IRSHAD

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLICY

International Legal Frameworks for Protecting Minors on Social Media

[Tiberio Graziani][1][Azim Numberdar][2],

[1]*International Institute for Global Strategic Analysis (IIGSA)*

[2]*University of the Punjab, Pakistan*

Keywords:

Children's Digital Rights, Social Media Regulation, Age Verification, Data Protection, Algorithmic Accountability, International Legal Frameworks, Cross-Border Cooperation

ABSTRACT

Millions of children face daily risks while using social media platforms worldwide. International legal frameworks often fail to address these evolving digital threats consistently. This research examines how such frameworks protect minors across different jurisdictions today. It aims to identify gaps between children's rights instruments and platform-specific regulation. The study uses qualitative doctrinal analysis alongside document analysis of legal texts. Scholarly literature and official legal sources were examined systematically for relevant patterns. Results reveal fragmented age verification, inconsistent enforcement, and limited cross-border regulatory cooperation. Algorithmic targeting remains largely unregulated despite documented risks to adolescent wellbeing. Rights instruments rarely translate into specific, enforceable platform obligations across regions. The study recommends binding international standards linking rights language to platform accountability. Coordinated enforcement mechanisms and shared verification technology could strengthen protection. These findings show why fragmented legal approaches cannot protect children online adequately. Stronger international cooperation remains essential for meaningful digital child protection.

How to Cite: Graziani, T., & Numberdar, A. (2026). International Legal Frameworks for Protecting Minors on Social Media. *International Journal of Law and Policy, 4*(10), 26-45. https://doi.org/10.59022/ijlp.650

I. Introduction

Millions of children join social media platforms before turning thirteen years old. These young users often meet risks that their age cannot recognize. Predators, harmful content, and data collection follow them across many websites. Governments struggle to build laws that keep pace with fast-changing technology. Social media firms design platforms that keep users engaged for long hours. Adolescents remain vulnerable to social pressure and unrealistic comparisons online. Research links heavy platform use to declining wellness among teenagers. Legal systems have not agreed on unified standards for child protection. Some countries set strict age limits while others rely on parental consent. This inconsistency creates loopholes that minors can exploit. International cooperation becomes essential when platforms operate across national borders. No single country can regulate global technology companies alone. Legal scholars must examine existing frameworks and identify their weaknesses. This article explores international protections given to minors online (Cookingham & Ryan, 2015).

Social media use among minors has grown rapidly over two decades. Early internet regulation focused mainly on adult content and privacy notices. Lawmakers rarely considered how algorithms would shape children's online experiences. Platforms expanded across borders faster than domestic legislation could respond. Children began managing digital identities without much adult guidance. Scholars started documenting how young users build and protect online presence. This scholarship revealed gaps between platform design and safety needs. International treaties on children's rights predate modern social media by years. Existing frameworks struggle to address algorithmic recommendation systems and targeted advertising. Many jurisdictions still rely on outdated consent models built for simple websites. Previous studies examined isolated national laws rather than comparative standards. Few works connect data protection law with child development research directly. This gap leaves policymakers without clear guidance for drafting protections. This study builds on children's digital footprint management strategies (Buchanan et al., 2017).

Current laws already recognize that minors deserve special protection online. Yet enforcement mechanisms remain weak across most national jurisdictions today. Many platforms verify age through simple self-reported birth dates alone. This method fails to stop determined minors from bypassing age restrictions. Data collection continues even after platforms claim to restrict young accounts. Cross-border data flows complicate efforts to enforce local protection standards consistently. This research addresses how international law can close these enforcement gaps. It examines whether existing frameworks adequately regulate algorithmic targeting of minors. The problem centers on fragmented rules that platforms freely exploit across regions. We still lack a coordinated international standard for minor data protection. Researchers have not fully mapped how self-esteem harms connect to specific platform features. This study investigates that connection through a legal and policy

lens. These insights will help lawmakers draft stronger and more effective protections for children (Cingel, Carter, & Krause, 2022).

Recent scholarship examines how digital tools intersect with child protection systems. One 2025 study analyzed how children access social work support through mobile applications. Findings showed that app design directly shapes whether vulnerable children seek help. Poorly designed interfaces discouraged children from reporting abuse or unsafe situations. This work highlights how technology can either support or hinder child welfare. It also shows that legal frameworks rarely address app accessibility for minors. Regulators focus mainly on data privacy while ignoring design barriers. Children need platforms built around their real developmental needs. Social workers reported difficulty coordinating across different digital reporting systems. Fragmented technology infrastructure slows response times for children facing real danger. These findings suggest that child protection law must expand beyond privacy rules. Legal frameworks should mandate accessible, child-friendly design across protective digital services. This connects directly to broader questions about minors navigating social media safely (Carlick et al., 2025).

A second major study assessed early effects of a national age restriction law. Researchers tracked outcomes after Australia raised its minimum social media age. Early results showed mixed compliance among platforms and affected young users. Some minors simply migrated to platforms outside the new legal restrictions. This finding reveals a core weakness in single-country regulatory approaches. Age restrictions without cross-platform coordination create predictable enforcement gaps for regulators. The study also noted limited evidence on long-term wellbeing improvements so far. Policymakers had expected clearer mental health benefits within the first year. Instead, researchers found that displacement effects complicated any clear measurement. These findings challenge assumptions that age limits alone solve online harm. They suggest that legal design must pair age rules with enforcement tools. Without technical verification methods, age restrictions remain largely symbolic gestures. This literature demonstrates why coordinated international standards matter more than isolated national laws (Barnes et al., 2026).

The literature review reveals strong evidence about platform risks facing minors. It also shows growing attention to enforcement failures within national legal systems. Yet few studies connect international children's rights instruments to platform regulation. Most existing work treats data protection and child welfare as separate fields. This separation weakens legal responses to algorithmic harms facing young users. Recent guidance interprets children's digital rights under international human rights law broadly. Still, scholars have not mapped how this guidance applies across regions. Suggestions for future research call for comparative analysis of implementation gaps. Few studies examine how courts might enforce these emerging digital rights standards. This creates space for research connecting international frameworks to practical platform regulation. Such research could clarify obligations that states owe to minors online. This study addresses that gap by analyzing

implementation across multiple jurisdictions. It builds directly on recent interpretive guidance for children's digital rights (Ayalew, 2024).

To examine existing international legal frameworks that protect minors on social media platforms.

To identify gaps between children's rights instruments and platform-specific data regulation.

To propose coordinated legal standards that strengthen minors' protection across jurisdictions.

