

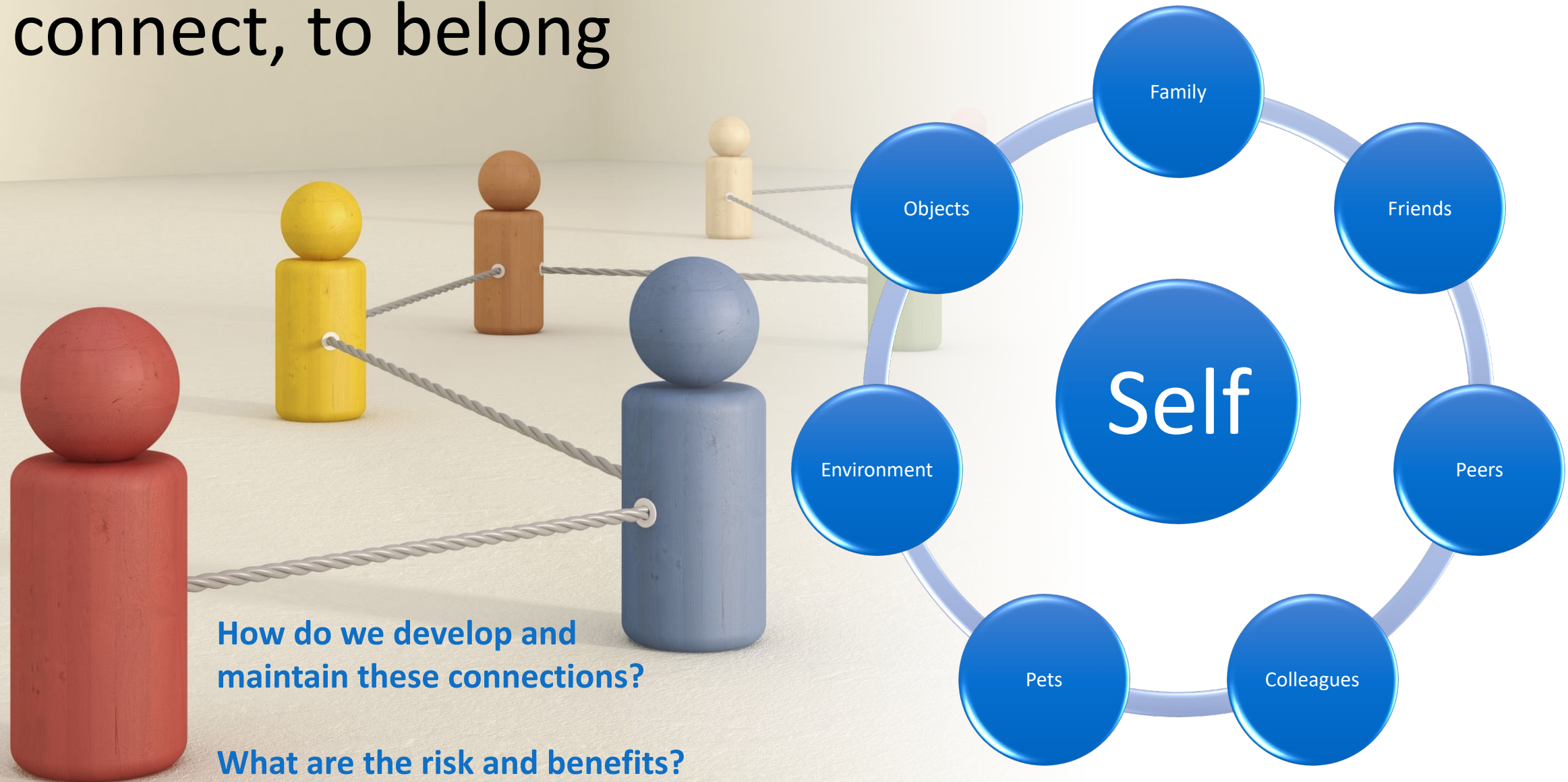
Social Media: The good, the bad, and the ban

