at all, and also denying them a time for adjustment and development to get acquainted to these platforms, and understand personally both the benefits and the harms - before a sudden exposure when they're of age? To use an analogy, simply giving young people alcohol once they are of age without any education around safety measures and alcohol consumption will result in binge drinking and alcohol abuse.

To push the boundaries even more: this is just the messy, unpleasant reality of the world we're in right now. And young people will encounter harm sooner or later, as part of their journey in becoming an adult. We can thus develop guidance, safety measures, tools and resources to empower them in navigating these harms and protecting themselves from it. What we can't do is to shelter them and hope the harm will disappear.

Finally, why do we hold kids legally responsible for their actions at the age of 10 but deny them access to social media until they are 16? There is a clear inconsistency here that needs to be addressed to ensure a balanced and fair approach to youth engagement with the digital world.

Interviewee #6: Abigail (WA)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I'm currently a final year student of Juris Doctor and founder of WA Consent, which address the legislation gap in the Criminal Code for sexual assault

I'm also a member of the Victims of Crimes Council of Department Justice, and have experience volunteering for Student Legal Advice Centre and CPTSD Foundation.

Personally, I grew up in an unconventional household with lived experience as a victim of sexual assault and domestic violence, which greatly informed and inspired my professional works.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

I used to rely heavily on social media to navigate the world and it certainly imposed many ideas and expectations on me, which I've actively worked to deconstruct under the assistance of my therapist.

This reliance is due to many reasons: a neurodivergent individual who faced neglect during childhood, I lacked a support system and sometimes would cling to any attachments I could find online. Additionally, living with complex PTSD and autism means that navigating social interactions doesn't come naturally; it often triggers trauma responses. Observing how 'normal' people interact online offers a blueprint for me to learn and acquire certain social etiquettes and appropriate responses, though this can be a double-edged sword.

In my early days on the internet, I followed content creators with eating disorders, mirroring my own struggles. These parasocial relationships were influential, shaping my self-image and behaviours, often in unhealthy ways. Consuming content about romantic tropes also shaped my understanding of relationships, sometimes setting unrealistic expectations, especially as a queer woman navigating hetero-dominant contents.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

During my campaign for WA Consent, which involved me sharing private and personal details about my experience, I noticed a conflation between openness and the willingness to give up one's privacy. Just because someone is open about certain aspects of their life doesn't mean they should feel obligated to disclose everything, sacrificing their privacy in the process. Especially must emphasise that what I share is intentional and aimed at being productive for the advocacy cause, not just for spectacle. And yet, these platforms are designed in such a way that push users to share more personal information to gain traction, clicks, and shares, creating a set up where people feel the pressure to give up their privacy for the mobility in advancing their work.

The constant pressure for private details also translates directly into my anxiety for my own safety. Due to the political nature of my advocacy work, I'm constantly wary of the potential of being doxxed, despite being careful with my personal information.

To take a step back and observe the bigger picture, the term 'social media' itself is misleading; it promotes connectivity, but I often question what this 'connection' truly means. Having constant 24/7 access to someone doesn't equate to meaningful interaction. Even when interactions occur, there's a significant difference between engaging with someone in person and viewing an edited version of their life online either in the form of video or photo. Social media interactions in this case are just a facade, then - mere pixels on a screen. But it creates a false sense of closeness to content creators , often ironically driven by our loneliness. Big Tech exploits this loneliness, making it easy to monetise not only our

personalities but also our deepest, darkest desires - which again circling back to the constant demand for privacy.

Another danger is the creation of 'rabbit holes' where users, especially young adolescent boys, are incrementally exposed to more radical views of misogyny through social media algorithms. These algorithms start with small suggestions and gradually increase the quantity and radicalism of the content.

The insidious nature of parasocial relationships online means that young people establish a sense of connection with content creators, giving their words a personal resonance and perceived authority. This is particularly dangerous because young people, who may not have the critical thinking skills required and are still finding themselves, may align with unhealthy role models.

