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# Protection of Children’s Rights in the Digital World - A Comprehensive Review

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## ABSTRACT

We are living in the age of digital technology, which is deeply entrenched in our daily lives. These days, we cannot imagine living even a day without digital technology, including smartphones, computers, laptops and the internet. Many children spend their time using digital technology using different educational applications and digital content, which have now become one of the basic techniques of learning and education. Moreover, applications like 'Siri', 'Google Assistant', 'YouTube Kids' and 'Amazon Alexa' are becoming daily companions of the children. Though the children in modern societies have received many benefits using digital technology but despite these benefits digital technologies carry risks and challenges that may violate their digital rights. The prevalence of concerns like cyberbullying, online exploitation, privacy violations and exposure to inappropriate content emphasises how critical it is to safeguard the rights of children in the current age of technology. Though there have been legal frameworks for the protection of children's digital rights, it's just hazy that how effective such legislations and policies are in the protection of children's digital rights. This comprehensive review tried to look into the significance, challenges and interpretations of protecting children's rights in the digital world.

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## 1. Introduction

In the technologically advanced society of today, children are heavily reliant on technology. They rapidly adapt to new trends and technology easily, particularly in social networking, online gaming and content production. They, therefore, become a crucial consumer segment for digital products and services.

Children account for roughly one-third of global internet users, and they are going online at increasingly younger ages through social media, mobile apps, online gaming and other digital platforms, often without consistent adult supervision (European Commission 2024a). About 25 per cent of the world's population is under age 15, which has major implications for internet access and digital policy. Screen exposure is also rising, with one study reporting that children aged 8-12 spend about 4 hours and 44 minutes per day on screens. As connectivity expands, children and teenagers are using the internet more for learning, communication and entertainment, making them a core driver of technology adoption (Statista 2025; DataReportal 2026). This trend accelerated during COVID-19 virtual schooling, especially among Generation Alpha, with devices introduced earlier in life; 44 per cent of young children receive devices from schools, and 28 per cent use their own for academic work, highlighting the growing centrality of technology in education (Statista 2025; DataReportal 2026; European Commission 2024a).

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Eventually, children frequently become habituated to the internet at their earliest years due to the increasing availability of devices such as smartphones, laptops and computers at homes as well as educational institutions. This earliest exposure might have an impact on their ability to use computers as well as digital activities. Although the world of technology presents a plethora of options for learning, interaction, innovation and enjoyment, it also exposes children and other vulnerable users to emerging risks. It brings up issues about digital privacy and security. It is essential to make sure that children have adequate technological education and awareness so as to use the internet safely, responsibly and effectively.

### 1.1 Definition of Child

The society in which children live has changed greatly since the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted in 1989. In order to fully comprehend the impact of digital technology on children, it is imperative that we come up with precise definitions for the terms 'child' and 'digital world'.

The UNCRC defines the term 'child' as someone under the age of 18; however, the term 'digital world' means more than just the internet. It includes any sort of digital technological products and services, including social networking sites, online gaming, desktops, laptops, mobile phones, tablets and other digital devices and different platforms.

### 1.2 Children's Rights in the Digital World

The expression 'Children's Rights in the Digital World' describes how the rights of children are enforced and protected in reference to technological advances and digital settings. In other words, in the age of digital technology, children's rights pertain to the benefits and security measures that guarantee children can securely explore virtual spaces. While children get involved more with digital platforms, it is critical to make sure that their rights are protected in such types of settings. Here are a few important child rights, including-

1. **Right to Protection-** Protecting children from risk while they use technological devices is ensured under the right to protection. This entails the protection of children from risks such as inappropriate use of information, cyber-attacks and online harassment. For children to learn, discover and participate online in a secure atmosphere, digital platforms should have robust security measures in place to protect them from these potential risks. Children can feel safe and secure in the digital realm if we prioritise security mechanisms and the appropriate use of technology.
2. **Right to Privacy-** Children's right to privacy in the digital realm means to ensure the security of children's personal information as well as to prevent unauthorised surveillance of their online activities. It involves securing their sensitive information from unauthorised use and ensuring that they understand how the information they've provided could be used. This can be done by developing unambiguous and age-appropriate privacy rules to educate the child about the procedure of collection of information, as well as regulations to secure such collected information. Children should be able to clearly comprehend these rules and regulations, which should comprehensively define the types of information that are being collected, the way it might be used and the individuals who will be given access to such information. By protecting this right of privacy, we foster a more secure virtual space where the children's sensitive information is protected, and their right to privacy is respected as well.
3. **Right to Participation-** Children's right to participation in the digital realm includes the freedom to participate fully and voice their opinions freely in digital environments. This right stems from the idea that children should have a say in decisions that impact their lives, such as those pertaining to the creation and usage of digital equipment and digital platforms. Children who take part in these processes may make sure that online environments are secure, stimulating and align with their requirements.