Professor Dawn Watling

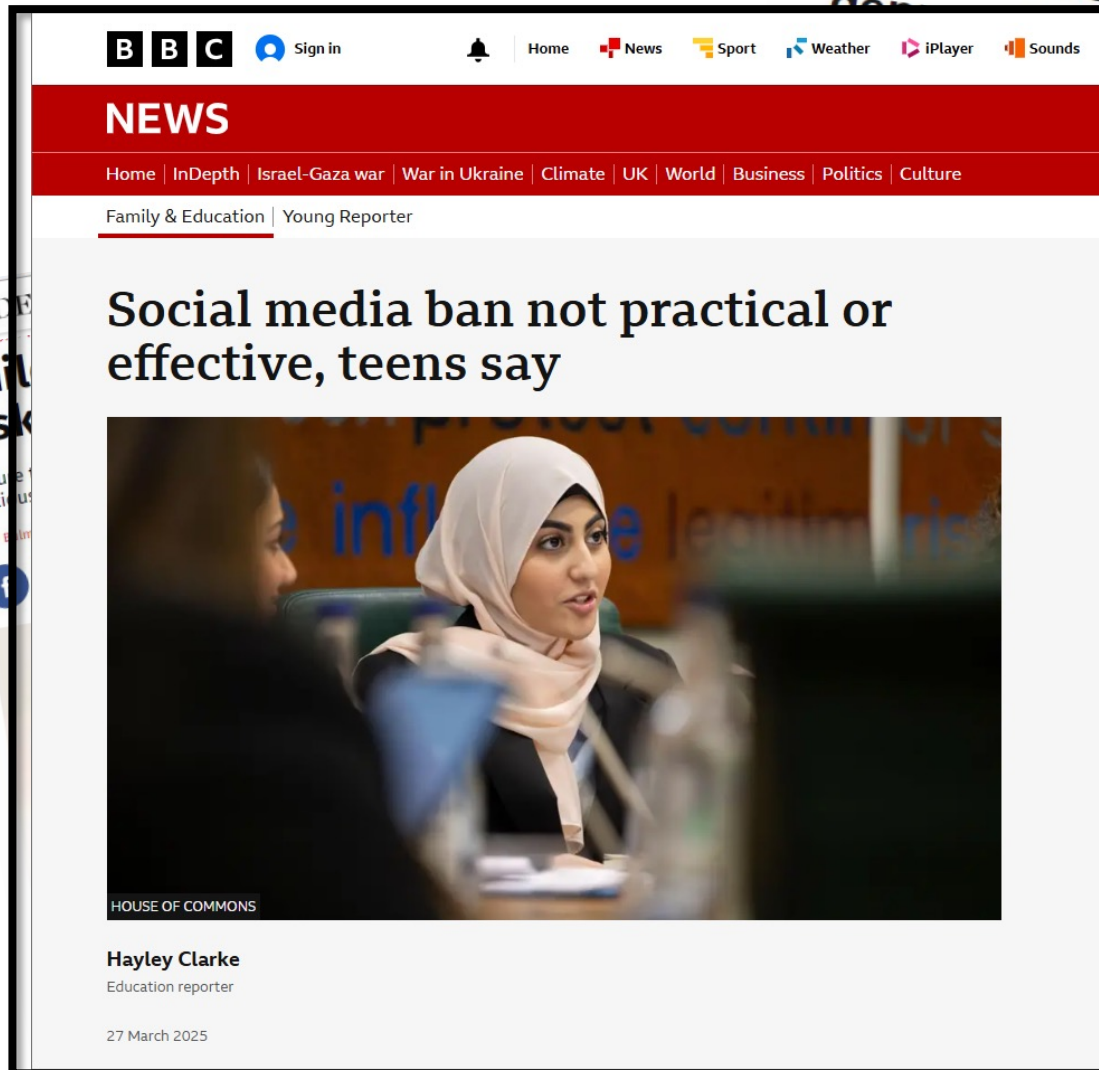
South East Research Network for Schools
Research and Practice Meeting July 2026



As human's we have a fundamental need to connect, to belong



In the media...



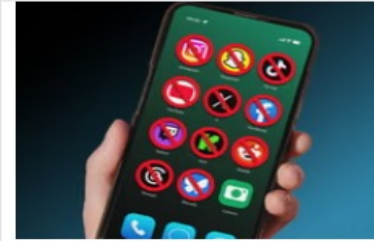
Smartphone Free Childhood

The Guardian



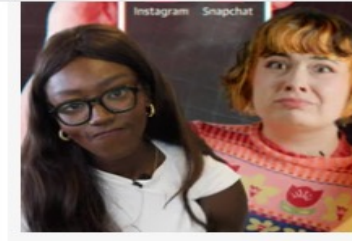
School smartphone bans seen as 'punitive' by young people, study says

30 Jun 2026 06.00 BST



'Tech firms are losing the public': social media age bans near tipping point

28 Jun 2026 11.00 BST



The UK is introducing an 'Australia plus' under-16s social media ban. But how is it going there?

