
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA: GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND LEGAL MEASURES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing use of social media among children in India, prioritizing their safety and welfare in the online environment has become a pressing issue. The government has implemented several policies and legal strategies to tackle the dangers children encounter on the internet, such as cyberbullying, access to unsuitable material, online exploitation, and also games such as Blue Whale, Fire Fairy etc. This summary evaluates the legal and policy structure established to safeguard children on social media in India, emphasizing efforts by governmental organizations like the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). These organizations aim to oversee detrimental content, enhance child protection, and increase awareness of online dangers. Furthermore, the government has concentrated on improving digital literacy and teaching parents and children about the responsible utilization of social media. Although advancements have occurred, difficulties remain regarding successful execution, changing dangers, and deficiencies in enforcement. The summary emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach that includes government, tech firms, educational institutions, and households to establish a safe digital space. It ends by emphasizing the necessity of ongoing policy updates and the cooperation of all stakeholders to safeguard children from online dangers in an ever-evolving digital environment.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media [1] has become a vital aspect of daily life, offering avenues for communication, education, and entertainment. Nonetheless, the increase in social media usage, particularly among children and teenagers, has sparked considerable worries regarding their safety. Social media platforms present numerous dangers for children, including cyberbullying, online predators, exploitation, and access to inappropriate material. In India, the swift increase in the digital population [2], especially among young users, has led the government to establish policies and legal actions aimed at safeguarding children from online threats.

This article examines the governmental regulations and legal structures in India designed to protect children on social media platforms. It will analyze current regulations, their efficacy, challenges in enforcement, and the involvement of different stakeholders in promoting online safety.

THE VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Kids and adolescents are particularly susceptible to online threats because of their limited experience with the internet and a lack of understanding about its possible hazards. With the rise in social media use, young individuals face numerous dangers that can greatly affect their emotional, mental, and physical health. Among the most prevalent risks are:

- Cyberbullying:

Numerous children encounter online abuse, which may involve intimidating messages, embarrassment, or humiliation in public. This form of bullying can greatly affect their self-esteem and mental well-being, as it frequently happens in environments where they look for social validation [3].

- Encountering Inappropriate Material:

Kids may unknowingly encounter explicit, violent, or harmful content on social media platforms. Such material may adversely affect their emotional growth and lead to confusion or anxiety [4].

- Internet Predators:

Predators utilize social media networks to seek out at-risk children, frequently masquerading as friends or reliable figures, aiming to exploit or harm them. This threat is particularly alarming due to the internet's anonymity, which complicates the process of identifying and tracking offenders [5].

- Privacy Breaches:

Numerous children lack awareness about privacy settings and the dangers of disclosing personal data, photos, or location information. This deficiency in comprehension may result in vulnerability to identity theft and exploitation [6].

- Addiction and Mental Health Concerns:

Heavy engagement with social media may result in addiction, making children excessively reliant on online interactions for affirmation. This conduct can lead to social isolation, anxiety, depression, and sleep issues, as the demand to uphold an ideal online image exacerbates mental health challenges.

To address these risks, the Indian government has introduced multiple initiatives aimed at safeguarding children on the internet. This includes initiatives for digital literacy to promote awareness of responsible internet usage, enhanced content regulations, and efforts to better comprehend privacy and security. Important governmental organizations like the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) are collaborating to manage online platforms and establish a more secure atmosphere for young individuals. Even with these initiatives, obstacles persist in tackling the ever-changing landscape of online dangers, underscoring the necessity for continuous cooperation among government bodies, technology firms, and communities [7].

GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Information Technology (Fair Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Regulations, 2011:

The IT Rules, created under the Information Technology Act of 2000, mandate that companies adopt appropriate security measures and protocols to safeguard sensitive personal information, which also encompasses children's data. The regulations require that businesses, such as social media platforms, obtain permission from parents or guardians before gathering or handling children's data [8].

Nevertheless, these regulations have faced criticism for being insufficient in providing real-time protection, particularly in light of the swift development of digital platforms.

- The National Children's Policy, 2013:

The National Policy on Children seeks to guarantee the safety and welfare of children in India. It acknowledges the significance of safeguarding children from detrimental online material and exchanges. While it doesn't offer a specific framework for social media regulation, the policy highlights the importance of safeguarding children in digital environments, advocating for digital literacy and awareness among children, parents, and educators [9].

- Cyber Crime Prevention Program for Women and Children (CCPWC):

Initiated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the CCPWC initiative aims to combat cybercrimes targeting women and children. It advocates for the establishment of cybercrime units in states and union territories and supports awareness initiatives for children about the safe utilization of the internet and social media. The program additionally educates law enforcement officials to handle online crimes involving children [10].

- The Personal Data Protection Bill Draft, 2019:

The Personal Data Protection Bill is designed to oversee the management of personal data, encompassing data pertaining to children. This legislation mandates that social media platforms must acquire parental approval to gather personal information from individuals under the age of 18. The legislation also requires the creation of data protection agencies to enforce compliance and protect children's online privacy [11].