**4. Right to Access Information-** Children are protected from unauthorised access to digital information and resources under the right to access information. In order to promote their development and advancement, they must have access to true and reliable information, learning materials and automated resources. Ensuring that the information provided is accurate and appropriate for the target age group is another aspect of it. By protecting this right, we contribute to children's well-being in cyberspace by enabling them to explore, develop, interact and participate freely in the digital realm whilst still being safe and secure.

### **1.3 Significance of Protecting Children's Rights in the Digital World**

In order to protect children's privacy and overall well-being in the age of digital technology, their rights must be respected and protected. Children might not completely understand the risks that could be associated with sharing personal information on the internet in today's digital age. Protecting their privacy helps mitigate the likelihood of cyber-crimes such as identity theft, cyber bullying and unauthorised access to information. Children are often exposed to incorrect knowledge and cyber bullies through digital platforms, so it's important to put precautions in place in order to keep them protected.

Long before digital technologies and the internet were extensively utilised, in 1990, the UNCRC was established. General Comment 25 (UNCRC 2021), which underlined that children's rights are equally vital online and offline, was added to the UNCRC's revised guidelines by 2021. Laws that prohibit online exploitation, harmful interactions, the sharing of pornographic pictures of young children, the use of unauthorised information, discriminatory remarks and data protection are in place in many nations.

One cannot ignore how the digital age is affecting kids' mental and psychological well-being. Their mental and psychological well-being may be adversely affected by exposure to excessive time spent on screens, unreasonable expectations and online harassment. Online harassment and other inappropriate content exposure may contribute to depression, anxiety and other forms of psychological disorders. Child's digital rights must be prioritised to mitigate these digital risks and strengthen children's mental and psychological well-being. Furthermore, it's also crucial to make sure children are aware and capable of making well-informed choices about their virtual behaviour since they might not completely appreciate the repercussions of what they do, say and share online.

Digital resources are an excellent platform for learners to learn, but if they are not used responsibly and appropriately, they could be just as risky. Striking a balance in the use of technology to realise good while staying safe and educated is also crucial for protecting children's rights. Adherence to legal standards in digital interactions and the establishment of a safer digital environment have been made possible by the enforcement of regulations like the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 1998 (COPPA 1998).

Additionally, how children engage with digital information is influenced by their different stages of development. As part of protecting their rights, digital hits must be customised according to a child's stage of emotional and intellectual development. In order to enable children to navigate virtual worlds securely and ethically, it also involves imparting to them knowledge about digital literacy. In conclusion, protecting children's rights online means making sure they have their privacy, safety and appropriate development while using technological advancements.

### **1.4 Challenges in Protecting Children's Digital Rights**

There are several significant challenges in the way of protecting children's rights digitally. One of the biggest challenges is that a lot of applications and internet sites do not require age validation. Children often have access to age-inappropriate information and websites, exposing them to extremely detrimental content or information. Another challenge is the possibility of being targeted by cyber-criminals. Children could not properly understand the risks associated with sharing private information, which makes them vulnerable to being singled out by cyber criminals.

Privacy is another significant challenge. Without the parents' appropriate permission, several internet websites collect, store and make use of the children's personal information. This may result in the collection of personal information without consent, leading to the possibility of future exploitation. Furthermore, children could be experiencing harassment or bullying via Facebook, Twitter and various other social networking sites, which is why cyberbullying is becoming an increasingly widespread issue. Using fictitious names or being anonymous is common these days on social networking sites. Because of this, it might turn out challenging to recognise and bring down those responsible for malicious conduct like harassment or exploitative practices. Cyberbullying of children has become increasingly difficult to address and control when offenders may conceal their real identities.

The requirement for digital literacy is yet another challenge. Children frequently do not have the fundamental understanding and skills required to use the internet appropriately and effectively. They might not know how to protect their individual data or how to spot email scams or other fraudulent activities. Global disparity is an added challenge. The legislative frameworks, cultural perspectives on children's rights and internet accessibility differ throughout nations. Consequently, some areas could offer robust digital security systems for children, while others would not. These variations may result in unequal protection, putting children in certain areas at greater risk than others.

