

B2-C1 Worksheet: Should Social Media Be Treated Like Tobacco? - 27 May 2026

Article

Social media is being treated like tobacco by some UK campaigners and doctors, who argue that stronger limits are needed to look after children. The debate intensified this week after calls for a partial ban on certain platforms for under-16s. Supporters say the issue is no longer just screen time, but addictive design, personalised algorithms and content that vulnerable users may not be ready to handle.

The UK government is weighing up new rules after a public consultation on children's online safety. Possible measures include age limits, screen curfews and restrictions on features such as infinite scrolling. Critics of tougher rules push back against a blanket ban, saying social media can help young people stay connected, express themselves and find support. They argue that the real problem is the business model built into many apps, where attention is turned into profit.

The comparison with tobacco brings up a difficult question: should society crack down on risky digital products before the evidence is complete? Doctors say they are already seeing children harmed by anxiety, poor sleep and extreme online content. Technology companies warn that strict rules could be unrealistic or have unintended consequences. A serious policy now has to weigh up freedom, safety, mental health and the pressure placed on families to manage a problem they did not create.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. Some UK campaigners and doctors have compared social media regulation with tobacco regulation.
2. The article says the debate is only about the number of minutes children spend online.
3. Supporters of stronger limits are concerned about addictive design and personalised algorithms.
4. The UK government is considering possible measures after a public consultation.
5. Critics of a blanket ban say social media has no positive uses for young people.
6. The article says the business model of many apps turns attention into profit.
7. Doctors report concerns about anxiety, poor sleep and extreme online content.
8. The final paragraph says strict rules would have no possible negative consequences.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. treated like	A. to resist or oppose something
2. calls for	B. raises or introduces a topic
3. look after	C. described in the same way as something else
4. weighing up	D. changed from one form into another
5. push back against	E. requests or demands something publicly
6. built into	F. to take strong action to stop something
7. turned into	G. included as a basic part of a system
8. crack down on	H. being considered carefully
9. weigh up	I. to protect or care for someone
10. brings up	J. to consider something carefully before deciding

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. addictive	A. proof
2. partial	B. at risk
3. consultation	C. limits
4. restrictions	D. habit-forming
5. algorithms	E. strain
6. vulnerable	F. review
7. evidence	G. impractical
8. unrealistic	H. formulas
9. consequences	I. limited
10. pressure	J. results

Use the new language

Please choose 5 words or phrases and make your own sentence using the new word or phrase.

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. Which social media app is hardest for people to give up?
2. Do you think children need stronger online limits than adults?
3. Have you ever tried to cut back on screen time?
4. What helps people look after their mental health online?
5. Do you notice addictive design in apps you use?
6. Should parents or schools set screen curfews?
7. What positive things can young people get from social media?
8. Would a partial ban have changed your teenage years?

Student B

1. Is it reasonable to compare social media with tobacco, or is that too extreme?
2. Should governments crack down on platforms before all the evidence is complete?
3. Would age limits protect vulnerable children or simply push them to hide their use?
4. How much responsibility should be placed on families, schools, companies and governments?
5. Are algorithms more dangerous than screen time itself?
6. Should regulation focus on banning apps or changing the business model built into them?
7. What unintended consequences could a strict under-16 ban have?
8. How can society weigh up freedom, safety and children's mental health fairly?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=T, 5=F, 6=T, 7=T, 8=F

Phrase Match: 1=C, 2=E, 3=I, 4=H, 5=A, 6=G, 7=D, 8=F, 9=J, 10=B

Synonym Match: 1=D, 2=I, 3=F, 4=C, 5=H, 6=B, 7=A, 8=G, 9=J, 10=E

Example sentences with the phrases

1. Some campaigners believe social media should be treated like a risky product.
2. The report calls for stronger protection for younger users.
3. Parents often struggle to look after children's online safety alone.
4. Ministers are weighing up several possible rules for platforms.
5. Technology companies usually push back against strict regulation.
6. Infinite scrolling is built into many apps to hold people's attention.
7. In some apps, attention is turned into profit.
8. Governments may need to crack down on the most harmful features.
9. Teachers have to weigh up phone bans and digital learning benefits.
10. The debate brings up difficult questions about freedom and safety.