Even though the bill was still being debated as of 2025, it signifies an important advancement in safeguarding children's data online.

- National Commission for Protecting Child Rights (NCPCR):

The NCPCR, dedicated to safeguarding children's rights in India, has released guidelines aimed at ensuring children's safety on social media. These recommendations advocate for enhanced oversight of social media sites, raising awareness about online safety among children and parents, and motivating platforms to create a safer online space for young users [12].

LEGAL MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

India has introduced numerous legal actions to safeguard children on social media, addressing the swift increase of digital platforms and the linked dangers to young users. These regulations aim not just to avert harm but also to make sure that wrongdoers are held responsible for their behaviors, guaranteeing a safer online environment for children. Included in this list are the Information Technology (IT) Act of 2000, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012, the Juvenile Justice Act (2015), and the Prohibition of Indecent Representation of Women Act (1986), which play a key role in addressing numerous online dangers to children.

- The IT Act of 2000:

The 2000 Information Technology Act is fundamental to India's laws on cybercrime, tackling multiple online offenses. It offers legal measures to address offenses like cyberbullying, online harassment, and the sharing of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). A key part of the IT Act is Section 66E, which makes it a crime to infringe upon privacy by prohibiting the sharing of an image or video of a child without their permission. This rule is vital in preventing the distribution of unsuitable or exploitative material involving minors, as it can cause considerable damage [13].

Another important part, Section 67B, directly addresses child pornography. It forbids the uploading, sharing, or transmitting of CSAM, enforcing strict legal measures against those engaged in the online sexual exploitation of minors. These legal actions are essential in combating

online abuse, making sure that offenders of these crimes undergo criminal prosecution and help foster a safer environment for children on digital platforms.

- The 2012 Act for the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO):

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 was enacted to safeguard children against sexual abuse, exploitation, and harassment, whether in digital spaces or in person. This legislation tackles the growing issue of child sexual abuse enabled by social media and various digital platforms. It specifies definite protocols for reporting, examining, and prosecuting instances of child sexual abuse, which encompasses online grooming and exploitation [14].

The POCSO Act is essential in safeguarding children from sexual predators who exploit social media to manipulate or take advantage of young users. It offers legal protocols for addressing sexual offense cases, guaranteeing that victims obtain appropriate support and that the crime is thoroughly investigated and prosecuted. The Act requires law enforcement agencies to collaborate with other parties, including social media platforms, to combat online abuse and exploitation.

- The Children's Care and Protection (Juvenile Justice) Act, 2015:

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, provides measures to safeguard children who fall victim to online offenses, such as trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. The Act emphasizes the rehabilitation and reintegration of impacted children, concentrating on their care, protection, and legal entitlements. It encompasses strategies for addressing the needs of minors affected by online exploitation or abuse, guaranteeing that their welfare is prioritized.

The Juvenile Justice Act recognizes the increasing impact of digital platforms on children and highlights the necessity of protecting them in the online environment. It requires that police, social workers, and other officials offer essential assistance to victims, guaranteeing they obtain counseling and legal support. This law emphasizes the importance of a child-focused approach to justice, especially in situations that involve online abuse or exploitation [15].

- The Prohibition Act on Indecent Representation of Women, 1986:

While mainly aimed at shielding women from indecent or unsuitable representations, the Prohibition of Indecent Representation of Women Act (1986) is also crucial for protecting children, particularly in instances involving minors. The Act forbids the creation, distribution, or exhibition of indecent depictions of women, including minors, and makes these actions criminal. This law helps tackle situations where minors might face exploitation, unsuitable content, or sexualization on social media networks.

The Act aids in stopping the spread of offensive or degrading material related to children, especially images or videos that may negatively impact a child's dignity and mental well-being. Although it is mainly focused on safeguarding women, it continues to be a crucial instrument in preventing the online exploitation of children too [16].

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Although these policies and legal frameworks are essential for protecting children online, various obstacles impede their successful execution:

- Insufficient Awareness:

A major obstacle to safeguarding children online is the prevalent insufficient awareness among both parents and children regarding the possible risks of the internet. Many people do not recognize dangers such as cyberbullying, online predators, or privacy breaches, and frequently lack confidence in how to use social media platforms securely. This lack of knowledge may make children susceptible to exploitation and danger. To tackle this issue, there is an urgent requirement for thorough digital literacy initiatives that educate children and provide parents with the resources to monitor online behavior and promote safe internet habits.

- Enforcement Challenges:

The vast and anonymous characteristics of the internet pose a significant difficulty in identifying and prosecuting wrongdoers. Internet offenses, including cyberbullying, online exploitation, and data theft, can take place on various platforms, frequently complicating the identification of offenders or the determination of jurisdiction. The vast number of users and content further

complicates enforcement, since the task of overseeing harmful actions and executing prompt legal measures demands significant resources and collaboration among different agencies.

