

Submission to Petitions Committee: Education and safety restrictions on social media for children and teenagers

“ Social media is treated by older generations as a separate entity from reality, when in fact it has become part of our social fabric. This makes it hard to have these conversations with older generations.”

(Whāraurau Youth Advisors, *Young people speak out about Wellbeing*, 2022)¹

As the independent advocate working for and with mokopuna (children and young people), Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission (Mana Mokopuna)² thanks the Petitions Committee for the invitation to provide a written submission on the **Petition of Charlene Whyte: Education and safety restrictions on social media for children and teenagers**.

The Chief Children's Commissioner is available to discuss this submission and issues raised by the petition further with the Petitions Committee in an oral hearing, should the Committee wish to.

Summary

1. All mokopuna have the right to be safe in the places and spaces they exist in. Safeguarding the wellbeing of mokopuna in the digital environment³ and on social media is of great importance, and mokopuna themselves recognise and advocate for online safety mechanisms to be strengthened in Aotearoa New Zealand, so they can be safe in these spaces.⁴
2. We support increased education and safety mechanisms on social media for mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, emphasising that solutions to address the negative impacts of social media must be driven by and with mokopuna. It is their right under Article 12 of the Children's Convention to be listened to on matters affecting them, and they are experts in their own lives, holding the greatest understanding of the complex relationship between the digital environment and mokopuna themselves.
3. International evidence and research within Aotearoa New Zealand shows interconnection between that the negative impacts of social media and mental health concerns, with links to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, low self-esteem, being over-whelmed by awareness of world events, uncertain futures including eco-anxiety, depression, anxiety, exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, decreased sleep, and reduced in-person time with family and friends.^{5,6} For some

¹ Te Hīringa Mahara the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (2022). *Young people speak out about Wellbeing: An insights report into the Wellbeing of Rangatahi Māori and other Young People in Aotearoa*. [Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf](https://www.mhwc.govt.nz/youth-wellbeing-insights-report-full.pdf) ([mhwc.govt.nz](https://www.mhwc.govt.nz))

² Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission is the independent Crown entity with the statutory responsibility to advocate for the rights, interests, participation and well-being of all children and young people (mokopuna) under 18 years old in Aotearoa New Zealand, including young persons aged over 18 but under 25 years if they are, or have been, in care or custody.

At Mana Mokopuna we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and well-being at every stage of their lives.

³ According to [General Comment No.25 \(2021\)](#) - *the digital environment is constantly evolving and expanding, encompassing information and communications technologies, including digital networks, content, services and applications, connected devices and environments, virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, robotics, automated systems, algorithms and data analytics, biometrics and implant technology*.

⁴ https://www.women.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-08/NZ-teens-and-digital-harm_statistical-insights_2018%20%281%29.pdf

⁵ [Social media and Youth Mental Health](#)

⁶ [Youth Wellbeing Insights Report | Te Hīringa Mahara—Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission](#)

groups of mokopuna, including mokopuna Māori, Pacific mokopuna and rainbow mokopuna, the harms of the digital world are experienced more.⁷

4. We also recognise the positive impacts of social media for mokopuna, including relationships and belonging, mokopuna finding communities of support, and access to information. For some groups of mokopuna, such as mokopuna whaikaha and Rainbow mokopuna, these aspects of social media can be particularly important. Mokopuna highlight strengths of the digital environment in discourses about online safety and social media regulation.⁸
5. Throughout our submission we recognise existing work that looks to support mokopuna to be safe in the digital environment, such as research conducted by the Classification Office and educational resources and programs provided by Netsafe. Mana Mokopuna encourages building upon this work. Considering this, we are disappointed by the recent removal of the Relationship, Sexuality, and Education (RSE) Guidelines, which provided essential education for mokopuna at various stages of development, particularly concerning relationships, including online relationships and safety. The RSE Guidelines serve as an important preventative and educational tool to keep mokopuna safe while fostering positive social connections and relationships, which mokopuna recognise as an important part of their wellbeing and development.⁹
6. The idea put forward by the Petitioner of a Social Media License for mokopuna is creative and innovative, and we commend the recommendation of increasing mokopuna and adult education and awareness of the digital environment and how to safely navigate this. However, we recommend that further work is done and that mokopuna are meaningfully consulted before any steps are taken to develop and implement a Social Media License. Mokopuna should be involved in the scoping, design and development of education and awareness raising initiatives and regulations relating to the digital environment, to ensure that any such initiatives are mokopuna-friendly and will be effective in better equipping mokopuna for the digital world, including aspects such as social media, disinformation, misinformation and Artificial Intelligence.

Introduction

7. It is essential that any initiatives to address and mitigate the harmful impacts of social media are grounded in a children's rights approach, upholding New Zealand's duties as a States Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention). Alongside this, the right of mokopuna to participation must be upheld throughout the development of any policy and legislative initiatives relating to the digital world (including social media), given the direct and indirect impacts on mokopuna.
8. Our submission relating to this Petition is informed by authoritative children's rights advice from the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee), specifically; General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment; and General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights.
9. Tech companies and social media sites hold significant power when we look at the everyday interactions of mokopuna in the digital environment, including social media. They are responsible for the algorithms, content management and reporting and response practices that govern these spaces. Therefore, ensuring corporate accountability for the promotion, protection and respect of children's rights is essential. As the primary duty-bearer under the Children's Convention, the Government has a duty to exercise this accountability for children's rights in relation to tech companies and social media sites (among other digital actors), in regard to mokopuna rights in the digital world.

⁷ [Koi-Tu-Literature-Review-for-Te-Hiringa-Mahara-May-2023.pdf](#)

⁸ [The Digital Age: Youth, Disability, and Mental Health](#)

⁹ [Let's talk about it: Review of relationships and sexuality education - Summary](#)

10. Research and evidence highlights that increased rates of mental distress among mokopuna correlates with the rise of social media and access to digital devices.¹⁰ Mokopuna have also shared that it is important to recognise the positive impacts of social media in their lives, and they have suggested many solutions to address its negative impacts, such as increasing education on the harms and dangers of being online.¹¹
11. It is important to recognise that many inequities occur for mokopuna online. For example, mokopuna Māori, Pacific mokopuna and rainbow mokopuna report higher rates of discrimination and online bullying.¹² Rainbow mokopuna have also emphasised that social media enhances their wellbeing through exploring their identities, accessing resources, and connecting with peers.¹³ While there are many barriers and impacts of the digital environment for mokopuna whaikaha (disabled children), many mokopuna whaikaha report increased connection and acceptance from being online and active on social media.¹⁴
12. Mana Mokopuna advocates for increased education for both mokopuna and adults on navigating the digital environment and social media, and being equipped to be safe in these spaces. We recommend that further work is done to develop and implement online safety mechanisms in New Zealand, and to explore the proposal of a Social Media License. Mokopuna must be consulted, and their views and ideas meaningfully considered before any steps are taken to restrict social media access for children and young people.
13. Our submission provides information and advice to support the following key messages:
 - Centring children's rights in the digital environment
 - Children's rights considerations for mokopuna Māori, and mokopuna belonging to indigenous and/or minority groups
 - Social media companies have responsibilities to uphold children's rights
 - Evolving capacities and the importance of parental education and support
 - Mokopuna exist and thrive in the digital world
 - Mokopuna hold the solutions to address the negative impacts of social media – seek out and listen to their views
 - A deeper dive into the negative impacts of social media for mokopuna
 - Solutions and ideas that mokopuna have shared
 - Giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Centring children's rights in the digital environment

“ Less harmful or mean content. More privacy and control over what I share. More education for parents and teachers about what it's like to be online as a young person. Safer online gaming spaces.”