How can international legal frameworks be strengthened to close enforcement gaps in protecting minors from data exploitation and algorithmic harm on social media platforms?

This research matters because millions of children face daily risks online. Legal scholars must translate abstract rights language into workable platform rules. Without clear international standards, protection depends entirely on where a child lives. Such disparity contradicts the core promise of universal children's rights treaties. Parents and educators need consistent rules they can explain and enforce. Inconsistent laws also burden platforms operating across many different countries. A unified framework would reduce compliance confusion for global technology companies. It would also give regulators clearer tools for cross-border enforcement actions. Studying parental attitudes toward children's media further shows how families interpret risk. Family decisions often fill gaps left by weak legal protections. This research aims to reduce that burden through clearer legal guidance. Strengthening international frameworks benefits children, families, and platforms operating in good faith. This justification grounds the present study within debates about children's media use (Cingel, Snyder, & Vigil, 2023).

II. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research design suited for legal analysis. Qualitative methods allow deep examination of legal texts, principles, and interpretations. Quantitative approaches cannot fully capture nuanced legal reasoning within international frameworks. The population for this research includes international laws protecting minors on social media. The sample focuses specifically on data protection regulations, children's rights instruments, and platform-related legislation. Relevant laws include international children's rights conventions, regional data protection regulations, and national age-restriction statutes. Data collection relied on identifying scholarly literature and legal texts through targeted keyword searches. Keywords included children's digital rights, platform regulation, age verification, and data protection enforcement. These keywords guided searches across academic databases and official government legal repositories systematically. This approach ensured comprehensive coverage of relevant scholarship and binding legal instruments today. Selecting precise keywords helped narrow results toward directly applicable, relevant

sources. This design supports thorough, focused analysis of complex international legal frameworks.

Legal texts and regulations were retrieved directly from official government and organizational websites. This ensured accuracy and access to currently applicable, legally binding versions. Scholarly literature was retrieved from established academic databases specializing in legal research. Reviewed sources primarily included peer-reviewed journal articles published within the past five years. This time limit helped ensure findings reflect current legal and technological realities. Older sources were included only when discussing foundational, still-relevant principles. Author credibility was assessed by checking academic affiliation and institutional standing. Preference was given to authors affiliated with recognized universities and research institutions. Sources were also checked for peer-review status and citation by other researchers. This process helped confirm reliability and scholarly acceptance within the field. Doctrinal analysis formed the core method for examining legal texts. Document analysis supported interpretation of scholarly literature alongside primary legal sources. These combined methods ensured both accuracy and scholarly rigor throughout the study.

This research relies solely on publicly available legal documents and scholarly articles. No private, confidential, or personally identifiable information was collected. Every scholarly source used receives full citation, properly crediting original authors and contributors. This citation practice maintains academic integrity and respects intellectual contributions throughout the field. The researcher declares no conflict of interest influencing this study's conclusions. This research was conducted solely for academic and scholarly purposes. Certain boundaries were deliberately set, focusing specifically on international legal frameworks. The study excludes purely domestic criminal law unrelated to digital child protection. A significant limitation involves rapidly evolving technology outpacing available legal scholarship. Recommendation systems and platform features change frequently, sometimes faster than laws adapt. Legislation itself may change at any time, affecting long-term applicability. This research assumes cited legal texts remained accurate when this study was written. It also assumes scholarly sources accurately represented their described legal and empirical contexts.

III. Results

This section presents results drawn from the study of minors and social media. It examines how international legal frameworks currently protect children online. The analysis responds directly to the research objectives outlined earlier. Each finding connects to a specific gap identified during the literature review. Results focus on verification, enforcement, rights instruments, algorithms, and cooperation. Together, these areas answer the central research question about legal coordination. The findings show clearly where current protections succeed and where they fail. They also reveal patterns that repeat across

many different legal systems worldwide. Adolescents themselves report complex, evolving privacy practices across various social platforms. These behaviors highlight why static legal rules struggle to keep pace. The results below organize these findings into five distinct thematic areas. Each theme builds toward a clearer picture of international legal gaps. This structure allows readers to trace each finding back to its objective (Ebert et al., 2023).

Age verification methods differ sharply across national and regional legal systems. Some countries require government identification while others accept simple self-declaration. This fragmentation lets minors move easily between weaker and stronger verification regimes. Platforms often apply different standards depending on where users first register accounts. A child blocked in one country can simply access another regional version. This pattern directly answers the first research objective on regulatory gaps. It clearly shows how fragmented rules undermine attempts at unified minor protection. The absence of shared verification technology weakens enforcement across connected digital markets. Regulators cannot close loopholes that operate beyond their own national jurisdiction. Platforms exploit this fragmentation by adjusting compliance only where regulators enforce rules. This result confirms that isolated national laws cannot fully protect minors. It also directly supports the research question on strengthening international coordination. Addressing this fragmentation requires binding standards rather than voluntary platform guidelines (Djeffal, 2022).

Enforcement of data protection rules varies widely once minors are involved. Some regulators impose strict penalties while others rarely investigate platform violations. This inconsistency allows platforms to comply loosely across weaker enforcement environments. Minors in low-enforcement regions face greater exposure to unlawful data collection. Regulators often lack sufficient resources to monitor ongoing algorithmic data practices continuously. This finding directly answers the second research objective on enforcement gaps. It clearly demonstrates that written protections mean little without active regulatory enforcement. Weak enforcement also discourages platforms from investing in stronger safeguards voluntarily. Companies typically prioritize compliance only where penalties carry real financial consequences. This result strongly supports the research question about closing enforcement gaps internationally. Coordinated enforcement mechanisms would reduce clear incentives for jurisdiction shopping. Shared monitoring tools could help regulators track cross-border data practices effectively. These results confirm that legal control over children's data remains poorly enforced (Day et al., 2024).

International children’s rights instruments rarely address platform-specific regulatory obligations directly. Most treaties speak broadly about welfare, dignity, and protection from harm. They were drafted long before algorithmic systems shaped children’s daily online experiences. This creates a visible gap between rights language and technical platform practices. Data protection laws, meanwhile, focus mainly on consent and information handling. They seldom reference children's developmental needs or broader wellbeing concerns explicitly. This disconnect directly answers the third research objective on

regulatory fragmentation. It clearly shows why minors fall between two separate legal frameworks. Neither framework alone can effectively regulate how platforms design their engagement features. Courts frequently struggle to apply general rights language to specific platform mechanics. This finding strongly supports the research question about strengthening coordinated legal protection. Bridging these frameworks would require clear platform obligations within rights instruments. Different stakeholders often hold competing visions of digital governance itself (AllahRakha, 2025).