- **Worldwide Character of Social Media:**

Social media platforms are fundamentally worldwide, with servers frequently situated beyond India. This poses difficulties for enforcing national laws on platforms that function across various jurisdictions. Although India has implemented rules to reduce online harm, the worldwide characteristics of these platforms make it difficult for content moderation and enforcement actions to be effective, since platforms might be hesitant or slow to adhere to national rules. This global intricacy demands enhanced cooperation between governments and technology firms across nations.

- **Privacy Issues:**

Although protecting children's personal information is crucial to prevent online abuse and identity theft, excessively strict data protection regulations may inadvertently establish obstacles. For example, excessively stringent data collection regulations might limit children's ability to access important online resources, including educational tools, learning platforms, and support services that need user information to operate properly. Finding a compromise between safeguarding privacy and providing access to valuable content is a sensitive matter that demands thoughtful evaluation of both security and the necessity for digital resources that aid in children's learning and growth.

These issues highlight the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that includes continuous education, enhanced enforcement measures, global collaboration, and careful regulation to guarantee that children can securely take advantage of digital opportunities without facing undue risks.

ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER

Protecting children on social media is a shared responsibility that demands active participation from multiple stakeholders, each contributing significantly to fostering a safe online space.

- Social Media Platforms:

Companies like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and others bear a crucial duty to safeguard children. These platforms should not only establish strong child protection policies but also proactively enforce age verification measures to stop underage users from accessing content or platforms unsuitable for their age. Content moderation is also an essential aspect, where platforms should implement stricter measures to detect and eliminate harmful or unsuitable content, including explicit material, cyberbullying, or predatory actions. Furthermore, implementing child-friendly options, such as limited modes and enhanced privacy settings, can assist in making children's online experiences safer and more regulated.

- Parents and Educators:

Parents and teachers are crucial in protecting children's online engagements. Parents should actively engage in teaching their children about the dangers of social media, instructing them on privacy, security settings, and ways to manage online dangers such as cyberbullying. Establishing limits for social media usage, like restricting screen duration or overseeing online behavior, is essential for assisting children in interacting with the digital realm in a wholesome and balanced manner. Conversely, educators can integrate digital literacy initiatives into educational programs, instructing children not only in the responsible use of the internet but also in recognizing and mitigating possible risks. This collaboration among parents and teachers guarantees that children possess the knowledge and resources needed to safely navigate the online environment [17].

- NGOs and Advocacy Organizations:

NGOs and advocacy groups are essential in safeguarding children on social media. Organizations like Child Rights and You (CRY) [18], the Internet Freedom Foundation, and Save the Children tirelessly strive to promote awareness of online threats and push for enhanced child protection initiatives. They work closely with governments, policymakers, and technology firms to advocate for laws and regulations that emphasize children's safety in the online environment. These organizations also conduct awareness campaigns to inform the public about digital rights and child safety in the online space. Through promoting legal changes, providing resources, and assisting

children impacted by online dangers, these organizations play a vital role in advancing child protection efforts.

Collectively, these parties foster a safe environment that allows children to navigate and gain advantages from the digital realm securely. Successful cooperation between the government, technology firms, parents, teachers, and advocacy organizations is crucial to allow children to benefit from the positive features of social media while reducing the associated risks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, although substantial advances have been achieved in India to safeguard children online, the issues related to child safety on social media continue to persist. The government has shown dedication to tackling these problems by implementing initiatives designed to reduce harmful content and educate both children and parents. These initiatives are essential for informing the public about the possible risks of the digital realm. Nonetheless, enforcement continues to be a significant hindrance. The worldwide reach of social media platforms, along with jurisdictional challenges, complicates the enforcement of regulations consistently, putting children at risk from dangers that cross national boundaries. The absence of awareness among parents and teachers makes the issue even more challenging. Although children might be more adept with technology, numerous adults do not possess the understanding required to properly oversee and direct their children's online behavior. This lack of comprehension, along with worries about privacy, may result in complacency, making children susceptible to cyberbullying, exploitation, or being exposed to unsuitable content. Furthermore, the insufficient privacy safeguards for minors' personal information heightens these worries.

To establish a more secure online space for children, a comprehensive and cooperative strategy is crucial. Government bodies, social media companies, educators, and parents need to collaborate to guarantee that safety measures are established and consistently enforced. Social media platforms need to assume greater responsibility for user safety by establishing robust age verification processes, promptly eliminating harmful content, and safeguarding privacy, particularly for minors. Simultaneously, parents and educators need to take an active part in teaching children

about internet safety, encouraging open dialogue, and consistently overseeing their online activities. In the end, guaranteeing the safety of children online is a responsibility that cannot be fulfilled by a single group on its own. Creating a secure, supportive, and empowering online environment for young users necessitates the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders. It is only with such a cohesive strategy that India can guarantee its children navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

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