(Mokopuna, Age 12-14, Internet Safety Survey, Save the Children and Netsafe, 2025)¹⁵

14. Guidance from the UN Committee notes that technology is vital to the lives and futures of mokopuna.¹⁶ The UN Committee highlights the importance of the digital environment, including

¹⁰ [Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)

¹¹ [Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf \(mhw.govt.nz\)](#)

¹² [Kōi-Tu-Literature-Review-for-Te-Hiringa-Mahara-May-2023.pdf](#)

¹³ [Can Social Media Participation Enhance LGBTQ+ Youth Well-Being? Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale](#)

¹⁴ [The Digital Age: Youth, Disability, and Mental Health](#)

¹⁵ [Children's voices poll: internet safety — Save the Children NZ](#) via [Instagram](#)

¹⁶ [General comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#)

during times of crisis and for education, and they also advise that there is an increased opportunity for the realisation of children's rights alongside the risks of digital violation or abuse.¹⁷

15. The rights of all mokopuna must be respected, protected, and fulfilled in the digital environment. Advances in digital technologies impact children's lives and their rights in extensive and interconnected ways. Meaningful access to digital technologies can help children realise the full scope of their civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights.¹⁸ We emphasise the following children's rights and guidance to the Petitions Committee as it considers the Petition at hand¹⁹:

Article 2 – Right to non-discrimination

Children have the right to non-discrimination, including not experiencing racism, discrimination, or hateful communications online and through equitable access to the digital environment. Therefore, social media sites must ensure that algorithms and automated processes do not discriminate against different groups of mokopuna and that when instances of discrimination occur online, that there are safe and responsive complaints and reporting mechanisms available.

Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development

Children have the right to life, survival and development and the State has a responsibility to ensure the maximum possible development of each and every mokopuna. There are links between social media use and increased mental distress, suicidality and other risks to mokopuna safety and wellbeing – such risks must be addressed and considered in the diverse contexts that mokopuna live in. It is also important to consider this right for mokopuna in the earliest years of life, when their development of cognitive, emotional and social skills is rapidly growing, and their brain plasticity is maximal. In the early years, precautions may be required, depending on the design, purpose and uses of technologies, especially during the critical neurological growth spurts of early childhood and adolescence.²⁰

Article 8 – Right to Identity

Children have the right to the preservation of identity, and this encompasses the experience of belonging and identity-shaping that mokopuna can benefit from in the digital environment. For example, digital forms of culture, recreation and play should support and benefit mokopuna and reflect and promote their cultural identities, languages and heritage. The digital environment can also facilitate children's social skills, learning, expression, creative activities, and a shared online culture. This also relates to the right to privacy and protecting identity data through secure digital systems, strict regulatory standards, and support for parents, whānau and communities regarding sharing mokopuna information and photos online.

Article 12 – Right to Participation

Children have the right to freely express their views on matters affecting them, including in the digital environment. In the development of solutions focused on social media educational and safety mechanisms, mokopuna must be meaningfully involved to ensure that their perspectives and needs are addressed. This will ensure that such policies are shaped in a way that reflects their realities, giving them a voice in creating solutions to address the impacts of social media.

Article 15 – Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly

Children have the right to associate freely and engage in peaceful assemblies, including in the digital environment. This encompasses their ability to join online communities, engage in digital activism, and express themselves freely. In the digital environment and on social media, mokopuna

¹⁷ Ibid, pg.1, para 3.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ General comment No. 25 (2019), para. 22; and general comment No. 20 (2016), paras. 9–11.

should have the freedom to engage in online discourse and collaborate with their peers in a safe and protected space.

Article 16 – Right to Privacy

Children have the right to privacy, including protection from any unlawful interference in their digital lives. Children's personal data must be safeguarded, and their privacy must be respected, ensuring they are protected from unauthorised access, exploitation, or misuse of their personal information by digital platforms, online actors and Artificial Intelligence.

Article 17 – Right to Access Information

Children have the right to access information that is important for their development. Digital platforms are often a place where mokopuna go to access this information, and it is important that it is age-appropriate, dependable, and supports their learning, wellbeing, and growth. This right ensures that mokopuna are free to access diverse, accurate, and enriching content online to enhance their development. This right is particularly important given the proliferation of disinformation, misinformation and Artificial Intelligence in the digital world.

Articles 28 & 29 – Right to Education

Children have the right to quality education, and the digital environment can play a key role in facilitating this right. Digital tools and platforms should be designed to enhance educational opportunities, providing equal access to learning resources for all children. Online education must be accessible, inclusive, and aligned with a child's holistic development. Education focused on online safety and digital citizenship, such as the RSE Guidelines, must ensure that mokopuna have a voice in their education, with opportunities to develop their personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This includes providing a curriculum and guidelines that support their growth in all areas, including all four dimensions of Te Whare Tapa Whā. RSE Guidelines play a crucial role in this by helping mokopuna navigate online safety, the complexities of their developing identities and fostering positive, healthy connections (both in-person and online) that contribute to their overall development.

Article 31 – Right to Culture, Leisure and Play

Children have the right to culture, leisure, and play, which includes digital play and leisure. Social media also provides mokopuna with a platform to explore and express their cultural identities. For example, for mokopuna Māori this includes through online engagement based in Te Reo Māori (such as learning and sharing of language), tikanga Māori, and other cultural practices. The digital environment should provide safe, creative, and age-appropriate avenues for all mokopuna to play, socialise, and express themselves, fostering healthy engagement and positive development through digital play and creative platforms.

Article 32 – Right to protection against economic exploitation

Children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and harmful work, including ensuring that mokopuna are not forced to work in ways that interfere with their education or development. In the context of the digital environment, this right is highly relevant as children are increasingly exposed to risks like online marketing, data profiling, and digital child labour.²¹ It is important that mokopuna are not targets of manipulative commercial practices, such as being nudged to spend money in apps or share personal data. To address these risks, the digital environment must implement safeguards to protect children from economic exploitation. Parents, policy makers, and tech companies must regulate and uphold these protections.

16. As the Government has endorsed the Pact for the Future and the Declaration for Future Generations, we advocate for the implementation of the objectives and recommendations set out in the Global Digital Compact. These recommendations are grounded in a human rights framework and support

²¹ The child's right to protection against economic exploitation in the digital world

the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and will therefore, support the realisation of mokopuna rights in the digital environment.²²

17. The Children's Convention also encompasses **Special Protection Measures**,²³ and we encourage the Committee to consider the impact of the digital environment and social media for children belonging to minority or indigenous groups. It is important to consider the inequitable and intersectional concerns as these mokopuna are likely to experience heightened challenges and risk of harm online.²⁴

Children's rights considerations for mokopuna Māori, and mokopuna belonging to indigenous and/or minority groups

18. The following section discusses some of the children's rights considerations for mokopuna Māori, and mokopuna belonging to indigenous and/or minority groups, with a focus on challenges that they are experiencing to their rights in the digital world.