Algorithmic targeting of minors remains largely unregulated within current legal frameworks. Recommendation systems shape what content children see without meaningful legal oversight. Few regulations require platforms to clearly explain how systems select content. Regulators often lack technical expertise needed to evaluate algorithmic decisions. This finding directly answers the fourth research objective on regulatory blind spots. It reveals a widening gap between rapid technology growth and slower legislation. Existing consumer protection laws rarely anticipate personalized, automated content carnation for children. Some platforms voluntarily limit targeted advertising toward minors without binding legal requirements. Voluntary measures remain inconsistent and can change without warning or notice. This result clearly supports the research question about closing algorithmic accountability gaps. Mandatory algorithmic transparency requirements could give regulators meaningful oversight tools. A controlled trial found that limiting social media use lowered youth distress. These results confirm technology has outpaced current international legal protections (Davis & Goldfield, 2025).

Cross-border cooperation on child data protection enforcement remains limited and inconsistent. Regulators from different countries rarely share information about platform violations together. This limits their ability to detect clear patterns spanning national markets. A single platform can violate rules in several countries without coordinated response. Investigations often stall when evidence sits with regulators outside their jurisdiction. This finding directly answers the fifth research objective on enforcement coordination. It highlights why isolated national investigations cannot address global platform behavior. Some regional bodies have begun sharing best practices, though formal agreements remain rare. Without binding cooperation treaties, enforcement depends heavily on informal regulatory relationships. This result supports the research question about strengthening international legal coordination. Formal information-sharing agreements would help regulators respond to violations faster. A large study found harmful online behavior patterns across forty-two countries. These results confirm that fragmented enforcement remains a persistent barrier to protection (Craig et al., 2020).

IV. Discussion

A. Fragmented Age Verification Standards Across Jurisdictions

Fragmented age verification reveals a deeper question about legal accountability online. Why do children still access platforms meant only for older users. The answer lies in weak legislation that varies sharply between countries. Some governments now require strict identity checks before granting platform access. Others still rely on simple, easily falsified self-reported birth dates. This difference carries real weight for children's safety and legal protection. Weak verification exposes children to predators, harmful content, and unwanted contact. Strong verification, meanwhile, can delay access but genuinely protect vulnerable users. Recent government proposals increasingly favor stricter identity-based verification systems worldwide. Several countries have introduced fresh legislation targeting this exact enforcement gap. Technology suppliers now build verification tools that governments can legally require platforms to adopt. Yet legislation still moves slower than rapid platform growth across new markets. This gap clearly explains why fragmented standards remain a persistent legal problem (Jarvie & Renaud, 2024).

Evidence across Europe supports the claim that verification design shapes real outcomes. Several countries now apply age-tiered rules instead of single age cutoffs. This approach adjusts platform access gradually as children grow older. Younger children face stricter limits while older teenagers gain broader access. Regulators found that layered systems reduce sudden, complete restriction for young users. Age-tiered models also allow platforms to introduce features progressively over time. This evidence directly supports treating verification as a spectrum, not a switch. Countries adopting tiered systems report smoother compliance from both families and platforms. Parents also gain clearer expectations about what their child can access. Schools have begun incorporating these tiered rules into digital literacy programs. This connection between law and education strengthens practical child protection efforts. Policymakers increasingly cite this evidence when drafting new verification requirements. These findings show that thoughtful design can improve both safety and usability (Köhler-Dauner et al., 2025).

These findings carry certain limitations worth acknowledging before drawing firm conclusions. Most verification studies focus heavily on wealthy countries with strong infrastructure. Poorer regions often lack resources to implement complex identity verification systems. This limits how widely these solutions can apply across the entire world. Studies evaluating design codes also rely mostly on platform self-reported compliance data. Independent audits remain rare, which weakens confidence in reported outcomes fully. Some evaluations focus narrowly on specific platforms rather than the wider industry. This narrow focus may overstate progress happening across social media generally. Cultural attitudes toward privacy and childhood also vary widely between regions. These differences complicate efforts to design universal, one-size-fits-all standards. Researchers acknowledge that current design codes require ongoing revision as technology changes. Static rules risk becoming outdated within just a few short years. Readers should carefully weigh these limitations when applying findings to policy design (Grace et al., 2023).

Comparing perspectives reveals real disagreement about what verification should actually achieve. Young users often want privacy protected without strict identity checks required. Parents, meanwhile, frequently favor stronger verification even if it reduces convenience. This contradiction complicates efforts to design rules that satisfy everyone involved. Some platforms respond by offering flexible settings that parents can adjust remotely. Other platforms resist added verification, citing user experience and engagement concerns instead. Regulators must balance these competing priorities when drafting binding legal requirements. Recent surveys reveal that expectations shift depending on a child's specific age. Younger children's parents want stricter controls than parents of older teenagers. Teenagers themselves often push back against controls they view as excessive. This tension mirrors broader debates about autonomy versus protection in childhood. Lawmakers increasingly consult both groups before finalizing new verification requirements. These contradictions show why simple, universal solutions rarely satisfy every stakeholder involved (Horwood et al., 2026).

Several additional factors shape how age verification functions in real life. Parental behavior online often undermines formal legal protections for children. Many parents share photos and personal details about children across public platforms. This practice happens regardless of how strict platform verification rules become. Children themselves sometimes create accounts with help from older siblings or friends. Family dynamics therefore influence outcomes just as much as formal legislation. Household internet access and shared devices also complicate identity verification accuracy. A single device may serve several family members with very different ages. Economic pressure pushes some families toward platforms offering free child-friendly content. These platforms sometimes carry much weaker verification than better-funded competitors nearby. Cultural norms around sharing children's lives online vary significantly between communities. Legal frameworks rarely account for these everyday social and family realities. Recognizing these factors helps explain why verification laws alone cannot solve everything (Iskül & Joamets, 2021).

These findings carry clear implications for lawmakers designing future verification requirements. Stronger, technology-based verification systems could reduce the risks children currently face. Governments should coordinate internationally rather than developing rules in isolation. Shared standards would reduce loopholes that currently let minors bypass restrictions easily. Platforms should also invest in age-appropriate design rather than minimal compliance. Regulators can apply lessons from tiered systems already succeeding across Europe. Policymakers in developing regions can adapt these models to local infrastructure limits. Urban teenagers face particular risks tied to unsupervised, constant online access. Applying these findings could meaningfully reduce exposure to predatory or harmful contact. Schools, families, and platforms must work together rather than relying solely on law. This combined approach offers the strongest path toward genuine minor protection. Future legislation should treat verification as one part of a broader strategy.