Anonymity on social media also makes it easier to dehumanise others. On a microscale, this manifests as having public versus private Instagram accounts to vent or trash-talk about real people in their life, blurring the lines between real and fake. On a macroscale, it includes hate or anti-accounts targeting public figures or celebrities. This dehumanisation removes the ability for meaningful discussions, pushing people into binary thinking of right-wrong, good-bad, and contributing to polarisation and extremist ideologies.

We hold people to unrealistic standards of perfection, ready to demonise them for any mistake. This lack of leniency prevents learning and growth, which is essential for meaningful discussions and a healthy society.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

I've found it incredibly valuable for staying informed and learning about global events. Social media provides access to information and perspectives that might not be available through traditional media, allowing me to engage meaningfully with important issues rather than sticking to comfortable, familiar narratives.

Social media has also allowed me to reconnect with my cultural identity as a half-Filipino who didn't grow up immersed in the culture. It offers a platform for sharing ideas and creative expression, which, despite its dangers, is powerful for self-expression.

From a mental health perspective, I've found support and community in online forums like Reddit, which I couldn't find elsewhere. Certain YouTubers create safe spaces where marginalised individuals, such as queer people of colour, can navigate their identities and feel empowered.

Through my work with WA Consent and its digital campaigns, I've connected with incredibly resilient young women. These interactions have been empowering, highlighting the potential of social media to foster survival and mutual empowerment.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

First, a culturally safe approach is essential. It's important to understand that there isn't a single, universal view of ethical and moral codes, especially in a country that is diverse and multicultural as Australia. Unfortunately, both the service providers (Big Tech) that design these platforms and our policymakers are often focused solely Western-centric worldview. Regulation should be sensitive, expansive and fluid to reflect and accommodate our social and cultural diversity.

When it comes to censoring particular words that are considered as slurs or offensive, it's worth noting that people with discriminatory prejudice and intention will find ways to circumvent bans, often using dog whistles or disguised language. Ironically, allowing people to say what they mean directly can sometimes make their intentions clearer and easier to address.

A regulatory attempt for content moderation also must acknowledge that what one person deems hate speech might not be the same for another. Thus, the context is crucial. We should create environments that allow people to learn and grow. For example, instead of outright censorship, we could implement pop-ups or links to educational resources when someone sees or posts something harmful. This education-focused approach hopefully will address the problem in the long-run, as the issue with language usage and bigotry are clearly a complex systemic issue, and thus any effort to tackle the root cause must also require large-scale, societal shifts, and not simple technological solutions.

Considering Big Tech's richness in resources, they should be mandated to engage in pro bono work to support social equity and human rights. For example, they can have in-house social advocacy campaigns, which can be done via commission work or have a team dedicated specifically for this purpose. Alternatively, they can promote the campaigns or advocacy works of other independent non-profits that lack resources.

Regulating pornographic content is another critical area. Media should include pop-ups or messages on explicit websites to inform viewers that pornography has production value and isn't a realistic depiction of sexual activity. This is particularly important as young people often seek out explicit content as a substitute for educational materials on sexual activities.

Finally, invasive website tracking and data gathering pose significant risks, particularly for vulnerable demographics like victims of domestic violence. Such practices can facilitate stalking and violence, highlighting the need for better regulations to protect these individuals.

Interviewee #7: Zahra (WA)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

I'm currently working as the Campaign & Policy Strategist at the National Association for Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect and as a Non-Executive Board Director at the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. I also have extensive advocacy leadership in addressing the intersection of gender equality and refugees' and migrants' rights. On an international level, I am the Australian Representative for UN Women's '30 for 2030 Network', 'Beijing +25 Youth Task Force', and 'Generation Equality Core Group'. I previously attended the 67th Commission on the Status of Women in New York with the theme of 'Technological change and the digital age for achieving gender equality'.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

Well, I'm glad that when I was younger, my parents taught me to never use my real, full name, and I took this advice to heart because looking back at the old content I posted in those early years is embarrassing. More than that, I know many peers who have experienced their old posts resurfacing or coming to the attention of their employers, which greatly compromised their professional reputation and put their careers in jeopardy. They probably didn't anticipate such damages when publishing those contents a few years back.