Video ▶ 2:19



The Saturday read
Social media bans go global: big tech faces a reckoning after Australia's crackdown

27 Jun 2026 06.00 BST

'More relevant than making fires': Explorer Scouts launch badges for AI and digital age

25 Jun 2026 08.40 BST

'I was miserable at my old school': UK social media ban puts spotlight on hybrid learning

25 Jun 2026 07.00 BST

Four in five under-16s in Australia using social media despite ban, study shows

24 Jun 2026 23.00 BST

TechScape newsletter
Will California's billionaire tax proposal make it to ballots?

Newsletter

🔥 Social media bans are trending. But it's too late for my son and me
Dave Schilling

20 Jun 2026 12.00 BST | 💬 65

🔥 The UK's social media ban for under-16s has just empowered big tech
Taylor Lorenz

19 Jun 2026 14.27 BST | 💬 136

Read a book? Join a club? Stare at a wall? Social media alternatives for under-16s

19 Jun 2026 14.20 BST

Attorney general tells department to stop using X amid UK disinformation concerns

18 Jun 2026 19.00 BST

Social media ban: saving kids or punishing them?

18 Jun 2026 17.51 BST

🔥 We must be alive to the dangers of a UK social media ban - and the way to really help young people
Rosie Parkyn

18 Jun 2026 12.00 BST

UK under-16s social media ban: which apps will be blocked and how will it work?

UK social media ban 'likely to cause £1.3bn drop' in digital advertising spend

Today in Focus
Will a ban keep the UK's kids off social media? - podcast

Social media
use often
portrayed as
leading to
mental health
decline

BUT...

Orben & Przybylski
(2019)
Exploring risk for
wellbeing in
comparison to
technology use in a
sample of 355,358
observations.

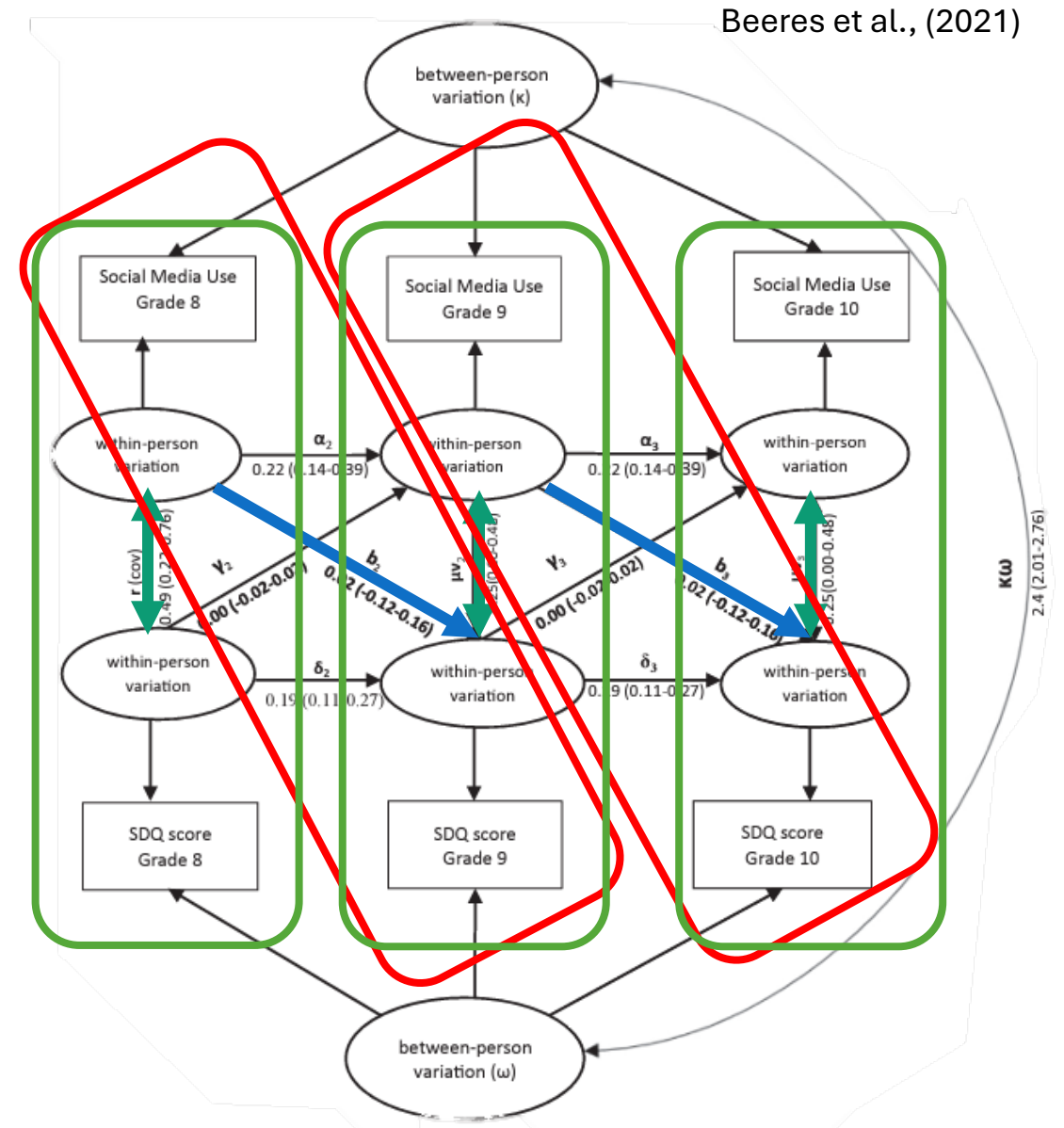
Table 3 | Comparison specification results