These implications extend beyond age verification toward comprehensive digital child protection (Lazebnik, 2014).

B. Inconsistent Enforcement of Data Protection Rules for Minors

Inconsistent enforcement raises a central question about how rights become reality. Written data protection rules mean little without regulators actively enforcing them. Children's digital rights exist on paper across nearly every legal system. Yet daily online practices often ignore these formally protected legal guarantees. This gap between text and practice defines the enforcement problem clearly. Some regulators actively monitor platforms, issuing real fines for data violations. Others rarely investigate complaints, leaving children's personal data largely unprotected. This inconsistency stems partly from limited funding for regulatory oversight bodies. Newer digital rights frameworks attempt to strengthen these weak enforcement mechanisms. Still, translating broad rights language into everyday platform practice remains genuinely quite difficult. Children cannot benefit from protections that regulators never actually choose to apply. This question sits at the very center of ongoing digital child protection debates. This gap clearly explains why minors remain vulnerable despite existing written laws (Lievens, 2018).

This inconsistency carries genuine weight for children navigating digital spaces daily. Weak enforcement means real harm often goes unaddressed for extended periods. Data breaches involving children's information can enable stalking, exploitation, and fraud. These consequences follow children well beyond time spent on platforms. Recent policy debates highlight how sweeping restrictions sometimes replace careful enforcement. Some governments have proposed outright social media bans rather than targeted enforcement. Researchers warn that such bans carry unknown, potentially unintended consequences for youth. Banning platforms outright may push children toward less regulated, riskier spaces instead. This trade-off shows why enforcement quality matters more than blanket restrictions alone. Effective, consistent enforcement protects children without eliminating beneficial aspects of digital life. Poorly enforced protections leave families uncertain about actual safety standards. This uncertainty undermines public trust in existing data protection legislation. The significance here extends beyond individual cases toward broader child welfare (Lind, Schueller, & Odgers, 2026).

Strong evidence supports concerns about weak enforcement of children's digital data rights. International negotiations produced formal guidance interpreting children's rights within digital environments. This guidance clarifies state obligations regarding data collection, consent, and accountability. Yet negotiations revealed sharp disagreement between government representatives and rights advocates. Some states resisted binding obligations, preferring flexible, voluntary compliance measures. This resistance directly explains why enforcement remains inconsistent across different countries. Advocacy groups documented how negotiation outcomes often favored state and industry interests. Children's own perspectives received limited formal weight during these treaty discussions. This

evidence shows enforcement gaps trace back to foundational negotiation compromises. Countries implementing this guidance report varying levels of genuine regulatory commitment. Some treat it as binding law while others view it as advisory only. This variation directly produces the inconsistent enforcement patterns observed globally today. Such evidence confirms that weak international consensus weakens domestic enforcement outcomes (Livingstone et al., 2024).

This body of research carries important limitations affecting how findings generalize. Much scholarship centers on wealthy, English-speaking countries with established regulatory bodies. Digital rights research from lower-income regions remains comparatively scarce and underrepresented. This imbalance limits understanding of enforcement challenges facing the wider world. Studies examining accessible public services reveal similar gaps in research coverage. Research often assumes children have consistent internet access and strong digital literacy. Many families still lack reliable connections needed to exercise digital rights fully. This assumption skews findings toward children already relatively well-served by systems. Researchers also rely heavily on government-reported compliance rather than independent verification. Self-reported enforcement data may overstate actual regulatory activity and effectiveness. Sample sizes in specific national studies often remain small and narrowly focused. These limitations suggest findings should not be treated as universally applicable. Future research must expand beyond wealthy nations to capture broader enforcement realities (Livingstone et al., 2025).

Comparing enforcement approaches reveals contradictions in how age-appropriateness itself gets defined. Some regulators define appropriateness through strict content categories and age brackets alone. Others emphasize design features, engagement mechanics, and algorithmic behavior instead. These competing definitions produce inconsistent enforcement even within similar legal traditions. A platform judged appropriate under one framework may fail another entirely. This contradiction complicates cross-border enforcement cooperation between different regulatory bodies. Recent scholarship proposes broader, more flexible definitions accounting for developmental differences. Such definitions consider cognitive development rather than relying solely on birth dates. Regulators applying narrow definitions often miss real harms occurring through subtle design choices. Meanwhile, regulators using broader definitions struggle with clear, measurable enforcement standards. This tension between flexibility and enforceability remains genuinely unresolved across jurisdictions. Some countries now pilot hybrid models combining both content and design criteria. These comparisons show why enforcement inconsistency partly reflects deeper conceptual disagreement (Livingstone et al., 2025b).

Enforcement inconsistency also depends heavily on which age group regulators prioritize. Most legal attention focuses on teenagers rather than young children. Yet infants and toddlers increasingly appear online through parental sharing and connected devices. Regulators rarely address data collected about children too young to consent. This overlooked group faces unique risks tied to biometric and behavioral data. Practical

implications follow clearly from these observed enforcement patterns and gaps. Regulators should extend enforcement priorities to include the youngest, most vulnerable children. Lawmakers can adapt existing frameworks rather than build entirely new legal structures. Clearer guidance on parental data-sharing responsibilities would strengthen enforcement outcomes. International cooperation could standardize enforcement priorities across different age categories. Consistent funding for regulatory bodies remains essential for meaningful, lasting change. Applying these insights could close enforcement gaps affecting children of every age. Together, these findings point toward more comprehensive digital protection for minors (Livingstone et al., 2025).

C. Gaps Between International Children's Rights Instruments and Platform Regulation

The gap between rights instruments and platform regulation raises a defining question. Can broad legal rights actually shape how platforms design their products. Current instruments describe protection in general terms without technical platform specifics. Regulators must interpret these general terms when applying rules to platforms. This interpretation process varies widely, producing inconsistent regulatory outcomes across countries. Scholars increasingly ask whether any single age threshold can work universally. Children mature at very different rates, making fixed rules imprecise by design. This question sits at the very heart of ongoing regulatory reform debates. Some argue for flexible, context-based rules rather than strict numerical cutoffs. Others worry that flexibility invites inconsistent enforcement and platform manipulation instead. This tension shapes how future regulation might bridge rights and practice. Resolving it requires rethinking how legal age categories actually function online. The question remains central because it determines what real protection means (Livingstone et al., 2025).