This is why, despite having rich internal dialogues and developing my personal life and identity, I'm incredibly careful and hyper-aware of how I present myself or post certain content online, just in case it will be used against me in a few years' time. In a tech-driven, highly digitalized world such as the one we're living in, I feel that online persona almost matters as much as your physical persona. In fact, a lot of the time, it feels like the digital world has 'consumed' reality in the sense that it has major consequences, and our physical world is reactionary to what's happening online. This is especially true for young people, as I feel it is harder and harder to distinguish the lines between digital and physical.

For example, I know of cases in my high school where teenage girls had their explicit content leaked, without their consent, of course. Imagine the repercussions of such a violation of one's privacy and the damage it does during those critical developmental years. I'm confident in saying that my observation in high school is not an isolated incident—almost every school, every year level experiences at least one or two cases like that, and the fact that this is the norm is not right.

Another example of the detriment of the digital world that manifests greatly in our 'real' physical world is the toll it takes on my mental health. I constantly navigate anxiety, which intensifies my complicated relationship with my body. I had an eating disorder for about a decade, and I know many female friends who suffer the same conditions. The media I consume significantly contributes to this.

More concerning, with emerging technology like AI, where almost anyone can generate and twist content and information, it is almost impossible to detect what's real and fake. This will

add fuel to the fire of misinformation—already a significant issue, which will escalate if this technology is left unchecked and under regulated.

This speaks to the importance of digital literacy more than ever. Luckily, with my academic background in journalism and law, I feel equipped to discern information, its source, reliability, and validity. However, I doubt if the majority of the public, especially young people, have the same ability—and saying that this is worrying is an understatement.

Lastly, although I'm grateful for the community I've cultivated and nurtured over the years thanks to digital technology, as I've grown older, I appreciate the importance of staying grounded by investing in and building a physical community.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

As someone who has a considerable platform due to my advocacy work, I've experienced my fair share of online harassment. For example, I wrote an article for a national broadcaster discussing controversial topics on intersectional social issues. Once published online, I received significant online harassment, including doxxing and vile comments calling for my deportation. The most disheartening aspect was that this online hate was perpetuated by my own community.

Similarly, after my nomination for the Australian Human Rights Award 2023, my personal Twitter/X account was ransacked, and anonymous accounts bombarded the Human Rights Commissioner with my content, twisted or taken out of context, as evidence to revoke my nomination.

I used to be very active on Twitter/X for advocacy work, but now I've officially closed my account. X, in particular, has little to no monitoring, and even if you report problematic content, they are slow and limited in taking it down. Worse, if you block abusive accounts, they can simply create new ones to continue the harassment. Compared to Meta's platforms, like Instagram, when you block someone, the platform ensures they will also block future accounts that person may create. This creates a sense of trust and security for users, making them feel the platform is taking accountability to ensure their well-being and experience.

The reason I was active on X before was its efficiency in streamlining perspectives, thoughts, and insights, which is ideal for socio-political advocacy. However, it also easily garners hate and unwanted attention. Reflecting on my intersectional feminist work, I'd call for more investigation into understanding how algorithms disproportionately discriminate against girls and women, its long-term impacts, and how to prevent this phenomenon from further entrenching in our technology-driven systems. Systemic discrimination also affects Indigenous communities in rural areas, for example, on platforms like TikTok. A human rights approach to developing these technologies or their regulatory framework should be prioritised.

A crucial statistic to highlight is that young people aged 10-15 have the highest rate of committing online gender-based violence (need to fact-check). Various reasons contribute to

this, but primarily, young people in this age group are impressionable, lack life experience, and do not have the digital literacy to fully understand the implications of their actions.

When I was younger and didn't know better, partaking in online hate was something I did because it was popular and the 'angry mob' mentality can be dangerous. The challenge with laws and policies in this space is reflecting the constantly changing ethical and moral attitudes of society.

I'm also concerned about how disruptive information technologies like AI will impact the cultural landscape of our ethics and moral codes, especially with strategic business deals and partnerships shaping these technologies behind the scenes. For example, News Corp's major deal with OpenAI—the former is notorious for propagating certain rhetoric, and the latter is a tool increasingly relied upon for information.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

The digital platform is excellent for exposing me to various opportunities, especially for professional development and creative avenues. Leveraging an online presence on platforms like LinkedIn has been foundational for my career.