Inadequate legislation is an absolute challenge. A large number of regulations in place today are not intended to deal with the particular challenges of the digital age. Regulations that came up before the widespread use of the internet, for instance, might not address the particular dangers of online harassment or children's data privacy. Emergence of the latest technologies and platforms may bring up new risks that may not be addressed by current legislation. Because of the swiftness of development, regulations may be out of date by the time they come into effect, leading to gaps in the protection of children's digital rights.

To be brief, as the digital world grows more complex, it is critical to prioritise the protection of children's rights. To overcome the challenges listed above, it is critical to strengthen legislation, train children as well as parents and invest in technological innovations that underscore online security. Likewise, the government, educational institutions, parents and the technology industry must work collaboratively to establish a safe and beneficial internet ambience for children.

### **1.5 Research Problem**

Global digital engagement continues to grow. The Digital2026 Global Overview Report notes that more than 6 billion people, roughly 73 per cent of the world's population, were using the internet as of late 2025 (DataReportal 2026). Recent studies indicate that internet users spend over six hours per day online, reflecting sustained high engagement with digital information, media and communication platforms (Statista 2025; DataReportal 2026). Children and adolescents represent a substantial share of users worldwide; international estimates indicate that around one-third of global internet users are under age 18, and youth aged 15-24 have the highest connectivity rates among all age groups (UNESCO 2023). Recent international reports further show that children are going online at increasingly younger ages and using digital technologies for learning, communication and entertainment, making digital literacy and online safety education essential components of early development (UNESCO 2023; OECD 2024). Presently, digitalisation being a new trend, children's digital rights are not yet fully protected. The dissemination of personal online data involving a child may be an infringement of his/her right to privacy and may also affect his/her childhood development. There are inadequate legal mechanisms to protect the interests of the child in the digital environment, either to regulate the use of child-related sensitive information available online or the design of the technology itself.

### **1.6 Research Gap**

After an essential literature review, it has been found that, given the increased use of digital platforms by children, little information is available that investigates how children perceive and navigate the issues of online privacy and safety. Therefore, the main research problem is to broadly evaluate the -

existing legal framework at national and international levels relating to the protection of children's rights in the digital environment. To bridge this gap, there is a need to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in protecting children's digital rights and to suggest recommendations for the advancement of such rights.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

The following are the key research questions that have been answered to meet the purposes of this research:

1. How do digital technologies facilitate child development in modern society?
2. What is the level of awareness among children of their digital rights, and how does such awareness help to navigate the digital platform safely and responsibly?
3. What are the main risks and challenges children face in the digital environment, and how do these impact their rights?
4. What gaps exist in existing legal frameworks related to child digital rights, and how can policy frameworks be strengthened to bridge such gaps?

### **1.8 Research Design**

Mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative have been used for a better understanding (interviews and questionnaires). The universe of the study was kept limited to the State of Punjab and UT Chandigarh. The target population were the children aged 04-15 years and their parents or guardians.

#### **1.8.1 Ethical Considerations**

To protect the safety and well-being of children and parents, concerns about ethics were critical when conducting the research. The collection of personal information involved risks to the subjects the researcher wished to protect; however, anonymity and confidentiality had been ensured throughout the study to protect the identity and interests of the participants. After providing parents with comprehensive information about the research's objectives and techniques and age-appropriate clarifications to their children regarding their participation, parents gave their informed permission. The researcher had also obtained informed consent from guardians (if any) as well as consent of the child to participate. Moreover, a safe and enjoyable setting was established for the purpose of gathering data. The freedom to leave at any moment was communicated to participants, and to reduce any potential discomfort, emotional reactions were continuously assessed.

## **2. Digital Technologies And Child Development In Modern Society**

Digital technologies have become an integral part of children's lives, offering significant benefits across multiple areas of development. One of the most prominent advantages is enhanced learning opportunities. With the vast amount of information available online, children can explore topics of interest through resources such as Google Scholar, educational blogs and virtual libraries. Platforms like Khan Academy and YouTube provide instructional videos and interactive exercises, catering to diverse learning styles and helping children grasp concepts at their own pace.

E-learning platforms further enrich learning by offering interactive courses that dynamically engage students. Websites such as Coursera, edX and Duolingo provide real-time feedback, allowing children to identify mistakes and improve immediately. Educational games add an element of motivation through rewards, points and challenges, encouraging perseverance and active participation. These tools create an engaging and responsive environment that promotes consistent learning and problem-solving.

Beyond knowledge acquisition, digital technologies foster critical thinking and creativity. Puzzle and strategy games such as chess and Minecraft encourage children to plan strategically and think analytically, while applications like Scratch introduce programming and conceptual thinking through -

interactive projects. Artistic platforms such as Adobe Creative Cloud, Canva, GarageBand and Story Tyke allow children to express themselves creatively through digital art, music, videos and storytelling. These tools nurture imagination, innovation and technical skills simultaneously.