Comparison specifications		YRBS	MTF	MCS
Negative Factors	Binge-drinking	×2.95	×8.10	×1.02
	Marijuana	×2.70	×10.09	×1.14
	Bullying	×4.33	-	×4.92
	Getting into fights	×3.65	×15.58	-
	Cigarettes	-	×18.47	-
Neutral Factors	Being arrested	-	-	×0.96
	Perceived weight	×1.02	-	-
	Potatoes	×0.86	-	-
	Asthma	×1.34	-	-
	Milk	×0.28*	-	-
	Going to movies	-	×11.51*	-
	Religion	-	×16.29*	-
	Music	-	×32.68	-
	Homework	-	×3.57*	-
	Cycling	-	-	×1.88*
Positive Factors	Height	-	-	×1.53*
	Glasses	-	-	×1.45
	Handedness	-	-	×0.10
	Fruit	×0.11	×9.49*	×1.32*
	Vegetables	×0.27	×20.63*	×1.52*
	Sleep	×3.06*	×44.23*	×1.65*
	Breakfast	×2.37*	30.55*	×3.32*

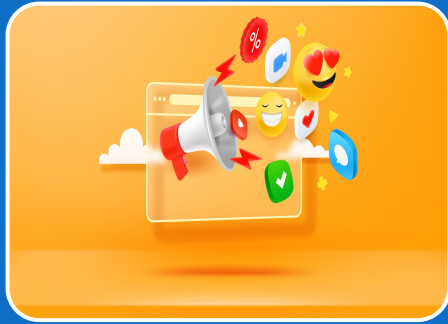
AND...

Most research does not look at change over time.

Consider if we should be looking out for changes in social media use that may indicate challenges with mental health.



Bans will not work: Children need e-safety training.



Children's use of SNS: Relationships with risks and benefits

- Private use & higher digital literacy = more social capital, and cyberbullying victimisation.
- Greater self-disclosure = more cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation
- Greater presentation of self = more social capital behaviours