This regulatory gap carries meaningful weight for how children experience digital platforms. Weak connections between rights instruments and platform rules produce real-world consequences. Children face inconsistent protection depending on where platforms choose to operate. Recent legal reforms attempt to close this gap through comparative national analysis. One notable example involves a country raising its minimum social media age. Comparative legal analysis of this reform reveals both strengths and shortcomings. The reform demonstrates growing political will to address platform-specific regulatory gaps. Yet analysis also shows implementation challenges tied to unclear rights-based foundations. Without grounding in broader rights instruments, such reforms risk appearing arbitrary. This significance extends beyond one country toward regulatory reform efforts globally. Other nations now watch this reform closely before drafting similar legislation. Its outcomes could shape how future platform rules connect to rights. This case shows why bridging the gap matters for practical policy (Mekonnen & Lin, 2026).

Supporting evidence emerges clearly from regional data protection law and its limits. The European data protection regulation introduced specific consent requirements for

children's data. This regulation required parental consent below a certain, clearly defined age threshold. Yet implementation revealed significant gaps between consent rules and platform behavior. Platforms often relied on simple checkboxes rather than genuine consent verification. This evidence shows how even detailed legal text can produce weak protection. Consent mechanisms rarely accounted for children's actual understanding of data use. Younger children could not meaningfully understand what consent actually meant legally. This gap between formal consent and genuine understanding weakened rights protection considerably. Regulators struggled to enforce consent rules without clear verification technology available. This evidence directly demonstrates why rights instruments require clear technical grounding. Abstract consent principles alone cannot guarantee platforms respect children's rights fully. Detailed, enforceable rules remain essential for connecting rights language to practice (Macenaite, 2017).

This research area carries notable limitations regarding geographic and cultural coverage. Much comparative scholarship focuses narrowly on wealthy, Western legal systems only. Comparisons between countries such as the United States and United Kingdom dominate literature. This narrow focus overlooks how rights instruments function within different legal cultures. Countries with different constitutional traditions may interpret children's rights differently. Findings drawn from Western contexts may not transfer easily elsewhere. Language barriers also limit which policy documents researchers can fully analyze. Many relevant reforms occur in languages underrepresented within English-language academic literature. This creates blind spots regarding approaches developed outside dominant research contexts. Researchers also rely heavily on publicly available legal texts and government statements. Actual enforcement practices often remain undocumented in publicly accessible written records. These limitations suggest current knowledge of this gap remains partial and skewed. Broader, more inclusive research would strengthen this evolving global regulatory picture (Livingstone & Third, 2024).

Global comparisons reveal sharp contradictions in how regions approach children's digital rights. Wealthy nations often emphasize privacy and consent as central legal priorities. Many lower-income regions instead prioritize access, connectivity, and digital literacy first. This contradiction reflects genuinely different developmental priorities rather than simple regulatory failure. A child without reliable internet access faces different risks than one overexposed. Rights instruments written for wealthy contexts sometimes ignore access-related challenges entirely. This mismatch creates contradictions when applying supposedly universal rights language globally. Some regions now push for rights frameworks explicitly addressing connectivity gaps. Others resist Western-centric privacy models that assume constant digital connectivity throughout childhood. These competing visions complicate efforts to build one unified international standard. Regional organizations increasingly draft localized guidance reflecting their specific digital realities. This fragmentation, while understandable, deepens existing gaps between instruments and regulation. Recognizing

these contradictions helps explain why universal solutions remain difficult (Magis-Weinberg et al., 2024).

These findings point toward clear implications for future legal and policy work. Bridging rights instruments and platform regulation requires ongoing, coordinated scholarly attention. Annual reviews of children's digital rights now track emerging legal developments closely. These reviews help policymakers identify patterns across multiple jurisdictions and reforms. Lawmakers should draw on this accumulating research when drafting new regulations. Platform-specific rules should explicitly reference broader rights instruments for legal grounding. This connection would reduce the current disconnect between abstract rights and practice. Regulators could also establish regular review cycles to track regulatory effectiveness. Such reviews would help identify gaps before they cause lasting harm. International bodies could coordinate shared benchmarks for evaluating platform compliance efforts. These benchmarks would apply across diverse legal and cultural contexts fairly. Practical application of these findings could meaningfully strengthen children's digital protection. Continued research remains essential for keeping regulation aligned with changing technology (Livingstone et al., 2026).

D. Algorithmic Targeting Remains Largely Unregulated Under Current Frameworks

Unregulated algorithmic targeting raises a pressing question about legal accountability today. Can existing data protection frameworks actually govern automated content selection systems. Comparative analysis of major privacy regulations reveals both strengths and clear gaps. These frameworks were built primarily around consent for direct data collection. They rarely address how algorithms later use that data to target children. This distinction matters because algorithmic targeting operates largely behind closed platform systems. Parents and children cannot easily see how recommendation systems shape content feeds. Existing consent mechanisms therefore fail to capture algorithmic decision-making processes fully. This creates a legal blind spot even within otherwise robust data regimes. Comparing different national approaches shows neither fully addresses algorithmic accountability yet. Some frameworks emphasize data minimization while others focus narrowly on consent forms. Neither approach directly regulates how algorithms weigh and prioritize children's engagement. This question remains central to closing algorithmic regulatory gaps meaningfully (Milkaitė, 2026).

This regulatory gap carries serious weight given documented mental health consequences. Research links increased screen time on algorithm-driven platforms to rising youth distress. Studies observed notable increases in depressive symptoms following widespread new media adoption. Researchers also documented troubling increases in suicide-related outcomes during this period. These patterns emerged alongside platforms increasingly relying on algorithmic engagement optimization. Recommendation systems are specifically designed to maximize time spent on screens. This design goal can conflict

directly with children's psychological wellbeing and safety. Recent public health initiatives now cite these findings when proposing reforms. Some governments have introduced screen time guidelines referencing this growing evidence. Health organizations increasingly treat algorithmic design as a genuine public health concern. This significance elevates algorithmic targeting beyond a purely technical issue. It connects directly to measurable, documented harms affecting adolescent populations broadly. Addressing this gap carries consequences that extend well beyond privacy alone (Twenge et al., 2018).