Digital technologies also enhance interpersonal skills and collaboration. Platforms like KidzSearch enable children to connect and interact safely with peers worldwide, while games such as Roblox and Club Penguin provide secure spaces for social engagement. Collaborative learning tools like Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams teach children to work together on projects, share feedback and develop teamwork skills, fostering meaningful peer relationships.

Parental involvement in children's development is facilitated by technology. Applications like ClassDojo and SeeSaw allow parents to monitor academic progress, participation and behaviour, while messaging apps improve communication with teachers. Virtual conferences further increase flexibility, enabling parents to stay connected and engaged in their child's learning without logistical constraints.

Customisation of learning is another benefit offered by digital technologies. Programs like DreamBox adjust homework difficulty based on individual performance, providing appropriately challenging tasks. Such personalised learning experiences support children's engagement, accommodate their unique needs and promote autonomy in education.

Digital platforms also support emotional and psychological development. Safe chat rooms allow children to express emotions, ask questions and seek guidance anonymously, while role-playing and simulation games expose children to diverse perspectives and real-world scenarios. These activities enhance empathy, awareness and social understanding.

Global awareness is increasingly promoted through digital tools. Educational programs and interactive videos on platforms like National Geographic Kids introduce children to global issues, cultures and environmental concerns. Virtual field trips through apps like Google Expeditions allow children to explore historical sites, museums and natural wonders, broadening their horizons without leaving home. Initiatives such as ePals connect schools globally, encouraging intercultural collaboration and communication.

Finally, digital technologies contribute to physical and mental well-being. Fitness apps like Google Fit and HealthifyMe motivate children to engage in physical activity through challenges and games, while mindfulness applications such as Calm and Headspace teach mental health awareness and emotional regulation skills. These tools help children cultivate healthy habits, resilience and self-care practices.

In summary, digital technologies provide extensive benefits for learning, skill development, interpersonal relationships, global awareness and well-being. However, it is crucial to balance screen time with offline activities such as outdoor play and physical exercise. Ongoing parental involvement ensures that children maximise these benefits while remaining safe and guided in their interactions with technology. By fostering responsible use, digital tools can enrich children's development holistically and sustainably.

### **3. Level of awareness among children of their digital rights**

Children's awareness of digital rights is shaped by age, education, cultural background and parental guidance. Understanding how these factors influence children's comprehension is essential for ensuring their safety while navigating digital platforms (Council of Europe 2016; OECD 2024). This section explores awareness levels across age groups, the role of educational programs and how digital literacy and recent policy initiatives help children navigate online spaces responsibly.

#### **3.1 Level of Awareness among Children**

Younger children, aged 5 to 10, often have limited knowledge of digital rights. At this stage, parents are the primary educators, introducing them to basic concepts such as protecting personal information and recognising online threats. Parental guidance is essential for setting rules, monitoring activity and

discussing risks (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 2024).

As children enter the tween years (11-13), awareness increases. Tweens begin to use social media and other digital platforms independently, learning privacy controls and the importance of cautious online behaviour. Schools often integrate virtual citizenship programs, teaching responsible behaviour and the implications of leaving digital footprints. Initiatives like Common Sense Media further educate tweens about digital rights, complementing parental and peer guidance (UNESCO 2023).

Teenagers, between 14 and 18 years, demonstrate higher comprehension of digital rights. They are aware of data protection, copyright issues, cyberbullying and the importance of consent when sharing content online. High schools often offer digital literacy courses to reinforce these principles. Peer interactions remain vital, as teens exchange experiences and discuss responsible digital practices (UNCRC 2021).

### **3.2 Awareness through Educational Programs**

Educational initiatives play a crucial role in raising awareness about digital safety. Schools increasingly integrate virtual citizenship curricula covering topics such as consent, privacy, cybersecurity and online harassment. Lessons are often supplemented with workshops, audiovisual materials and interactive activities, which enhance engagement and retention of knowledge (European Commission 2024a).

Cultural and geographic differences also shape children's awareness. In developed nations, children have greater access to digital literacy programs and resources, while children in less developed regions may face limited opportunities to learn about their rights online. Internet infrastructure further affects accessibility: high-speed, reliable connections enable children to participate in online learning and explore digital tools effectively, whereas slow or inconsistent access can hinder digital skill development and limit understanding of safe online practices (DataReportal 2026).

Family and societal perspectives on technology and privacy strongly affect awareness. In some cultures, online sharing is normalised, while in others, privacy is prioritised. Open discussions at home combined with school-based education help children develop a balanced understanding of digital rights (OECD 2024).