Being an active advocate in various spaces means I can observe and participate in many disruptive social movements facilitated by digital technology, such as #MeToo. It's also great for community building. However, the downside of online activism or campaigning is that algorithms and recommendation systems only push content that aligns with your views, keeping your content in echo chambers. It doesn't reach a broader audience or challenge their perceptions, which should be the goal of advocacy campaigns.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

Regarding the current debate around social media restrictions for children under 16 via age verification, I support such an initiative due to young people's susceptibility to harm and the difficulty in monitoring the online space for them. However, I'm sceptical about its effectiveness and enforcement. Young people can use VPNs, and age verification technology must be tested and reliable. There's also the cost of implementing this—how expensive will it be for taxpayers?

Rushed policies or laws are usually not good ones. We need to take time to consider the potential ramifications, especially for tech policies, as we don't fully understand their systemic impacts. For example, the latest Deepfake Bill proposed by the Attorney-General would benefit from specific studies on its intersectional impacts on different communities. However, I acknowledge the urgency for policymakers to keep pace with the rapidly evolving tech landscape.

Regulatory attempts should aim for preventive measures rather than reactive ones. For instance, investing in digital literacy for all ages, especially young people, is vital. Schools

provide tech equipment for learning, even in low socio-economic areas, so it's sensible to provide basic training to ensure young people have the skills and understanding to protect themselves and others from potential harm and to conduct themselves respectfully online.

This issue isn't a quick fix, especially with emerging tech like AI being more integrated into our lives, bringing new challenges. Lastly, I'd like to highlight an initiative I led with other young people across the Asia-Pacific: the 'Toolkit: Second Edition of the Youth Guide to End Online Gender-Based Violence', a collaboration between UN Women's 30 for 2030 Network and the South Korean government. I recommend the Review team consult this resource to prevent and address online gender-based violence and incorporate these strategies into the Australian context. Referencing the UN Development Goals when devising these policies would also ensure a human rights-centric approach.

Highlights from the resource include: adopting clear and consistent definitions of online gender-based violence; enhancing specialised training for law enforcement to recognize, investigate, and prosecute such violence; investing in more research and data collection; and working closely with tech companies to establish accountability measures, transparent content moderation, and reporting procedures.

Finally, I strongly believe that young people's participation in policy decision-making processes is critical. However, the most effective form of this participation is debatable. Youth Advisory Groups can sometimes be tokenistic and ineffective. We need to find ways to include authentic youth voices and harness their creativity and transformative power. This is a discussion we need to have.

Interviewee #8: Ahmad (VIC)

Can you please give us a brief introduction about your background?

Originally from Afghanistan, I am now a permanent resident of Australia. I'm currently working as a Facilitator at Orygen - a leading youth mental health organisation, as part of their Global Fellowship program in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade.

I'm also a Founder at Changemakers - a grassroot initiative to address the mental health system and ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan under the intersectional lens of education, gender equality and health. This work also has a wider outreach across the South Asia region.

Most recently, I'm also a member of the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Youth Advisory Group, providing consultation for the Minister of Social Services in online bullying and harassment.

Reflecting on your personal, lived experience, how would you characterise your relationship with social media or the digital world more broadly?

I would characterise my relationship with social media and the digital world as generally positive, though nuanced. As a man, I acknowledge that my gender experience influences this perspective.

Social media has allowed me to learn various things and leverage opportunities, especially working remotely. Being digitally connected enabled me to stay involved with Orygen back in Afghanistan and collaborate worldwide. It provides entertainment and relaxation and makes information accessible for learning.

Staying connected with my family is another significant benefit, as an Australian migrant who cannot physically be with my family. For instance, I call my family every Friday morning for hours. This digital connection also forms a unique 'digital diaspora' experience that uses technology to maintain connection with my homeland. Especially when it comes to keeping up with social, cultural, and political relevant contents from Afghanistan. I also feel a sense of attachment to certain content creators, further enriching my digital experience.

 However, the randomness of social media algorithms often surprises me, particularly in contact suggestions. Although I tried to be subtle about my boundaries and not wanting to connect online with a few people that I know in person, they either still manage to find and contact me or pop up on my recommendations, even when I don't want them to.