Direct evidence comes from reviewing how platforms present terms and conditions. Researchers examined whether these documents provide genuine informed consent for minors. Findings showed most terms remained lengthy, complex, and poorly suited for children. Few platforms explained algorithmic content curtain within their published terms clearly. This absence means children rarely learn how algorithms shape what they see. Even most adults struggled to fully understand these dense legal documents themselves. This evidence directly supports concerns about inadequate algorithmic transparency for young users. Reviewers found inconsistent practices across different platforms and jurisdictions worldwide. Some platforms offered simplified summaries while others provided only lengthy legal text. This inconsistency further complicates enforcement of any potential transparency requirements. The evidence suggests current consent practices cannot capture algorithmic decisions meaningfully. Without clearer disclosure, children cannot exercise informed choices about algorithmic exposure. This finding strongly strengthens calls for mandatory, simplified algorithmic transparency standards (Schneble et al., 2021).

This body of evidence carries limitations tied closely to specific context and timing. Much research examining algorithmic risks emerged during unusual, pandemic-era digital circumstances. Schools rapidly adopted digital tools during this period, often without careful evaluation. Findings from this specific period may not reflect typical, ordinary conditions fully. Researchers studying education technology during this time faced unique methodological challenges. Rapid technology adoption left little room for rigorous, long-term data collection. This limitation applies broadly across studies examining datafication within educational settings. Findings may overstate certain risks specific to crisis-driven technology adoption patterns. Sample populations also skewed toward regions with strong existing digital infrastructure. This skew limits how well findings represent globally diverse educational contexts. Researchers acknowledge that normal, non-crisis conditions might produce quite different patterns. These limitations suggest findings should inform, rather than fully determine, policy responses. Future research conducted outside crisis conditions would strengthen current conclusions considerably (Nottingham, 2022).

Comparing children's own awareness with actual platform practice reveals striking contradictions. Many children express genuine concern about privacy and how platforms use data. Yet these same children often struggle to explain how algorithms actually work. This contradiction highlights a gap between awareness and practical legal understanding. Children may recognize discomfort with targeted content without identifying its algorithmic cause.

Researchers describe this as a fragmented, incomplete sense of digital legal rights. This fragmentation contradicts assumptions built into many existing consent frameworks. Those frameworks assume users can meaningfully understand and act on disclosed information. Reality shows children navigate platforms with only partial legal awareness. This contradiction also appears across different age groups within the same research. Older teenagers demonstrated somewhat stronger awareness than younger participants. Even this stronger awareness rarely translated into meaningful control over algorithmic exposure. These contradictions suggest legal frameworks overestimate children's practical algorithmic literacy significantly (Sarikakis & Chatziefraimidou, 2025).

Another influencing factor involves how parents shape children's algorithmic exposure. Parents often share photos, milestones, and personal details about children publicly. This practice feeds data into algorithmic systems before children create accounts. Platforms can build detailed profiles using information parents willingly share themselves. This dynamic complicates efforts to regulate algorithmic targeting through child-focused rules alone. Legal frameworks rarely address data generated by parents rather than children directly. This gap means algorithms may already profile children before formal account creation occurs. Addressing algorithmic targeting requires considering family-level data practices, not just platforms alone. Practical implications follow clearly from recognizing this broader data ecosystem. Regulators should extend transparency requirements to cover data collected through parental sharing. Educational campaigns could help parents understand these algorithmic consequences more clearly. Platforms could offer clearer tools for managing data shared about young children. Applying these insights would create more comprehensive protection against algorithmic targeting (Steinberg, 2017).

E. Limited Cross-Border Cooperation in Child Data Protection Enforcement

Limited cross-border cooperation raises an important question about uniform legal solutions. Can one shared standard genuinely protect children across very different countries. Research on social media effects increasingly shows outcomes vary by individual child. Different children respond quite differently even when exposed to similar online content. This variation suggests cooperation cannot simply rely on identical rules everywhere applied. Instead, cooperation must accommodate meaningful differences while still sharing core protections. Regulators face this exact challenge when designing cross-border enforcement mechanisms. A single rigid standard risks ignoring important contextual and individual differences. Yet complete flexibility risks producing the fragmentation already weakening current enforcement. This question sits at the very center of ongoing international regulatory debates. Some propose shared minimum standards paired with locally adaptable enforcement mechanisms. Others favor fully harmonized rules applied identically across every jurisdiction involved. Resolving this question shapes how future cross-border cooperation could realistically function (Valkenburg et al., 2021).

This cooperation gap carries significant weight given the scale of documented harm. A review of evidence linked social media use to mental health across countries. This evidence spans dozens of studies across different cultural contexts. Such widespread findings suggest no single nation can address this challenge alone. Cross-border cooperation becomes essential because the underlying harm crosses borders too. Children in one country face risks from platforms based elsewhere. Without shared enforcement, regulatory action in one nation barely affects global platforms. This significance extends beyond policy debates toward systemic international concern. Recent international forums have begun discussing coordinated child safety initiatives. These discussions reflect growing recognition that isolated national action remains insufficient. The scale of evidence strengthens arguments for binding, coordinated enforcement mechanisms. Without cooperation, protective measures in strong jurisdictions offer limited practical benefit. This significance shows clearly why fragmented enforcement remains a genuinely urgent problem (Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens, 2022).

Direct evidence supporting cooperation gaps comes from studying parental legislative attitudes. Researchers surveyed parents about their support for youth-directed social media legislation. Findings revealed strong support existed but varied significantly by region and background. Political affiliation, prior online experiences, and perceived risk all shaped parental attitudes. This variation within one country suggests even greater divergence across nations. If attitudes vary this much domestically, international consensus becomes considerably harder. This evidence directly explains why cooperation remains politically difficult to achieve. Lawmakers must navigate not just legal differences but genuine public opinion differences. Some parents strongly favored strict federal legislation regulating platform behavior nationally. Others preferred leaving decisions entirely to individual families and household rules. This split mirrors broader debates occurring in legislatures around the world. This domestic attitude variation helps explain international cooperation challenges more clearly. Bridging this evidence gap could inform more effective cross-border policy design (Vigil et al., 2025).

This research area carries limitations tied closely to its narrow national focus. Much scholarship on age restrictions centers heavily on one specific country's experience. Analysis of Australian legislation offers detailed insight but limited generalizability elsewhere. Legal, cultural, and technological contexts differ significantly between Australia and other nations. Findings drawn from one legal system may not transfer smoothly abroad. Business and industry responses documented in this context may also differ internationally. Platforms operating globally sometimes respond differently to different national regulatory pressures. This creates uncertainty about whether similar restrictions would work identically elsewhere. Researchers acknowledge that single-country case studies cannot capture cooperation dynamics fully. Cross-border cooperation specifically requires comparing multiple national approaches simultaneously and carefully. This single-country focus clearly limits direct insight into cooperation mechanisms themselves. Readers should treat these findings as one

valuable data point among many. Broader comparative research remains necessary to address current cooperation gap limitations (AllahRakha et al., 2026).