Recent regulatory developments, such as the IT Rules 2026 in India, have strengthened obligations for online platforms to protect children's data and content safety. These rules, including stricter content moderation and reporting requirements, ensure that children are better safeguarded while using digital platforms (Government of India 2026; Reuters 2026).

### **3.3 Children Navigating Digital Technologies Safely and Responsibly**

When children are aware of their digital rights, they are better equipped to navigate online spaces safely. Understanding privacy and data protection allows them to manage social media settings, control who can access their personal information and recognise the risks of sharing sensitive content. This foundational knowledge helps children make informed decisions about what they post and with whom they interact, reducing exposure to potential harm (UNESCO 2023).

Awareness of digital rights also empowers children to identify and respond to online harassment, including cyberbullying. They become familiar with what constitutes inappropriate behaviour, learn how to seek support from trusted adults and understand how to use reporting mechanisms effectively. By knowing their rights, children can act confidently when confronting or reporting harmful content, creating a safer digital environment for themselves and their peers (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 2024).

Furthermore, knowledge of digital rights fosters critical thinking, responsible behaviour, and ethical decision-making online. Children learn to evaluate the reliability of information, participate respectfully in discussions and practice good digital etiquette. This understanding encourages not only self-

protection but also advocacy, as children are more likely to support others, educate peers and engage in initiatives promoting online safety. Programs like Safer Internet Day 2026 provide practical opportunities for children to apply these skills, reinforcing lessons from school and parental guidance while raising awareness about consent, privacy and responsible engagement (Safer Internet Day 2026; AwarenessDays 2026).

Overall, when children comprehend their digital rights and responsibilities, they develop the skills, confidence and judgment needed to use digital technologies safely and responsibly. Education, parental involvement and supportive policies work together to ensure that children are prepared to navigate the digital world effectively, protect themselves from risks and participate ethically in online communities

#### **4. Risks And Challenges Children face In The Digital World**

In today's digital world, children are exposed to a plethora of risks and challenges that can have a substantial influence on their rights. For children to enjoy their digital rights and to create secure online experiences, grown-ups must be aware of these risks. In this part, we will examine some of the primary risks and challenges in more detail below, along with how such risks and challenges impact children's digital rights.

##### **4.1 Risks and Challenges Children Faced Online**

When children are abused online, whether through text messages, social networking sites or online gaming, it's known as cyberbullying. A few examples of this may include spreading rumours, sending threats of harm, isolating them from social media platforms or sharing defamatory information. Cyberbullying affects a lot of children, and it can make them feel anxious or frightened, which prevents them from accessing the internet. Cyber bullies pose as classmates or close acquaintances to take advantage of children over the internet. In an attempt to win children over, they lie and mislead them, which opens the door to risks like sexual exploitation. The rights of children to privacy and protection are endangered by such behaviour.

Children may come across violent or sexually explicit information online, increasing their risk of exposure to inappropriate content. This information may perplex children, have an impact on their conduct and impede their psychological and social development. Likewise, concerns about privacy come up when online databases acquire personal information about children without their complete awareness or consent. Privacy concerns are raised by the possibility of abuse of such information, which may include surfing habits and locations. Besides, every digital activity leaves behind an electronic trace. Children might not be aware that the things they publish or participate in might have an extended effect on their reputation and opportunities in the future. This may affect their ability to express themselves freely and have a good reputation.

Digital addiction can result in excessive time spent on screens, which can harm children's social, psychological and physical wellness. Issues like insomnia and poor physical activity may arise from this. Similarly, because there is so much misleading information on the internet, misinformation is an extremely serious issue. Learning can be hampered and confusion caused by children who find it difficult to differentiate between authentic and fraudulent information. Lastly, when children do not all have equal access to technology, there is a digital gap. Socioeconomic class and geographic location are two factors that can contribute to differences in access to technology and opportunity, which can result in social and educational inequality.

##### **4.2 Impact on Children's Digital Rights**

Children's digital rights are significantly impacted by various risks they experience when using the internet. Children's right to safety and security is compromised by cyberbullying, which also makes them feel emotionally insecure and discourages them from participating in online groups. By using a child's personal information for malicious purposes and behaving dishonestly, online predators violate

their right to privacy and security. Their right to a healthy growth is interfered with when they are exposed to inappropriate information, which also negatively impacts their academic and mental health. Their right to manage their personal data and make educated decisions regarding its usage is jeopardised by privacy violations, which can result in the misuse of their data without authorisation.