Mokopuna Māori

19. Mokopuna Māori have shared that the negative impacts of social media include the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and racism.²⁵ Mokopuna Māori correlate these experiences with anxiety, anger, and a diminished sense of health and wellbeing due to cyberbullying, targeted racism and the way the media sometimes perpetuates the portrayal of harmful negative stereotypes.²⁶ This can lead to mokopuna Māori feeling excluded, unfairly treated, and disrespected. For more information on the impacts of mokopuna Māori, please refer to paragraphs 70-76 of this submission on pages 16-17.

Pacific mokopuna

20. A recent literature review examining the impacts of social media on Pacific youth in Aotearoa New Zealand reveals that, compared to peers from other ethnic groups, Pacific mokopuna are more susceptible to cyberbullying, online exclusion, unsolicited requests for sexually explicit material, non-consensual sharing of personal information, accidental exposure to distressing content, and unintentional downloading of malware. It also raises that social media offers benefits such as opportunities to challenge media bias and maintain international connections.²⁷

Mokopuna whaikaha

21. An Aotearoa New Zealand based research paper has highlighted that mokopuna whaikaha experience several negative impacts of social media, including social exclusion, exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and pressure to conform to social norms.²⁸ Many disabled young people face online isolation and are more vulnerable to digital abuse.²⁹ They are also more likely to encounter distressing material, including content promoting self-harm.³⁰ Additionally, social media can also increase feelings of inadequacy due to societal beauty or behavioural standards that are posted online.³¹ While social media often provides support and connection for mokopuna whaikaha, the challenges faced by mokopuna whaikaha must be addressed to create a safer and more inclusive online environment for and with them.³²

²² [Pact for the Future. Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations](#)

²³ [Special protection measures - Children's Convention from the United Nations - Ministry of Social Development](#)

²⁴ [youth19-intersectionality-report-final.pdf](#)

²⁵ Kora, Aorangi (2023), [Te Ara Matihiko: Exploring affirmative social media use among rangatahi Māori](#)

²⁶ [Cyberbullying Toward Māori Is Rife in New Zealand: Incidences and Demographic Differences in Experiences of Cyberbullying Among Māori](#)

²⁷ [The impacts of social media on the wellbeing of Pacific youth in New Zealand 2024](#)

²⁸ [The Digital Age: Youth, Disability, and Mental Health](#)

²⁹ [New Zealand Teens and Digital Harm - Statistical insights into experiences, impact and response](#)

³⁰ [The Digital Age: Youth, Disability, and Mental Health](#)

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

Rainbow mokopuna

22. The Youth Wellbeing Insights Report highlights several negative impacts of social media for rainbow mokopuna.³³ Many rainbow mokopuna report experiencing cyberbullying, discrimination, and harassment, which can have serious effects on their mental health.³⁴ Rainbow mokopuna do not consistently feel safe on social media platforms to be their authentic selves. This has often led them to self-censor, not participate in public conversation, or keep their social media accounts private.³⁵ However, social media can also foster positive connections for rainbow mokopuna, offering social support and resilience, whilst also posing risks, such as heightened loneliness, mental distress, and exposure to online-victimisation or harmful behaviours.³⁶ While social media provides a sense of community, belonging and spaces for identity-building, exploration and learning for many rainbow mokopuna, it also presents significant risks related to online safety and mental wellbeing, making it important to create safer and more inclusive online spaces.³⁷

Muslim mokopuna

23. There is large concern about how social media enables the perpetuation of extremism, hate and racism, which can lead to extreme violence – like the 15th of March 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacks which killed 50 people and left another 50 people injured.³⁸ A survey by Netsafe in 2019 found that in the context of religious affiliation, the highest rate of exposure to online hate speech was reported by Muslim participants at 67%.³⁹ Muslim mokopuna are concerned about perceptions and portrayals of Muslim culture online and in the media.⁴⁰ However, Australian research has highlighted that Muslim youth have found opportunities to take civic engagement and collective agency on social media and online platforms.⁴¹

Care experienced mokopuna

24. In the Youth Wellbeing Insights report by Te Hiringa Mahara, they spoke to care-experienced mokopuna who shared that social media adds another level to the experience of bullying and one mokopuna shared that social media platforms must have policies to support young people to be safe online.⁴² They also highlighted that social media providers must follow their policies and ensure that they respond to complaints or reports of harm.⁴³ There is limited research on the impacts of social media on care-experienced mokopuna. Mana Mokopuna is concerned that, due to this lack of evidence, care-experienced mokopuna may not be given the same consideration as other groups of mokopuna.

Intersectional children's rights challenges

25. The digital environment can have a negative compounding impact without adequate safeguards in place. Intersectional research in Aotearoa has found a pervasive pattern of inequity for young people who have intersectional identities compared to those from the majority groups (i.e. Pākehā, non-disabled, cis-heterosexual youth). Mokopuna with intersecting identities have emphasised that they feel a lack of understanding and support for their identities, and they are also concerned for the mental health of their peers due to New Zealand's high rates of youth suicide.⁴⁴ It is important that

³³ [Youth Wellbeing Insights Report | Te Hiringa Mahara—Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission](#)

³⁴ <https://insideout.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Ending-rainbow-focused-bullying-and-discrimination-resource.pdf>

³⁵ [Queer+experiences+NZ+final+report+Dec+2023+Kayli+Taylor.pdf](#)

³⁶ [JMIR Mental Health - Young Sexual Minority Adolescent Experiences of Self-expression and Isolation on Social Media: Cross-sectional Survey Study](#)

³⁷ [Journal of Medical Internet Research - Social Media Use and Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth: Systematic Review](#)

³⁸ [Terrorism, trauma, tolerance: Bearing witness to white supremacist attack on Muslims in Christchurch](#)

³⁹ [Measuring trends in online hate speech victimisation and exposure, and attitudes in New Zealand](#)

⁴⁰ [A critical narrative review of research about the experiences of being Muslim in New Zealand](#)

⁴¹ [Religion, belonging, and active citizenship: A systematic review of literature on Muslim youth in Australia](#)

⁴² [Youth Wellbeing Insights Report | Te Hiringa Mahara—Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission](#)

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ [Negotiating multiple identities: Intersecting identities among Māori, Pacific, Rainbow and Disabled young people](#)

we approach such issues with an intersectional lens - for example, for mokopuna that belong to both the Pacific and Rainbow community, Moana Wā offers a safe online space through social platforms to navigate intersectional issues that impact them, such as white supremacy, racism and stereotyping.⁴⁵

Taking a children's rights approach to digital policy-making

26. Mana Mokopuna urges that in its consideration of the Petition, the Committee is closely guided by *General Comment No. 25 on Children's rights in relation to the digital environment*.
27. General Comment No.25 emphasises the need to integrate children's rights into digital policy-making. It stresses the importance of ensuring that mokopuna are protected from online harm, have access to quality information, and can participate in decisions that impact them. This authoritative children's rights guidance emphasises the duty of States Parties to the Children's Convention to actively work towards a digital environment that is child-centred and promotes mokopuna rights, while seeking to eliminate and minimise the challenges to their rights and the inequities that mokopuna face online.⁴⁶

Social media companies have responsibilities to uphold children's rights

“ When I report a post that has me or someone I know in it, it never gets taken down and it always says that there is no reason the post or photo should be removed.”