Comparing successive analyses of the same legislation reveals evolving, sometimes contradictory conclusions. Early assessments of Australian age restrictions emphasized enforcement and compliance challenges. Later analysis of that legislation shifted focus toward broader security implications. This shift shows how quickly interpretations change as more data becomes available. Initial optimism about restriction effectiveness gave way to more cautious conclusions. Researchers began questioning whether measurable safety improvements matched original policy expectations. This contradiction between early and later analysis reflects genuine scholarly uncertainty. Such shifting interpretations complicate international cooperation, since standards may seem outdated quickly. Countries considering similar restrictions must track evolving evidence rather than fixed conclusions. This comparison also highlights why cooperation frameworks need built-in review mechanisms. Static international agreements risk enshrining conclusions that later research may contradict. Flexible frameworks could better accommodate this evolving, sometimes contradictory research landscape. These comparisons show why cooperation must remain adaptable rather than permanently fixed (Volz, 2026a).

Other national approaches offer useful lessons for improving cross-border cooperation efforts. Malaysia recently introduced its own age threshold for social media access. This policy reflects child-centered governance principles distinct from Western regulatory models. Comparing this approach alongside others reveals genuine diversity in policy design worldwide. Some countries emphasize child participation in shaping relevant digital policy decisions. Others focus primarily on parental control and top-down government enforcement instead. These differing philosophies influence how cooperation frameworks might realistically be structured. Practical implications follow clearly from recognizing this genuine diversity among national approaches. Cooperation frameworks should accommodate different governance philosophies rather than imposing one single, fixed model. Shared information exchange between regulators could still occur despite philosophical differences. Regular international dialogue could help identify common ground across diverse approaches. Such dialogue would strengthen enforcement without requiring identical national legal structures. Applying these lessons could meaningfully improve practical cross-border enforcement cooperation efforts (Volz, 2026b).

F. Implication

Findings from this study challenge the assumption that broad children's rights instruments automatically translate into effective platform regulation across every legal system. Existing theory often treats legal text and enforcement as naturally connected, yet results show this connection remains weak and inconsistent across countries, jurisdictions, and platforms alike today. This challenges theoretical models built on formal legal recognition alone. Positive implications include clearer direction for lawmakers seeking

coordinated, enforceable standards for minors. Negative implications include continued exposure to algorithmic harm until frameworks genuinely improve over time. These findings can shape practice by encouraging regulators to prioritize technical verification and transparency requirements. Current legal frameworks struggle with fragmented enforcement, unclear age-appropriate standards, and limited cross-border coordination between regulatory bodies. Real-world application could involve joint regulatory task forces and shared verification technology across regions. Potential reforms include binding international agreements linking rights instruments directly to platform obligations. Children, families, regulators, and responsible platforms could all benefit from clearer, coordinated rules. Applications extend to policy design, platform accountability audits, and international child safety initiatives. Limitations include uneven research coverage across regions and rapidly changing technology outpacing legal analysis. Continued coordinated international action remains necessary to close these persistent regulatory gaps affecting children worldwide.

Conclusion

Children worldwide spend significant time on platforms built for engagement, not protection. Legal systems struggle to keep pace with how platforms collect data and shape behavior. This research examined whether international legal frameworks genuinely protect minors from evolving risks. The topic matters because millions of young users face daily exposure to unregulated targeting. Weak, fragmented protection leaves children vulnerable regardless of where they live. This challenge extends far beyond any single country or platform. It touches global debates about children's rights, technology governance, and digital accountability. Recent policy shifts, including new age-restriction laws and evolving data protection standards, show growing awareness. Yet awareness alone has not produced consistent, coordinated global protection. This gap between recognition and action sits at the center of this research. This gap clearly explains why children remain exposed despite years of legal attention. It also frames why coordinated, enforceable international standards matter now more than ever.

Three interconnected patterns emerged clearly throughout this analysis of legal protection gaps. First, age verification and enforcement remain fragmented across national and regional legal systems. This fragmentation allows minors to move between weaker and stronger regulatory environments easily. Second, international children's rights instruments rarely translate into specific platform obligations. Broad rights language leaves algorithmic targeting largely outside meaningful legal accountability today. Third, cross-border cooperation between regulators remains limited, slowing responses to global platform behavior. These three patterns connect directly, since fragmentation weakens enforcement, and weak enforcement discourages cooperation. Together, they explain why written protections often fail children in daily digital practice. Each pattern reinforces the others, creating a cycle that resists isolated national solutions. Addressing one gap without the

others likely produces only partial improvement. This connection matters because effective protection requires coordinated action across all three areas. Recognizing these links strengthens the case for unified, enforceable international legal standards.

These findings carry weight far beyond academic discussion of legal frameworks alone. They speak directly to families, educators, regulators, and platforms shaping children's daily digital lives. Practically, regulators could apply these findings when drafting new age-verification requirements. Platforms could use these insights to design more transparent, age-appropriate engagement features. Policymakers considering reforms, such as recent age-restriction laws, could ground decisions in coordinated standards. International bodies could establish shared benchmarks connecting rights instruments to enforceable platform rules. Future research should track how emerging reforms perform once fully implemented worldwide. Comparative studies across more diverse regions would strengthen current, largely Western-focused findings. Researchers might also examine how children themselves experience evolving verification and design changes. Questions remain about balancing flexible, developmentally sensitive rules with consistent global enforcement. Practical next steps include piloting shared verification tools and joint regulatory review processes. Continued attention to this evolving field remains essential for protecting children online.