Since offensive or embarrassing posts can have a lasting impact, digital footprints can undermine their right to a decent reputation and have an impact on their ability to freely express themselves online. Their right to physical and mental health is compromised by an addiction to digital gadgets, which undermines their right to health and wellbeing and can result in problems including social isolation and sleep disruptions. Their capacity to learn efficiently and make wise judgments is hampered by misinformation, which interferes with their right to correct information. Finally, because digital gaps restrict access to necessary digital resources and abilities, they compromise their right to equal educational opportunities and exacerbate social inequality, which also impacts students' social and academic performance.

By being aware of these concerns and how they affect children's rights, we can make digital environments safer and fairer for all children. Therefore, it is imperative to tackle these hazards in order to protect children's rights and guarantee their safe and equitable navigation of the digital environment.

## **5. Child Legal Rights And Legal Frameworks**

The different risks and challenges that children encounter in the digital world are frequently not adequately addressed by the current legislative frameworks pertaining to children's digital rights. In this section, we examine the gaps that currently exist in existing legal frameworks and how legal frameworks can be improved to bridge such gaps.

### **5.1 Gaps in Existing Legal Frameworks**

Inadequate definitions and scope of many laws pertaining to children's digital rights result in ambiguous interpretations and insufficient protection against problems like cyberbullying and online harassment. Various laws concerned with children's digital rights are ambiguous or poorly defined. An absence of definitions for terms like 'digital literacy' and 'online safety' might result in varied understandings and inequitable implementation of the law. Children may not receive the full level of protection as anticipated if these legislative gaps are left open. Furthermore, even when legislation is present, they are often not enforced effectively. The existing legislations that is in place primarily concentrate on specific concerns like cybersecurity or data protection, while overlooking other critical concerns like cyberbullying and online harassment. This indicates that potential risks and challenges that children might come across digitally could fail to be completely addressed by the regulations that are in place at the present time.

Due to the inadequate effectiveness of age-specific protections offered in various legislations, children are constantly at risk while exploring the internet. Some legislation, such as the COPPA in the United States, sets the age of authorisation for accessing information about children at 13. Nonetheless, this does not take into consideration little ones who could be using the internet and are at risk. The children under the age of 13 are allowed to access internet-based applications and video games, which commonly fail to provide those children with the appropriate privacy and security measures. Likewise, existing regulations usually failed to acknowledge that a child of various ages calls for specific types of protection from digital risks. What is effective for young children may not be designed for younger children. As an instance, more extensive privacy protection ought to be implemented for websites that could be accessed by children at a young age in order to protect them from offensive or inappropriate content.

The lack of uniform global standards among nations for protecting children's digital rights makes worldwide implementation more difficult. There is a hodgepodge of legal regulations and conventions among nations designed to protect children's digital rights. Whereas the General Data Protection

Regulation (GDPR) and other strict regulations in the European Union protect the personal information of children, there's a chance that legislation in various other nations varies. For global organisations, this variance could possibly make it exceedingly difficult to adhere to every regulation while offering adequate safeguards for children. Another challenge is the implementation of these regulations globally. Lack of global legislative collaboration could have made it challenging to prosecute someone responsible for infringing on the rights of a child who lives outside the country.

In India, the legal framework for children's digital rights has historically been fragmented. Relevant laws include the Information Technology (IT Act, 2000) (Sections 66E and 67), the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO Act, 2012) and provisions under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Recently, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, has been enacted and is being implemented in phases. It sets out requirements for explicit consent for data collection, imposes obligations on platforms to safeguard children's data and introduces penalties for violations. Despite these developments, India still lacks a comprehensive, standalone law exclusively addressing children's online privacy and safety. Compared to COPPA and GDPR, the Indian framework is still phased and fragmented, and enforcement remains a challenge, leaving gaps in protection for children online.

Recent developments include the IT Rules 2026, which amend the 2021 IT Rules to address AI-generated content, deepfakes, misinformation and other harmful online material. Platforms are now required to label AI-generated content clearly, take action within reduced timelines (as little as three hours) and embed metadata to help users identify synthetic content. These updates aim to enhance accountability and online safety, but civil society groups caution about possible overreach and implementation challenges.

Proactive approaches towards promoting digital security are sometimes overlooked because of the existing legislation that frequently has a concentrated focus on raising awareness and providing education. Several regulations place greater emphasis on the prosecution of criminals rather than on empowering children and their parents about their online privacy and digital rights. This might result in a reactive approach, in which problems are handled only after they occur, rather than before they occur (failing to act proactively). More importantly, teachers, parents and guardians sometimes get inadequate training about how to cope with internet threats and help children. Without sufficient training, parents, teachers or guardians might not be adequately equipped to help children understand the intricate contours of a digital realm.