While I try to keep my information private, making my account public can lead to this kind of unexpected exposure.

Reflecting on your professional and leadership experiences, what are some biggest risks with the digital world that you have observed or encountered?

Privacy is a major concern, particularly given my work in mental health and connections with Western institutions. When the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, my publicly accessible information posed a huge risk to my safety and that of my family. In high-risk crises, it's crucial to limit public access to personal information.

From my experience in mental health, I've seen studies suggesting a link between increased media exposure and higher suicide rates (fact-checking needed). The randomness of social media algorithms adds to this risk, as you never know what might trigger someone and what kind of contents they might be exposed to. There's a need for better flagging systems and more transparency in how algorithms operate.

Media literacy is also critical. People need to understand that the digital world isn't an accurate representation of 'reality'. On social media, everyone seems to lead perfect lives, which can lead to unhealthy comparisons about your looks, accomplishments, etc especially among young people who are still finding themselves or have low self-esteem. In the long run,

constant unhealthy comparison and unrealistic expectations can perpetuate serious mental health issues like depression and eating disorders.

In my role with the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Advisory Group, we also discussed with the Minister for Social Services the intersection of digital technology and violence against girls and women. We talked about how public figures and media personalities, the so-called 'menfluencers,' propagate toxic concepts of masculinity to young and adolescent boys. We also discussed the issue of unsolicited sexual pictures and the need for better protection against such risks.

What about the benefits or opportunities of the digital world?

Studygram accounts on Instagram, which are dedicated to studying aesthetics and motivation, have been a great resource for me. Social media also makes it easy to run different projects by connecting with people from various parts of the world. It enabled me to start my advocacy journey online, amplifying and collaborating with the voices that would otherwise be unheard.

Ultimately, I think it is a very important reminder that social media is a tool, and its value depends on how you use it. So despite its many flaws, I think as someone who uses it productively and critically, I'm able to extract all the benefits and opportunities that it provides.

Can you identify some policies that the government can do to better regulate the online space?

I believe we need a more nuanced understanding and conversation around freedom. It's easy for people to equate freedom with 'do whatever you want' or 'say whatever you like,' even at the detriment of others or society. This often gives them an excuse to distribute explicit content, hatred, and bigotry. Therefore, we need timely and sensible definitions of freedom, especially in today's context, and appropriate guidelines.

It's also important to detect discriminatory views and prejudice, which can disguise themselves as 'jokes,' 'memes,' or 'trends' on the internet. For example, a reel that went viral not too long ago asking the question of 'Which ethnic/nationality would you not date' should be flagged.

Condensing privacy statements is essential so people can actually read and clearly understand what they entail. Currently, users often accept terms and conditions without knowing what they actually agree to.

Devising safe and context-appropriate language, such as pop-ups or banners created by platforms, can point out the obvious (and sometimes not so obvious) fact that social media doesn't reflect real life.

We need stricter and more specific guidelines on acceptable posts and metrics to monitor the impacts of a creator's content. This includes how it is perceived or shared on social media and

the kind of influence they're having. This doesn't aim to censor content creators but rather provide more insights into their platform, holding them accountable for the impact they're having.

Finally, evaluation metrics for harm are necessary to understand and prevent potential harms, ensuring a safer online environment for everyone.

Conclusion

This Submission underscores the critical need for inclusive, nuanced, and youth-informed approaches to regulating the digital world.

The online experience is complex and multi-layered, thus requiring a regulatory framework that is dynamic and innovative. A balanced approach, supported by rich research and studies, as well as a trial-and-error method for different regulatory attempts is highly encouraged.

At the heart of the discussion, it is clear that young people urgently call for reform when it comes to regulating Big Tech's practices and its expected responsibility to the users and the wider public. However, young people also acknowledge that tackling Big Tech alone is not enough; thus advocating for a broader, systematic effort to mitigate online risks, one that demands other stakeholders from education to non-profit to step up in collaboration.

Most importantly, aligning with the 'Engage!' strategy from the Office for Youth, we strongly recommend the *Online Safety Act* Review team to continue consulting with young people, as an ongoing commitment and investment from the government to meaningfully include young people in shaping a safe digital future.