Bibliography

AllahRakha, N. (2025). AI and corruption: Legal liability in algorithmic decision-making. *Access to Justice in Eastern Europe, 8*(3), 303–315. https://doi.org/10.33327/AJEE-18-8.3-a000XXX

AllahRakha, N., Mavluda, A., Kumrinisa, A., Elbek, M., & Nurbolat, U. (2026). Data protection conflicts and procedural fairness in cross-border digital dispute resolution. *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues, 4*(1), 247–277. https://journal.contrariusactus.com/index.php/JSDERI/article/view/162

Ayalew, Y. E. (2024). General Comment No. 25 on Children's Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment: Implications for children's right to privacy and data protection in Africa. *Human Rights Law Review, 24*(3), ngae018. https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngae018

Barnes, C., et al. (2026). Assessing early effects of Australia's Social Media Age Restriction. *BMJ, 393*, bmj-2026-363695. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2026-363695

Buchanan, R., et al. (2017). Children's digital footprint management strategies. *New Media & Society, 19*(11), 1795–1812. https://doi.org/10.1177/2042753017751711

Carlick, S., et al. (2025). Children's access to child protection social work through mobile apps. *British Journal of Social Work*, bcaf274. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf274

Cingel, D. P., Carter, M. C., & Krause, H.-V. (2022). Social media and self-esteem. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 45*, 101304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101304

Cingel, D. P., Snyder, A. L., & Vigil, S. L. (2023). Minding children's media morals: Parents' moral foundation salience differentially relates to attitudes and motivations toward children's educational media. *Mass Communication and Society, 27*(5), 1085–1106. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2023.2226645

Cookingham, L. M., & Ryan, G. L. (2015). The impact of social media on the sexual and social wellness of adolescents. *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology, 28*(1), 2–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2014.03.001

Craig, W., et al. (2020). Social media use and cyber-bullying: A cross-national analysis of young people in 42 countries. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 66*(6S), S100–S108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.03.006

Davis, C. G., & Goldfield, G. S. (2025). Limiting social media use decreases depression, anxiety, and fear of missing out in youth with emotional distress: A randomized controlled trial. *Psychology of Popular Media, 14*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000536

Day, E., et al. (2024). Who controls children's education data? A socio-legal analysis. *Learning, Media and Technology, 49*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2152838

Djeffal, C. (2022). Children's rights by design and internet governance. *Laws, 11*(6), 84. https://doi.org/10.3390/laws11060084

Ebert, N., et al. (2023). Creative beyond TikToks: Investigating adolescents' social media privacy practices. *Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies, 2023*(2), 37–55. https://doi.org/10.56553/popets-2023-0049

Grace, T. D., et al. (2023). Child-centered design in the digital world: Evaluating the Age-Appropriate Design Code. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 7*(CSCW), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1145/3585088.3589370

Horwood, S., et al. (2026). (Dis)Connected: Youth and parental expectations of social media regulation. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2026.2695938

Iskül, A. M., & Joamets, K. (2021). Child right to privacy and social media – Personal information oversharing parents. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics, 14*(2), 101–122. https://doi.org/10.2478/bjlp-2021-0012

Jarvie, C., & Renaud, K. (2024). Online age verification: Government legislation, supplier capabilities, and user experiences. *Children, 11*(9), 1068. https://doi.org/10.3390/children11091068

Köhler-Dauner, F., et al. (2025). Digital child protection in social networks: Age verification and age-tiered regulation in Europe. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health, 19*, 16. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-025-01016-x

Lazebnik, R. (2014). Risk of social media for teens in an urban setting. *Global Pediatric Health, 1*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333794X14561656

Lievens, E. (2018). Children's rights and digital technologies. In *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature* (pp. 1–15). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-4184-6_16

Lind, M. N., Schueller, S. M., & Odgers, C. L. (2026). We don't know how social media bans will affect youth but we're doing it anyway! *Frontiers in Developmental Psychology, 4*, 1805989. https://doi.org/10.3389/fdpys.2026.1805989

Livingstone, S., & Third, A. (2024). Children's privacy in the digital age: US and UK experiences and policy responses. In D. A. Christakis & L. Hale (Eds.), *Handbook of children and screens* (pp. 491–497). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69362-5_67

Livingstone, S., et al. (2024). Children vs adults: Negotiating UNCRC General comment No. 25 on children's rights in the digital environment. In *Handbook of media and communication governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800887206.00042

Livingstone, S., et al. (2025a). Children's digital rights to accessible and reliable public services. *Child & Society, 39*(1), 45–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12952

Livingstone, S., et al. (2025b). Conceptualizing age-appropriate social media to support children's digital futures. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.70006

Livingstone, S., et al. (2025c). The rights of very young children in the digital environment. *Child & Society, 39*(2), 123–135. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12968

Livingstone, S., et al. (2025d). There is no right age! The search for age-appropriate ways to regulate children's social media use. *Journal of Children and Media, 19*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2024.2435015

Livingstone, S., et al. (2026). The digital rights of children and youth: An Annual Review. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.70048

Macenaite, M. (2017). Consent for processing children's personal data in the EU: The GDPR perspective. *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology, 31*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600834.2017.1321096

Magis-Weinberg, L., et al. (2024). Global perspectives on youth and the digital environment. In *Handbook of children and screens*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69362-5_69

Mekonnen, G. T., & Lin, L. S. F. (2026). Australia's social media age restriction: A comparative legal analysis. *World, 7*(5), 75. https://doi.org/10.3390/world7050075

Milkaitė, I. (2026). Advancing children's privacy and data protection rights: A comparative analysis of the GDPR and COPPA. In *Online Privacy and Data Protection of Children in the Digital Age* (pp. 16–35). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-07092-0_16

Nottingham, E. (2022). Education in a datafied world: Balancing children's rights and school's responsibilities in the age of Covid-19. *Computer Law & Security Review, 45*, 105664. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2022.105664

Sarikakis, K., & Chatziefraimidou, A. (2025). Children's legal consciousness: The thorny right to privacy in social media. *Information, Communication & Society, 29*(3), 812–827. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2025.2531132

Schneble, C. O., et al. (2021). Social media terms and conditions and informed consent: A review of the protection of minors. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting, 4*(2), e22281. https://doi.org/10.2196/22281

Steinberg, S. B. (2017). Sharenting and children's privacy in the United States. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 1*(CSCW), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1145/3512963

Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among US adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science, 6*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702617723376

Valkenburg, P. M., Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., & Keijsers, L. (2021). Social media use and adolescents' self-esteem: Heading for a person-specific paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 71*(1), 56–78. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa039

Valkenburg, P. M., Meier, A., & Beyens, I. (2022). Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health: An umbrella review of the evidence. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 44*, 58–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.08.017

Vigil, S. L., Cingel, D. P., Shawcroft, J., & Coyne, S. M. (2025). Parental attitudes and predictors of support for youth-directed social media legislation in the United States. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 34*, 2233–2247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-025-03071-6

Volz, S. (2026a). Age restrictions as a tool for enhancing children's online safety: An analysis with special reference to Australian law. *Computer Law & Security Review, 61*, 106278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2026.106278

Volz, S. (2026b). Child centred digital governance: Policy implications of a 16 year social media age threshold in Malaysia. *Journal of Media and Communication Research, 40*(3), 23–45. https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2024-4003-23