When it comes to children's possible solutions for addressing violations of their digital rights, reporting and resolution mechanisms sometimes prove to be ineffective. Children often lack convenient means of reporting issues about their digital rights, such as cyber bullying or online exploitation. Reporting mechanisms that are easy to use and intended for children are also not present on numerous pages on the internet. Whenever reporting and resolution mechanisms are available, children still might encounter difficulties while seeking justice. They might have been afraid of harassment, lack adequate knowledge of how courts work or lack guidance from adults they know and trust. These challenges could prevent children from coming forward with their concerns and asking for the assistance they need to make decisions.

## **5.2 Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks**

Strengthening existing legislation and procedures is a prerequisite to effectively protecting children's digital rights. Here's an overview of how to strengthen these regulations:

First, nations have to put into place a comprehensive legislation regulating children's digital rights. These legal regulations ought to address accessibility to information, security, safety, privacy and freedom of speech. In addition, they must deal with contemporary concerns like artificial intelligence and the impact of machine learning on minors on online platforms. In addition, there should be specific provisions given for people of different ages. By way of example, there should be more stringent

regulations for the collection of data and virtual activities pertaining to children under the age of 13, which might include more robust procedures for consent and restricted access to personalised advertisements.

Secondly, educational programs at schools must promote digital literacy. Children should be taught in schools how to spot scams or false information, protect their own personal information and report inappropriate online behaviour, etc. It will be much safer for children to use the internet if they are taught about their digital rights at an early age. Giving parents and other guardians education and training is also extremely important. Training and educational resources could help them understand potential risks, along with ways to keep their children protected digitally.

Thirdly, it is important to design child-friendly reporting mechanisms. To mitigate fears of threats of revenge or harm, these mechanisms have been designed to enable the children to report violations of their rights confidentially and anonymously. Furthermore, child advocate bodies assist children in navigating the legal system whenever their rights are infringed. These bodies might offer support and legal guidance to make sure children are successful in seeking justice effectively.

Fourthly, international collaboration is extremely important. The nations should be able to adopt global standards for children's digital rights that have been put forward with collaboration from global organisations such as the United Nations (UN). Such global standards for children's digital rights ought to incorporate key concepts including digital literacy, confidentiality, security and privacy. Furthermore, governments must collaborate for the implementation of the aforementioned legislation across nations. This could refer to globally binding agreements that simplify the identification and resolution of infringements, no matter where they might occur.

Finally, nations should also encourage business enterprises to use ethical data-gathering strategies. To prevent minors from being exposed to unethical videos or websites, for example, age authentication mechanisms should be implemented. Strict content moderation guidelines or parental control standards should also be enforced to shield young users from accessing the offensive or detrimental data. Moreover, to promote public trust and transparency, commercial enterprises additionally ought to make their information-sharing practices known to children as well as parents.

Global trends also show that the European Digital Services Act requires platforms to protect children from cyberbullying and harmful content and provide reporting tools. Countries such as Australia and the UK have adopted age-based restrictions and duty-of-care obligations for platforms. AI governance is also becoming part of children's digital rights frameworks, requiring age-appropriate design and privacy safeguards.

### **5.3 Safer Internet Day- An Initiative to Strengthen Digital Rights and Online Safety**

Safer Internet Day is celebrated every year on the first Tuesday in February to encourage safer and more responsible use of mobile phones and internet technologies, particularly among children and young people. It was started globally in 2004 by the European Commission as part of its Safer Internet Programme. The day's main goals are to educate people about safe online behaviours and to increase awareness of internet risks, including cyberbullying and privacy concerns. Each year, Safer Internet Day has a distinctive theme designed to promote collaboration among governments, academic institutions, business executives and non-profit organisations.

Safer Internet Day 2024 had the theme 'Together for a better internet', highlighting teamwork and collaboration. Safer Internet Day 2026 expanded these efforts, with NGOs in India such as Girl Effect launching school-based campaigns addressing online harms, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Awareness campaigns also took place in Africa and other regions, emphasising cooperation among families, schools, civil society and government agencies.

#### **5.4 The Digital 2026 Global Overview Report**

The Digital2026 Global Overview Report provides the latest insights on worldwide internet usage and digital engagement. As of late 2025, over 6 billion people, approximately 73 per cent of the global population, were active internet users (DataReportal 2026). Social media platforms have continued their rapid growth, with more than 5.5 billion users worldwide spending an average of 2 hours and 40 minutes daily interacting on these networks (Statista 2025; DataReportal 2026). Overall, the average daily time spent online across all platforms is estimated at 6 hours and 45 minutes, highlighting the persistent high engagement of individuals with digital media and communication tools (Statista 2025; DataReportal 2026).