(Mokopuna, Age 15-17, Internet Safety Survey, Save the Children and Netsafe 2025)⁴⁷

28. Tech companies and social media platforms, as key players in the digital environment, hold significant responsibilities for upholding children's rights, as outlined in *General Comment No. 16 on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights*.⁴⁸ This guidance emphasises that businesses, including tech companies, must respect, protect, and uphold children's rights.⁴⁹ These businesses have a duty to create environments that are safe, inclusive, and conducive to children's holistic development. This responsibility extends to preventing online harm, ensuring privacy and data protections, and enabling mokopuna participation, play and development in a way that promotes their rights without exploitation.
29. We recognise that despite children comprising one in three internet users, online spaces are predominantly designed for adults and often fail to meet the needs of mokopuna.⁵⁰ As a result, children encounter various inappropriate channels such as online gambling and contractual obligations, which poorly monitor appropriateness of content and age of users. Research has raised the challenge of ensuring age-appropriate and rights-respecting experiences in the digital world, given that it is not always clear who is a child.⁵¹ This issue connects to General Comment No. 16, which emphasises the importance of creating environments that protect children's rights and respect their evolving capacities, including in the digital space.⁵²
30. In the context of children's rights, businesses must prioritise protecting mokopuna from harmful content, exploitation and manipulation, giving effect to their rights under the Children's

⁴⁵ Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo, Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work, pg.12 [Kaiparahuarahi-Ed-2-Vol.-3 Part-2.pdf](#)

⁴⁶ [General comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#)

⁴⁷ [Children's voices poll: internet safety — Save the Children NZ](#) via [Instagram](#)

⁴⁸ [General comment No. 16 \(2013\) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights](#)

⁴⁹ [General comment No. 16 \(2013\) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights](#)

⁵⁰ [One in three: Internet governance and children's rights](#)

⁵¹ [Children's Rights and Online Age Assurance Systems in: The International Journal of Children's Rights Volume 32 Issue 3 \(2024\)](#)

⁵² [General comment No. 16 \(2013\) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights](#)

Convention.⁵³ Social media platforms must adopt proactive measures to ensure that their services do not conflict with children's rights to privacy, safety, education, and freedom of expression. This includes, but is not limited to, the design of child-friendly interfaces that protect mokopuna from harm, algorithms that are free from bias and manipulation, clear reporting mechanisms for harassment, bullying, and abuse, and appropriate responses to these reports in a timely manner.

31. The negative impacts of social media on children's rights are often exacerbated by things such as biased or addictive algorithms, poorly regulated environments, and inadequate reporting and response practices. Algorithms drive addictive and/or harmful content recommendations on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which are designed to maximise user engagement, often at the cost of mokopuna wellbeing and safety. These algorithms can expose mokopuna to harmful or inappropriate content, such as self-harm, sexual exploitation, and extremist material, and can seek to economically exploit children and young people.^{54,55} Because these platforms focus on engagement over safety, the algorithms often prioritise sensational, disturbing, or misleading content that may be detrimental to children's mental health or development, as well as marketing content aimed at particular ages of users.⁵⁶
32. Moreover, social media sites often operate in unregulated environments where there is insufficient oversight or accountability for the content mokopuna are exposed to.⁵⁷ In these environments, harmful behaviours, such as online grooming, harassment, and the spread of disinformation and misinformation can proliferate.⁵⁸ This lack of regulation allows harmful content to go unnoticed, further endangering mokopuna and depriving them of a safe space to interact and connect online. Tech companies running social media platforms must take responsibility by implementing robust safeguards and monitoring systems to identify and remove harmful content in real-time, especially for young users.
33. Additionally, poor reporting and response practices exacerbate these issues. When children encounter harmful content or behaviour online – for example, racist content; pornography; violent content; extremist content – they may face significant barriers to reporting or receiving timely support.⁵⁹ Many social media platforms provide inadequate reporting and response mechanisms that fail to address incidents effectively. These issues are compounded by inconsistent enforcement of community guidelines, with harmful content or abusive behaviour often left unchecked, which undermines children's rights to protection and redress.⁶⁰ Platforms need to offer: clear, accessible, and effective reporting systems that allow children to flag harmful content, ensuring that all complaints are adequately addressed and acted on; response protocols that prioritise the rights and best interests of child consumers rather than the risks and profits of the business; and that clear explanations are made if a decision does not meet the expectations of the complainant.

“ Social media [providers] will remove some things but you can report someone being racist or threatening people and it just says, there is no issue here and then just leaves it... [Companies] say 'we do not allow bullying, we do not allow this, but they do. And if they're going to put that this is our policy, they need to follow through with their policy.

(VOYCE Whakarongo Mai, Young people speak out about Wellbeing. 2022)⁶¹

⁵³ [Children's rights for The European Review LSERO 2.pdf](#)

⁵⁴ [Cybersmarties, Pathway to a Safe Digital Future: Empowering Children for positive online experiences, 2024](#)

⁵⁵ [Netsafe. \(2018\). New Zealand teens and digital harm: Statistical insights into experiences, impact and response.](#)

⁵⁶ [Ananta Pathak \(2021\), Dissecting Social Media and TikTok for Children and Young Adults](#)

⁵⁷ [Impact of regulation on children DFC Research report May 2024.pdf](#)

⁵⁸ [New Zealand Children's Experiences of Online Risks and Their Perceptions of Harm. Evidence From Ngā Taiohi Matihiko O Aotearoa – New Zealand Kids Online](#)

⁵⁹ [Is self-regulation failing children and young people? Assessing the use of alternative regulatory instruments in the area of social networks](#)

⁶⁰ [Final-Hidden-Hate-Report-250227.pdf](#)

⁶¹ Te Hiringa Mahara the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (2022). [Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf](#) (mhw.govt.nz)

34. Social media companies have a critical role in upholding children's rights by ensuring that their platforms are safe, accountable, and supportive of children's holistic development. By addressing the negative impacts of things such as algorithms, unregulated environments, and poor reporting practices, platforms can better protect children from harm and foster a digital space where children's rights are respected, protected and promoted. Business practices must evolve to prioritise the wellbeing of mokopuna, ensuring that platforms serve not just as spaces for social interaction but as safe environments where children can learn, grow, play and express themselves freely.

Evolving capacities and the importance of parental education and support

35. A children's rights approach endorses the evolving capacities of each and every mokopuna, this means that as a mokopuna gets older, they acquire enhanced competencies, abilities and understanding so mokopuna are able to make more informed decisions and exercise their rights with increasing autonomy.⁶²
36. Evolving capacities is particularly significant in the digital environment and supports mokopuna to engage more independently online as they develop. The risks and opportunities associated with children's engagement online changes depending on their age and stage of development and therefore, supervision from parents, caregivers and adults is important for younger mokopuna.⁶³
37. The concept of evolving capacities is important for younger mokopuna, as screen time and exposure to digital technology and the online world can have negative impacts on their health and wellbeing. For example, research has examined the risks and benefits of screen time for mokopuna under 5, with a focus on the impacts on development. It highlights that excessive screen time can hinder language acquisition, cognitive growth, and socio-emotional development, while also affecting sleep and physical activity. The screen habits of young mokopuna are often shaped by their parents, making it crucial for parents to be aware of screen time guidelines and set appropriate limits. Quality content, co-viewed with parents, can offer developmental benefits, such as supporting language learning and cognitive skills, but it is most effective when balanced with live, interactive experiences.^{64,65}
38. There are also increasing risks concerning data collection, where personal information belonging to mokopuna is constantly collected and analysed, often without their full understanding or consent. This raises significant concerns about mokopuna privacy rights, particularly in light of their evolving capacities. Parents play a crucial role in protecting mokopuna privacy, and it is important that they are informed about the risks of data exploitation and are equipped with the knowledge to navigate the digital environment safely. There must be a balance in respecting the evolving autonomy of mokopuna and providing adequate protection, and parents must be supported to guide younger mokopuna through the complexities of the digital landscape.
39. As a States party to the Children's Convention, the Government has a duty to support parents and caregivers to respect the evolving capacities of mokopuna. They should also enable adults to learn about digital citizenship and recognising online risks, so they can protect children's rights, including their safety, in the digital environment.⁶⁶