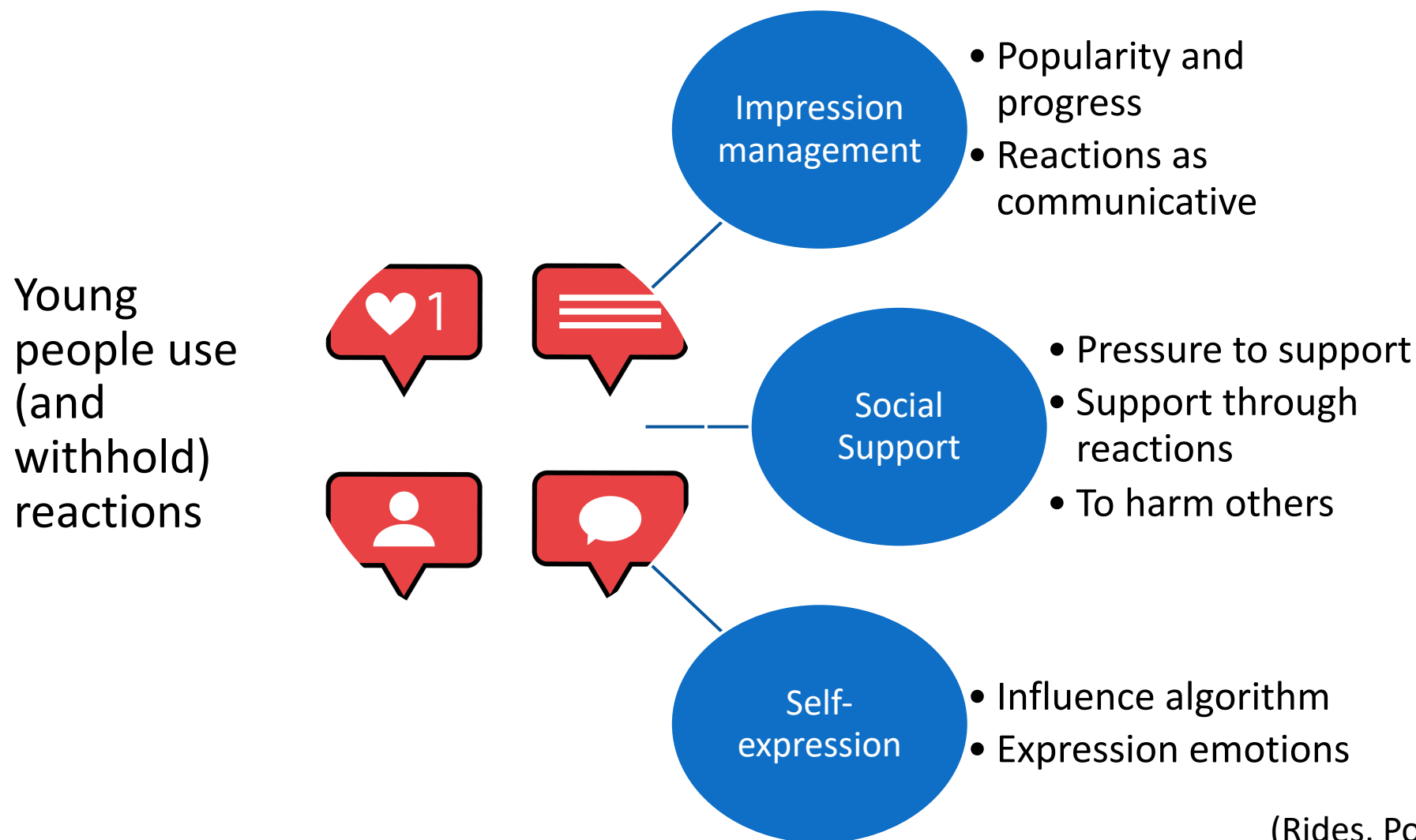


Adolescent's perceptions of SNS risks and benefits

- Boys were less concerned about social media risks
- Online behaviours were judged as benefits of SNS use when they were to build social capital, for social comparison, and disclosure to family.

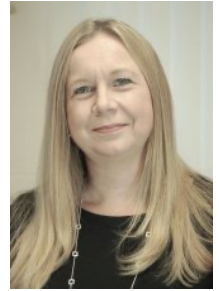
(Hayes, James, Barn, & Watling, 2022a, b)

Navigating a complex set of social norms: online behaviours



(Rides, Pote, & Watling, 2024)

Navigating a complex set of social norms: attention when deciding to like or not



Rides, Pote, Watling (under review)



- Older adolescents (18-25 years) higher in social anxiety look more frequently at information and for longer
- 13-17 years higher in social anxiety looked more frequently when higher number of like nominations on the post
- All looked longer at negative comments



Risks with bans

- Do bans work? (still accessing, unregulated, won't report)
- Will it detract from training?
- How do we allow platforms to support vulnerable children and the communities they gain support from?
- Who is 'left behind'?

Why are we not holding social media organisations accountable?

The background of the slide is a light green color with a complex network of thin green lines and dots. The dots are of varying sizes and are connected by lines, creating a web-like or molecular structure. Some dots are larger and more prominent, while others are smaller and less visible. The lines are also of varying lengths and thicknesses, some forming closed loops and others extending outwards.

We need time to reflect on
the evidence

Thank you for listening