Children represent a significant portion of this digital population. Globally, over 1 billion children use the internet, with many accessing it from a very young age via smartphones and tablets. On average, children spend between 4 and 5 hours per day online, engaging in educational activities, social networking, gaming and entertainment. This extensive exposure increases both learning opportunities and potential risks, such as privacy violations, cyberbullying and identity theft (DataReportal 2026).

Recent international developments also reflect growing attention to child digital safety. Portugal has implemented age-based restrictions for social media use, Egypt launched a Child Internet Risk Index, and the UAE established a Child Digital Safety Council. Concerns about AI-generated content are being addressed through regulatory updates, including India's IT Rules 2026, which require labelling AI content, faster takedown timelines and embedded metadata to help users identify synthetic content. Additionally, support networks for mental health and cyberbullying are increasingly recognised as essential for helping children navigate online risks safely (Government of India 2026; Reuters 2026).

Overall, initiatives like Safer Internet Day, the Digital2026 Global Overview Report and updated IT rules provide critical guidance for policymakers, educators, parents and technology providers. By monitoring global trends, these resources help raise awareness, enhance online safety and strengthen legal frameworks to protect children's digital rights.

### **6. Results And Discussion**

The protection of children's rights and online safety has become increasingly important in the evolving digital world. Data collected through parent and child questionnaires and interviews provides insight into gaps, challenges and current practices in safeguarding children online. The findings highlight variations in digital awareness across age groups, the critical role of parental engagement and the need for better communication and educational content.

#### **6.1 Key Findings**

The research reveals that younger children (ages 4 to 10) understand basic digital safety but require extensive parental guidance. Tweens (ages 11 to 13) are moderately aware of risks like cyberbullying but benefit from continuous supervision. Teens (ages 14 to 18) generally understand their digital rights and responsibilities, but often lack confidence or willingness to report issues. Proactive parental involvement strengthens children's awareness of online risks, yet communication gaps remain, with many teens hesitant to share their experiences. Children of all ages spend significant time online, highlighting the need for monitoring and guidance. Many parents rely on informal sources, such as blogs, for advice, underlining the need for structured educational programs and official resources on digital safety.

#### **6.2 Limitations of the Study**

The study faced several limitations. Children's responses may have been influenced by their parents, and obtaining consent resulted in a biased sample. Age-related understanding differences may have affected the interpretation of questions and experiences. The limited sample size and time constraints restricted data collection and generalizability. Acknowledging these limitations is important for interpreting results and guiding future research in children's digital rights.

### 6.3 Key Recommendations

Recommendations include implementing age-appropriate digital literacy curricula in schools covering digital rights, online safety and responsible behaviour. Interactive sessions should teach children to manage privacy settings, recognise cyberbullying and develop safe online practices tailored to their age. Open and non-judgmental communication between children and parents is essential, supported by parental awareness programs on cyber risks and effective supervision tools, including parental control applications. Communities should collaborate on digital safety initiatives and social media platforms must provide clear guidance and simple reporting mechanisms for harassment or harmful content. Educational content should be updated regularly to reflect evolving digital risks.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for holistic strategies integrating education, community involvement and parental engagement. Age-appropriate digital literacy, open communication and structured parental support can improve children's understanding, safeguard their rights and foster a safer and more responsible digital environment. Collaboration among schools, families and stakeholders is key to enabling children to navigate the online world safely and confidently.

### 6.4 Conclusion

'Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master.'

Among all innovations, the Internet is both a blessing and a challenge. When used responsibly, it connects, informs and empowers, but when misused, it exposes children to risks such as cyberbullying, privacy breaches and inappropriate content. Although the Internet was not designed with children in mind, it now plays a central role in their daily lives, making their protection a shared responsibility of parents, educators and policymakers.

Educating children and parents about digital safety, promoting responsible online behaviour, and providing tools to recognise and respond to risks are crucial. The principle of the "best interests of children" should guide all interventions, ensuring protective measures do not unnecessarily restrict access or hinder learning. Legal and policy frameworks must focus on empowerment: enabling children to express themselves safely, safeguarding personal data, fostering digital literacy and equipping them to navigate online challenges confidently.

To create a safer digital environment, schools, families, and governments must collaborate actively. Implementing age-appropriate education, parental guidance, clear reporting mechanisms and effective regulations can ensure that children reap the benefits of technology while minimising harm. By combining awareness, empowerment and protection, we can make the digital world both safe and enriching for every child.

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