⁶² [Evolving capacities of the child and the role of parents - Children's Rights Reform](#)

⁶³ [General comment No. 25 \(2019\), page. 4, para. 19-29.](#)

⁶⁴ [Ponti, M. \(2022\). Screen time and preschool children: Promoting health and development in a digital world.](#)

⁶⁵ [Nakshine, Vaishnavi S., et al. "Increased screen time as a cause of declining physical, psychological health, and sleep patterns: a literary review."](#)

⁶⁶ [General comment No. 25 \(2019\), page. 4, para. 19-29.](#)

Mokopuna exist and thrive in the digital world

“ A safe community [Upsouth] to share your voice to other people and earn a few bucks. Young people like me who can't get a job at this age can earn money just for showing our creativity and talent that we have to our community.” (Young person via an Animated Video, My Experience with Upsouth 2018)⁶⁷

40. Mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand are active participants in the digital world, using social media and digital tools to express themselves, connect with others, and shape their identities. Many mokopuna engage in digital storytelling, share their perspectives, and create content that resonates with their communities online.⁶⁸ This active involvement shows how mokopuna are not just consumers of digital content but are shaping the digital environment, and indeed it can be a space where mokopuna can and do thrive.
41. Recent research by the University of Auckland notes that young people are aware of the risks associated with social media and emphasises that the risks/negative impacts are not necessarily avoided by abstaining from social media use. It also highlights that social media is an important part of young people's lives and it is important for connecting with others and their social wellbeing.⁶⁹
42. The digital environment holds much potential to support mokopuna when issues might arise for their mental health and wellbeing. This was noted in a report by the Office of the Auditor General, where young people specifically shared that they want to access services for their mental health which includes online support.⁷⁰ For more examples and ideas that are informed by mokopuna, please refer here: [What young people want from mental health services: a youth informed approach for the digital age](#).
43. Social media has become a space where young people can celebrate their culture, connect with others who share similar cultural experiences, and advocate for their values and beliefs. For example, platforms like TikTok and Instagram have seen mokopuna Māori amplifying te reo Māori and kapa haka to express their cultural pride and connect with a local and global audience.⁷¹
44. Many mokopuna are using digital platforms to voice their opinions on social and political issues that affect them. This includes raising awareness about climate change, advocating for mental health support, advocating against racism and discrimination, advocating for disability rights, and challenging harmful stereotypes.⁷² This is an important expression of children's rights, as mokopuna are utilising the digital environment and social media to express their voice and have a say on political and societal issues that are important to them and which impact their day-to-day experiences as well as which have intergenerational consequences.
45. Mokopuna benefit from the digital world by gaining access to a wealth of information and educational resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a shift to online learning which supported continuity in education for many mokopuna.⁷³ Platforms like Google Classroom, Zoom, and educational YouTube channels provided mokopuna with tools to stay engaged with their studies.
46. Social media helps mokopuna stay connected with their peers, family, and communities, especially in times when physical interaction may be limited, such as during the COVID-19 lockdowns, or for

⁶⁷ Digitally enabling Rangatahi (youth) and their Whānau (families) to build critical and creative thinking toward more active citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand via [My Experience with Upsouth - Why should you join?](#)

⁶⁸ "Social media gave me my life." Recognition, adolescence, and political identity in the algorithmic era: Coming of age online in Aotearoa New Zealand

⁶⁹ [Our-Voices Social-Connections In-Person and Online Final.pdf](#)

⁷⁰ [Meeting the mental health needs of young New Zealanders — Office of the Auditor-General New Zealand](#)

⁷¹ [Indigenous Cultural Sustainability in a Digital World: Two Case Studies from Aotearoa New Zealand | SpringerLink](#)

⁷² [Nurturing the political agency of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand 2023](#)

⁷³ [Experiences in times of COVID-19: Home-life, social connections, and schooling for Aotearoa New Zealand children](#)

children living rurally. Online platforms provide a space for mokopuna to share experiences, offer emotional support, and build relationships. For example, a *Growing Up in New Zealand* study highlighted that almost 85% of children indicated that they felt moderately or strongly socially connected with others due to increased online connection during COVID-19 lockdowns.⁷⁴

“ Meeting with friends/family on the Zoom app for games or quizzes.”

(17-year-old boy, *Life in Lockdown* 2020)⁷⁵

47. The digital environment provides mokopuna with opportunities to engage in creative expression. Social media platforms and digital gaming have become outlets for mokopuna to share their art, music, dance, and other creative works, as well as to connect with other mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. This creative freedom and space to play helps mokopuna develop skills, build confidence, relationships and foster a sense of achievement.⁷⁶

“ [On Minecraft] You can build stuff and then you can fight people. And you get this stuff like diamonds and gold and emeralds.... We learn creativity and a lot of building instructions and sometimes you are going to rule the world.

(Mokopuna, *Understanding children's use and experience with digital technologies* 2017)⁷⁷

48. Social media and digital platforms can serve as a vital source of emotional support for mokopuna, particularly for those who may face challenges like bullying, mental health struggles, or isolation.^{78,79} Online communities and support groups provide safe spaces where mokopuna can connect with others who understand their experiences.⁸⁰
49. Social media allows mokopuna in New Zealand to engage with diverse cultures, perspectives, and global movements. For example, mokopuna can engage in international conversations about social justice, indigenous rights, and environmental issues. This exposure broadens their worldviews and allows them to feel part of a global community, empowering them to contribute to global discussions and apply these learnings to their own social context in Aotearoa New Zealand.⁸¹
50. As part of their deliberations, we urge the Committee to consider the concept of 'digital citizenship' or 'digital citizen' which Netsafe defines as someone who:
- Demonstrates honesty and integrity and ethical behaviour in their use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
 - Respects the concepts of privacy and freedom of speech in a digital world.
 - Uses and develops critical thinking skills in cyberspace.
 - Uses ICT to relate to others in positive, meaningful ways.⁸²
51. Although digital citizen is not a term that many mokopuna use to describe themselves, digital citizenship is an important concept to support educators, parents and adults to understand the important role of the digital environment today and how to encourage positive, critical and

⁷⁴ Experiences in times of COVID-19: Home-life, social connections, and schooling for Aotearoa New Zealand children - Meissel - British Educational Research Journal - Wiley Online Library

⁷⁵ <https://www.manamokopuna.org.nz/documents/94/LifeinLockdown-OCC-Nov2020.pdf>

⁷⁶ Understanding children's use and experience with digital technologies. Final research report. Victoria University, 2017.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Young People Talk About Digital Support for Mental Health: An Online Survey of 15–30-Year Olds in New Zealand - Garrett - 2024 - Health Expectations - Wiley Online Library

⁷⁹ "Social media gave me my life." Recognition, adolescence, and political identity in the algorithmic era: Coming of age online in Aotearoa New Zealand - University of Otago

⁸⁰ The Digital Age: Youth, Disability, and Mental Health

⁸¹ Confident, capable and world changing: teenagers and digital citizenship: Communication Research and Practice: Vol 6, No 1

⁸² Digital citizenship | TeachWell Digital

competent engagement online.⁸³ Education focused on digital citizenship, supports mokopuna to participate online and with social media in ways that are respectful of human rights and dignity through the responsible use of technology.^{84,85}

52. Many mokopuna thrive in the digital world, using social media and digital tools to express themselves, stay connected, and create positive change. They are actively shaping the digital environment through their voices, perspectives, and creative contributions. By engaging with digital platforms, mokopuna are not only enhancing their own lives but also making a meaningful impact on their communities and the wider world. The positive aspects of the digital environment, from educational access to creative expression and social activism, highlight the importance of supporting mokopuna to navigate and thrive in the digital age.

