

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 656 (Schiavo)

As Amended September 4, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

This bill requires social media platforms to provide users a button within the settings of the platform that enables the user to delete their account. This bill also requires the social media platforms to make this button accessible on any format that a user can access the platform. Furthermore, this bill requires that a social media platform shall delete personal information of the user that pertains to the account or the use of the platform upon deletion of the account. Lastly, this bill prohibits social media platforms from using dark patterns to interfere with a user's ability to delete their account.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Clarify that if a user clicks on the "Delete Account" button, the platform must display the necessary steps required to complete the account deletion process.
- 2) Clarify that if the platform requires verification of the account deletion through two-factor authentication, it must be done in a cost-effective and user-friendly manner, such as by text message, phone call, or email.
- 3) Clarify that a request to delete an account is treated as a request to delete any personal information the platform has collected through the user's use of the service, and that such requests must be processed in accordance with the California Consumer Privacy Act of 2018.
- 4) Clarifies that a user logging back into a previously deleted account does not, by itself, revoke the user's prior request for deletion.

COMMENTS

Social media has grown immensely over the past two decades, now encompassing everything from social networking to forums, chat rooms, content-sharing platforms, and even job-seeking tools. With its wide range of functionalities, over 80% of Americans are active on at least one platform.¹ Recent reports show that the average American spends nearly 2.5 hours per day on social media.² People turn to these platforms for a variety of reasons; some use them as news and information sources, others to grow small businesses, and many to maintain relationships and build community. Social media has even given rise to a new economic model in the form of influencers and the attention economy. However, the benefits of social media are not universal. Many users feel compelled to stay online out of fear of missing out, only to find themselves losing valuable time to mindless scrolling instead of meaningful social interaction.

¹ Jeffrey Gottfried, "Americans' Social Media Use", *Pew Research Center* (Jan. 31, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/01/31/americans-social-media-use/>.

² Robin Geuens, "What is the average time spent on social media each day?", *Soax* (Sept. 5, 2024), <https://soax.com/research/time-spent-on-social-media>.

In fact, the Oxford Word of the Year for 2024 was "brain rot," defined as "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging. Also: something characterized as likely to lead to such deterioration."³ Brain rot has come to describe both the consumption of endless, low-quality content on social media and the negative mental impact that consumption creates. Research supports these concerns. A meta-analysis of 15 studies found that problematic internet usage is linked to a reduction in grey matter, the region of the brain responsible for processing information.⁴ The areas most affected were those involved in reward processing and impulse control, which could lead to increased susceptibility to addictive behaviors. Moreover, social media use has been tied to reduced attention spans. In the past 20 years, the average human attention span has dropped from 2.5 minutes to just 47 seconds.⁵ These neurological changes have real-world consequences, impacting mental health and overall well-being. As a result, many individuals are seeking to detox from their phones and social media use. Unfortunately, the platforms themselves often make this process exceedingly difficult.

Social media usage and its impact on users is highly polarized. Beyond the ever-present fear of missing out that these platforms perpetuate, one might reasonably ask: why do users not simply unplug? The answer lies in the way social media platforms are designed. Engagement drives revenue, and these platforms have found ways to commodify user attention in the pursuit of profit. As a result, they increasingly employ tactics known as *dark patterns*, deceptive interface designs that manipulate users into making decisions they might not otherwise choose. Dark patterns were defined in the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) through the passage of Proposition 24, the California Privacy Rights Act, in 2020. They are described as "a user interface designed or manipulated with the substantial effect of subverting or impairing user autonomy, decision-making, or choice, as further defined by regulation."⁶ This definition was added by voter initiative to ensure that consent for the collection, sharing, or sale of consumer data is actual consent and not obtained through manipulative design.

At the heart of the issue lies a simple question: how difficult is it, really, to delete a social media account? A quick internet search yields countless websites and blogs devoted to guiding users through the complex process of account deletion across various platforms. For instance, in their support letter, the Consumer Federation of California highlights the convoluted, 20-plus-step process required to delete a Facebook account.

For a full account of the difficulties of deleting a social media account, please see the policy committee analysis.

According to the Author

Social media addiction is harming our youth on a daily basis. From impacts to self-esteem to even more dire consequences, California needs to ensure that those struggling to escape the

³ "'Brain rot' named Oxford Word of the Year 2024", *Oxford University Press* (Dec. 2, 2024), <https://corp.oup.com/news/brain-rot-named-oxford-word-of-the-year-2024/>.