Mokopuna hold the solutions to address the negative impacts of social media – seek out and listen to their views

“ We need to teach our young people how to have that critical lens early on. Teach young people to weigh up information and its validity. That’s not a skill that’s necessarily taught. There’s a lot of misinformation out there that could be really damaging.”

(Whāraurau Youth Advisors, *Young people speak out about Wellbeing*. 2022)

53. Mokopuna hold valuable insights into the challenges and harms they experience online. Their participation in decision-making processes is essential to ensure that policies, laws, and digital tools are designed to meet their needs and protect their rights. Engaging mokopuna in decisions about online safety, platform regulations, and digital content allows for solutions that reflect their lived experiences. As the independent advocate for mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, we strongly advocate for mokopuna views on the digital world and social media to be sought out to inform any policy or legislative approaches in this area, and for their views to be listened to and meaningfully taken into account to shape any change. We strongly advocate for tech companies, including social media platforms, to take this approach too.

A deeper dive into the negative impacts of social media for mokopuna

“ It is very different today now because you can be bullied in your own bedroom on the phone. That is a big thing we should be careful of. There is cyber bullying.”

(17-year-old Pākehā boy, *What makes a good life?*)⁸⁶

54. Social media has several negative impacts on mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly concerning mental health, body image, and overall wellbeing. Young people in Aotearoa New Zealand have some of the highest rates of screen use in the world, both at home and in the classroom, and we are concerned that the negative impacts of social media are exacerbated due to these high rates of screen time.⁸⁷

⁸³ Young People (Re) conceptualising **Digital Citizenship**: Constructing Ways of Being and Doing **Citizen** (ship)'Online'

⁸⁴ Burns, T. and F. Gottschalk (eds.) (2019), *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age*. Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris

⁸⁵ *Digital citizenship : Keep It Real Online*

⁸⁶ <https://www.manamokopuna.org.nz/documents/7/What-makes-a-good-life-report-OCC-OT-2019-WEB2.pdf>

⁸⁷ *Time to reconsider device use in schools? - The University of Auckland*

55. Mental Health is an issue that has been raised by researchers, practitioners and mokopuna themselves. Constant exposure to social media can contribute to anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. Young people may feel pressured to measure up to the curated, often unrealistic, portrayals of online content which can lead to significant emotional distress.⁸⁸ Accidental or intentional access to inappropriate adult sexual content online can result in unrealistic expectations of what relationships should be like, resulting in harmful behaviours by children and young people. Additionally, the addictive nature of social media can exacerbate these issues, with young people spending excessive amounts of time online, which can lead to poor sleep, heightened stress, and further mental distress.⁸⁹
56. As recently reported by Netsafe and the Classification Office, body image concerns are heightened in the digital environment as social media platforms are saturated with images that promote unattainable beauty standards.⁹⁰ Young people are vulnerable to unrealistic beauty standards, leading to dissatisfaction with their own appearance. This can result in low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating.⁹¹
57. Mokopuna, particularly mokopuna Māori, Pacific and rainbow mokopuna, are concerned about the issue of cyberbullying.^{92,93} The anonymity and accessibility of social media often creates an environment where cyberbullying can thrive. Cyberbullying can cause feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety, and in extreme cases, may lead to self-harm or suicidal thoughts or worse.⁹⁴

“ I see my friends and strangers in this country being bullied on social media or sharing hate towards another kiwi. Private information and images being shared for the world to see. Kids are seeing inappropriate stuff on the internet at a younger age. Minors are being contacted by creeps with bad intentions. People are having their social medias hacked and information shared.”

(Young person, State of the Generation Report, Youthline Auckland 2024)⁹⁵

58. Overusing social media can lead to changes to daily behaviour and the physical, cognitive, psychosocial wellbeing of mokopuna. As a result, young people may feel irritable and have difficulty focusing or concentrating in school or at home.⁹⁶ Social and family interactions can also be affected, as young people become more absorbed in their online lives and less engaged with those around them. These changes can negatively impact relationships and overall holistic wellbeing.⁹⁷
59. Social media platforms often collect vast amounts of personal data from young users, which can be exploited or misused. Mokopuna do not always understand the implications of sharing personal information online, leaving them vulnerable to privacy breaches, identity theft, hacking or unwanted exposure.⁹⁸ Additionally, many platforms may target young users with ads or manipulate their data in ways that exploit them as consumers, or compromise their privacy, potentially leading to long-term consequences for their digital footprint.

⁸⁸ [Young People's Voices on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand 2024](#)

⁸⁹ [Social Media Has Both Positive and Negative Impacts on Children and Adolescents - Social Media and Youth Mental Health - NCBI Bookshelf](#)

⁹⁰ [Digital Reflections: The Online Experience and its Influence on Youth Body Image in Aotearoa | Classification Office](#)

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² [Koi-Tu-Literature-Review-for-Te-Hiringa-Mahara-May-2023.pdf](#)

⁹³ <https://sites.massey.ac.nz/teaurangahau/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2021/09/Houkamau-et-al-2021.pdf>

⁹⁴ [The Cyberbullying Experiences Survey with New Zealand Psychology 2018](#)

⁹⁵ [State of the Generation, Youthline Auckland 2024.](#)

⁹⁶ [Impact of Digital Technologies on Health and Wellbeing of Children and Adolescents: A Narrative Review 2024](#)

⁹⁷ <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Koi-Tu-for-Te-Hiringa-Mahara-Literature-summary.pdf>

⁹⁸ [Youth Digital Wellbeing Research Report 2024 - v1.0](#)

60. Mokopuna are also concerned about exposure to inappropriate and harmful online content as well as interactions with strangers online.⁹⁹ We acknowledge the Government's efforts to regulate online spaces, however mokopuna can still encounter harmful or inappropriate content, such as violence, explicit material, or extreme ideologies. Exposure to such content can negatively impact their mental development and worldview.¹⁰⁰
61. These negative impacts underscore the importance of increasing education about the digital environment for both mokopuna and adults and providing mokopuna with the tools to navigate online spaces in a balanced and supportive way. Mokopuna also want proactive parental involvement to help them navigate the digital environment safely, monitor online risks and set limits on screen time and app usage.^{101,102}

Solutions and ideas that mokopuna have shared

62. For social media policies and regulations to be truly effective, they must be created with mokopuna. Solutions that come from the direct experiences and ideas of mokopuna are more likely to be effective because they are informed by their realities and lived experience.
63. Mokopuna have shared that educational initiatives can be an effective way to address online harms. Many young people advocate for creating more accessible spaces to learn about online safety, where mokopuna can support one another in identifying and managing harmful content.¹⁰³ It is important to empower young people to feel more confident in navigating the online world while fostering a sense of community responsibility.
64. There are many reports where mokopuna have highlighted the need for more robust content moderation on social media platforms.¹⁰⁴ Young people have suggested that platforms should implement better tools to detect harmful content, such as bullying, and ensure that harmful content or comments are removed promptly. They have also recommended clearer reporting systems that allow users to report abusive content without feeling overwhelmed or unsure about the process.¹⁰⁵
65. Mokopuna have proposed the introduction of digital wellbeing programs and strategies that can help them manage screen time, set boundaries around social media use, and develop healthier relationships with the digital environment.¹⁰⁶
66. Young people in New Zealand have also shared ideas on promoting positive content and online engagement. They have called for more platforms to support and showcase content that promotes mental health, positive body-image, and inclusivity.¹⁰⁷
67. Mokopuna have also shared that they think their parents and caregivers do not hold enough knowledge about the digital environment and the impacts of social media. They have highlighted that there is a need for mutual understanding and collaboration between mokopuna and their parents.¹⁰⁸ Mokopuna have suggested that their parents should learn from mokopuna who are more informed and engaged in the digital environment, and that parents and caregivers should provide the support needed to avoid risks and encourage safe online habits.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ [Youth Digital Wellbeing Research Report 2024 - v1.0](#)

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² [Blackdog Institute. Adolescent screen use and mental health Summary of findings from the Future Proofing Study July 2024](#)

¹⁰³ [The Significance of Digital Siblingship for Children Navigating Online Harms and in Accessing Justice | SpringerLink](#)

¹⁰⁴ Te Hīringa Mahara the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (2022). *Young people speak out about Wellbeing Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf* ([mhwc.govt.nz](#))

¹⁰⁵ [Is self-regulation failing children and young people? Assessing the use of alternative regulatory instruments in the area of social networks](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Youth Digital Wellbeing Research Report 2024 - v1.0](#)

¹⁰⁷ [New Body Image Report Highlights the Missing Voice of Youth | Classification Office](#)

¹⁰⁸ [Youth Digital Wellbeing Research Report 2024 - v1.0](#)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

68. Ongoing consultation with mokopuna ensures that their needs are met in a rapidly changing digital landscape. By maintaining ongoing mokopuna engagement – decision-makers, policymakers and social media companies can continue to adapt their platforms to keep pace with new challenges and emerging risks faced by mokopuna online. By listening to their voices and acting on their solutions, we can ensure a digital environment where mokopuna are protected, empowered, and can thrive.

Giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

“Negativity about rangatahi Māori is what’s splashed online.”

(Rangatahi Māori, Māoriland, Young people speak out about Wellbeing. 2022)¹¹⁰

69. The Government must ensure that the rights of mokopuna Māori are protected in the digital environment. This includes ensuring that digital systems, platforms, and policies are informed by the needs and aspirations of Māori and support their right to tino rangatiratanga. It is essential that the Government upholds the provisions of each article of Te Tiriti o Waitangi when it undertakes any efforts to regulate and improve digital policies.
70. Mokopuna Māori in Aotearoa face challenges in the digital environment and often face amplified versions of the challenges they encounter in their daily lives, such as racism and discrimination, misinformation and stereotypical rhetoric, when interacting with the online world, further intensifying the impact on their wellbeing.¹¹¹ Cyberbullying and racist online content targeting mokopuna Māori are incredibly harmful and highlight the need for safer digital environments.¹¹² Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that these impacts are not further exacerbated for mokopuna Māori.
71. It is also important to consider the positive impacts of social media for mokopuna Māori. For example, Instagram and TikTok does, for some rangatahi Māori, provide a positive space for rangatahi Māori to express their identities, challenge stereotypes, and engage in decolonising practices. Social media is one space where mokopuna Māori have started to reclaim and celebrate their culture and connect with each other online. This can help strengthen their sense of identity, belonging and unity, while also promoting social justice, indigenous rights, and environmental sustainability.¹¹³
72. Article 1 of Te Tiriti refers to kāwanatanga, which is about ensuring that the Crown upholds good governance over the digital environment in a way that respects Māori interests and supports mokopuna Māori to thrive. This means ensuring that digital systems, regulations, and platforms are developed in a way that addresses concerns of mokopuna and whānau Māori. Therefore, the Crown must ensure policies address issues around protecting Māori data sovereignty, guaranteeing equitable access to digital technology, and maintaining cultural integrity within digital spaces.
73. Article 2 of Te Tiriti refers to tino rangatiratanga, the right of Māori to exercise self-determination over their lives, lands, taonga and resources. In the digital world, this means that mokopuna Māori should have control over how they engage with digital platforms, how their culture and identity are represented, and how their content and personal data are used. It also involves the ability to freely express Māori culture and ideas in digital spaces without fear of exploitation.
74. Article 3 of Te Tiriti refers to ngā tikanga katoa rite tahi which is about ensuring equitable outcomes for Māori. In the digital world, this principle highlights the need to ensure that mokopuna Māori have equal access to digital technology, educational opportunities, and resources that enable them to thrive. It is also important to ensure that inequitable negative impacts of social media are addressed.

¹¹⁰ Te Hīringa Mahara the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (2022). *Young people speak out about Wellbeing* [Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf](https://mhw.comt.nz/Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf) (mhw.comt.nz)

¹¹¹ [Investigating Enactments of Whanaungatanga in Social Media for Rangatahi Māori](#)

¹¹² [Cyberbullying Toward Māori Is Rife in New Zealand: Incidences and Demographic Differences in Experiences of Cyberbullying Among Māori](#)

¹¹³ [MĀORI INSTAGRAM: THE SOCIAL MEDIA LIFEWORLDS AND DECOLONISING PRACTICES OF RANGATAHI MĀORI. 2020](#)

75. Digital and social media policy, regulation and law must be mindful of the control and ownership of Māori data.¹¹⁴ This includes advocating for policies that protect Māori data sovereignty, ensuring that Māori cultural and personal data are not exploited or misused, and that mokopuna Māori have the right to determine how their data is used. For international businesses the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides guidance, including on data sovereignty, that is applicable globally.
76. Article 4 of Te Tiriti refers to wairuatanga refers to spiritual wellbeing and religious freedoms. Applying this in the digital environment, this relates to the importance of ensuring that online spaces support the spiritual and religious freedoms of mokopuna. This may involve digital spaces that nurture a sense of belonging, support positive self-expression, and protect mokopuna Māori from harmful content or experiences such as cyberbullying, extreme ideological and racist misinformation.
77. Kaupapa Māori research has highlighted the proliferation of social media and the ability for 'online whanaungatanga' to build connections.¹¹⁵ This is important as it enables mokopuna and whānau Māori to unite, which is especially crucial for rangatahi Māori, wahine Māori and takatāpui as they experience high rates of online abuse and harassment.¹¹⁶
78. In a workshop, mokopuna Māori shared a vision for the digital world. They want a future embedded in values of fun, joy, and meaningful connections, where technology is a tool for positive engagement that fosters equality and access to opportunities. They imagine a society free from depression, poverty, racism, and vaping in schools, where Aotearoa respects Pacific and Māori cultures, honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and strengthens indigenous rights. Their vision includes enhanced use of technology to create limitless pathways, high-paying jobs, and a focus on passions beyond smartphones, while promoting environmental sustainability, business opportunities for youth, and global unity.¹¹⁷

Conclusion and recommendations

“It’s ultimately up to Meta, Twitter, TikTok to make those structural decisions, which don’t protect rainbow people, people of colour, disabled people and all the intersecting groups within.”