⁴ Jeremy E. Solly et al., "Structural gray matter differences in Problematic Usage of the Internet: a systematic review and meta-analysis", *Molecular Psychiatry* volume 27, pages1000–1009 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-021-01315-7>.

⁵ Sandee LaMotte, "If you think you can't focus for long, you're right", *CNN* (May 15, 2024), <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/11/health/short-attention-span-wellness>.

⁶ (Civ. Code. Section 1798.140 (l).)

cycle of addiction can do so easily. Unfortunately, because social media platform revenue relies on continued engagement of users, the mechanisms for account deletion is not always straightforward, leading many who begin the process to give up part way through. For those already struggling with addiction to a platform, this means returning to a harmful habit. AB 656 will follow recent efforts to simplify subscription cancellation to social media platforms, making it easier for individuals to escape a harmful situation.

Arguments in Support

The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law, in support of the bill, writes:

Among the horrors profit-ravenous social media platforms heap upon our children – aside from knowingly facilitating child rape and sexual trafficking, the matchmaking of child sexual abuse material to pedophile consumers of such material, the distribution of lethal fentanyl, the promotion of deadly “challenges,” pummeling girls with pro-anorexia and starvation content, using neuroscientists to addict mere children to their products, and record-shattering, ever escalating rates of suicide and depression requiring hospitalization – is that, when a child for their own well-being wants to quit a platform, the platforms make it intentionally hard and frustrating to do so.

As one investigative piece concluded, “[w]anting to delete your account is one thing, but actually being able to hit the delete button is another story. Social media outlets make money off of you and your information, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that they don't want to let you go. Because of this, the biggest networks have made it overly complicated to delete your account.”

According to the University of Chicago, “[f]irst, account deletion options vary considerably across platforms and the language used to describe these options is not always clear. Most platforms offer account deletion on desktop browsers but not all allow account deletion from mobile apps or browsers. Second, we found evidence of several dark patterns present in the account deletion interfaces and platform policies. Third, most participants had tried to delete at least one social media account, yet over one-third of deletion attempts were never completed.”

AB 656 simply makes it easier for children to quit social media platforms by making the option easy to find and easy to implement.

Arguments in Opposition

In opposition to the bill, Computer and Communications Industry Association alongside a group of technology trade associations, argues:

AB 656 conflates social media platforms with paid subscription accounts. The bill attempts to apply the same standards of requiring a “clear and conspicuous” cancellation process as was created under AB 2863 (Schiavo, 2024) targeting paid subscriptions and automatic renewals to social media platforms.

Unlike subscription services that charge a recurring fee for continued access, mainstream social-media platforms are offered to the public at no cost and operate primarily on an advertising-supported model; optional premium features do not convert them into “subscriptions.” Treating these free services as if they were paid, cancel-anytime

memberships ignores this fundamental distinction and risks importing a regulatory framework that does not fit the product.

[...]

SB 656 would also create various unintended consequences, requiring a deletion/suspension link on every screen would encourage impulsive or accidental deletions, offer bad actors an easy means to erase accounts with momentary device access as the deletion/suspension confirmation follow-up would only be optional under this bill.

Many consumers rely on their social-media credentials as a single sign-on key for other services or products—from video and music streaming, to e-commerce storefronts, food delivery network apps, transportation network apps, productivity apps, messaging apps, video games. Allowing an account to be deleted or suspended with only minimal confirmation would instantly invalidate those authentication tokens, leaving users locked out of services they may depend on for their daily lives.

In many cases, they would face cumbersome—and sometimes impossible—recovery processes, risking permanent loss of data, purchase histories, or business pages that were never housed on the social-media platform itself. This cascading lock-out hazard illustrates why a one-click deletion mandate is ill-suited to platforms that function as digital identity hubs.

FISCAL COMMENTS

This bill is keyed non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

VOTES:

ASM PRIVACY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION: 14-0-1

YES: Bauer-Kahan, Dixon, Bryan, DeMaio, Irwin, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Ortega, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Ward, Wilson

ABS, ABST OR NV: Wicks

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 71-0-8

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Papan, Tangipa

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

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