(Hui for rainbow young people, *Young people speak out about Wellbeing*. 2022)¹¹⁸

79. In our digital world, centring children’s rights is crucial for ensuring that mokopuna are not only protected but also empowered to thrive. Social media platforms have a responsibility to uphold these rights by creating safe, inclusive, and respectful environments that allow mokopuna to engage online without fear of harm, exploitation, or discrimination.
80. Mokopuna hold the solutions to address the negative impacts of social media, and the wider challenges of the digital world, as they are the ones most familiar with the challenges they face online. By actively involving rangatahi in discussions and decision-making, we can create more effective strategies and tools to address cyberbullying (including online racism), misinformation, hate speech, harmful content and digital exclusion.¹¹⁹ Empowering mokopuna to shape their online environments encourages creativity, innovation, and resilience, while also fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility in the digital world.

¹¹⁴ Māori data sovereignty and privacy. Tikanga in Technology Discussion Paper March 2023.

¹¹⁵ Full article: Te Tapatoru: a model of whanaungatanga to support rangatahi wellbeing

¹¹⁶ Ibid; Manaaki Collective. 2021. About the Manaaki Collective [Internet]. [https://themanakicollective.nz/the-manaaki-collective/\(open-in-a-new-window\)](https://themanakicollective.nz/the-manaaki-collective/(open-in-a-new-window))

¹¹⁷ Empowering Rangatahi Voices in Shaping the Digital Future - Elle Archer

¹¹⁸ Te Hīringa Mahara the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (2022). *Young people speak out about Wellbeing* Youth-Wellbeing-Insights-Report-Full.pdf (mhwc.govt.nz)

¹¹⁹ Priority actions for improving population youth mental health: An equity framework for Aotearoa New Zealand

81. The Government must also give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi within the digital environment to ensure that the rights, values, and needs of Māori are respected and upheld. This includes ensuring equitable access to digital tools, platforms, and opportunities, while also protecting mokopuna Māori from cyberbullying, racism and discrimination online. A commitment to Te Tiriti guarantees that mokopuna Māori are able to engage in the digital world on their own terms in respect of tino rangatiratanga.

In relation to the Petition of Charlene Whyte, Mana Mokopuna recommends that:

1. Further research, analysis and work is done to explore the idea of a Social Media License and that no action is taken to progress this idea without the active participation of mokopuna. We note that there is an eSmart Digital Licence+ program which is offered here in Aotearoa New Zealand as well as Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines and this may be an alternative to a Social Media License.
2. Educational programmes are implemented for mokopuna and adults, including in schools, online and in the community. Programmes like Digital Waitaha and Hector's World by Netsafe are great examples which can be built on and amplified.
3. Regulatory changes are progressed to strengthen the protection of mokopuna wellbeing and privacy online. It is important to explore legislative options to regulate tech companies and social media sites to uphold the holistic rights of mokopuna. Further work is required to determine the most effective way to implement these changes and ensure stronger protections for mokopuna online.¹²⁰
4. The Government acts on the solutions that mokopuna have already shared to address the negative impacts of social media, including supporting parents and caregivers to learn more about the harms of social media, how to navigate these, and by encouraging parents and caregivers to work with their mokopuna to embed safe online practices.
 - 4.1. Agencies such as the Department of Internal Affairs collaborate with others so that phones marketed for children have safety locks enabled by default at the point of sale. For example, KidSafePhone NZ offers this product and provides guidance to parents on gradually increasing age-appropriate access. This could be supported by a standardised framework to ensure safe digital use while empowering mokopuna and whānau with the tools to guide online safety.
5. Mokopuna Māori, whānau, hapū and iwi are consulted in the development of all digital policies and supported to uphold their tino rangatiratanga in the digital environment. This is particularly important due to Māori data sovereignty concerns and the links of Māori economic wellbeing to the digital economy.
6. The Government implement the actions and recommendations from the Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact, and Declaration on Future Generations, which was agreed to in November 2024. To see a summary please refer to Appendix 1 on page 19.

¹²⁰ [Safeguarding-childrens-privacy-in-NZ-full-report.pdf](#)

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations from the Global Digital Compact

Key Objectives and Recommendations from the Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations (September 2024):

The **Global Digital Compact** aims to create an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe, and secure digital future. The recommendations are structured around key **objectives** and **commitments**, focusing on digital inclusion, governance, human rights, and international cooperation.

Close Digital Divides & Accelerate Sustainable Development

- Ensure universal and affordable internet connectivity by 2030.
- Invest in resilient digital infrastructure, including satellites and rural networks.
- Expand digital literacy and skills training, prioritizing marginalized communities.
- Promote digital public goods and infrastructure, ensuring accessibility and affordability.

Expand Inclusion & Benefits from the Digital Economy

- Create an open, fair, and non-discriminatory digital environment.
- Support small businesses and entrepreneurs in accessing digital markets.
- Strengthen policy and legal frameworks for digital transformation.
- Promote technology transfer and knowledge-sharing, especially for developing nations.

Ensure a Safe, Open & Rights-Respecting Digital Space

- Uphold international human rights laws in digital governance.
- Protect against digital discrimination, abuse, and online gender-based violence.
- Strengthen legal protections for children and marginalized groups online.
- Encourage businesses to comply with human rights principles and accountability standards.

Advance Responsible & Equitable Data Governance

- Develop transparent, fair, and interoperable data governance frameworks.
- Balance data protection with innovation and economic development.
- Strengthen international cooperation on cross-border data flows.

Enhance Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Establish an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI within the UN.
- Promote AI governance frameworks that are ethical, transparent, and inclusive.
- Ensure equitable AI development and access, especially for developing nations.

Strengthen Multistakeholder Digital Cooperation

- Governments, businesses, civil society, and international bodies must collaborate.
- Develop global partnerships for digital capacity-building and sustainable investments.
- Promote agile governance mechanisms that adapt to emerging technologies.

This framework sets the foundation for a globally inclusive and responsible digital transformation, aligning with the UN's 2030 Agenda regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG/s).

Social media specific points that the UN Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations calls on:

- Digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms to respect human rights online, be accountable for and take measures to mitigate and prevent abuse, and to provide access to effective remedy in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other relevant frameworks (SDGs 5, 10 and 16).
- Digital technology companies and social media platforms to provide online safety-related training materials and safeguards to their users, and in particular, related to children and youth users (SDG 3).
- Social media platforms to establish safe, secure and accessible reporting mechanisms for users and their advocates to report potential policy violations, including special reporting mechanisms adapted to children and persons with disabilities (SDG 3).
- Digital technology companies and social media platforms to enhance the transparency and accountability of their systems, including terms of service, content moderation and recommendation algorithms and handling of users' personal data in local languages, to empower users to make informed choices and provide or withdraw informed consent (SDGs 9 and 10).
- Social media platforms to provide researchers access to data, with safeguards for user privacy, to ensure transparency and accountability to build an evidence base on how to address misinformation and disinformation and hate speech that can inform government and industry policies, standards and best practices (SDGs 9, 16 and 17).