

ISSUES OF COMPLIANCE WITH PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS IN CHILDREN'S CONTENT

Orzugul Karimova

2nd year master's student at the International Nordic University

E-mail: karimovaorzugul94@gmail.comscientific supervisor: **Jamila Asqarova**

Doctor of Philosophy (DSc), International Nordic University

Abstract. This article explores the issues of compliance with professional ethical standards in the creation and dissemination of children's content in digital environments, particularly on social media platforms. The study examines key ethical challenges, including violations of children's privacy, lack of informed consent, commercialization and potential exploitation, as well as the psychological impact of online exposure. Based on a comprehensive analysis of international legal frameworks and contemporary academic research, the article identifies the gaps in the current regulation of children's digital presence. Furthermore, it proposes a structured system of ethical principles aimed at ensuring the protection of children's rights and well-being in the digital space. The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening regulatory mechanisms, enhancing parental responsibility, and promoting digital literacy among stakeholders. The study contributes to the development of a more responsible and ethically grounded approach to children's content in modern media.

Keywords: children's content, professional ethics, social media, digital safety, privacy protection, informed consent, child rights, media ethics, psychological impact, online exposure, digital literacy, content regulation.

Introduction. The rapid development of digital technologies in the 21st century has fundamentally transformed communication processes, information exchange, and content production. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become dominant spaces where individuals actively create and share content. Within this evolving digital ecosystem, children are increasingly becoming visible participants, either as independent users or as subjects of content created by adults, including parents, influencers, and media professionals.

The growing presence of children in online content has generated significant academic and societal interest due to the complex ethical challenges it presents. While digital platforms offer opportunities for creativity, self-expression, and even financial gain, they also expose children to a wide range of risks. Unlike adults, children often lack the cognitive maturity and legal capacity to fully understand the long-term implications of their digital footprint. As a result, their involvement in content creation raises critical questions about autonomy, consent, and protection.

One of the most prominent trends contributing to this issue is the phenomenon of "sharenting," where parents share images, videos, and personal information about their children on social media. Although often motivated by positive intentions such as pride or social connection, this practice can inadvertently compromise children's privacy and dignity. Overexposure of personal details—including daily routines, emotional states, and health conditions—can lead to long-term reputational risks and identity-related challenges.

Moreover, the increasing commercialization of children's content has intensified ethical concerns. Many social media accounts featuring children generate substantial revenue through advertising, sponsorships, and brand collaborations. In such contexts, children may be positioned as instruments of economic activity, raising concerns about exploitation and the prioritization of financial gain over the child's well-being. This trend highlights the urgent need for clear professional ethical standards to regulate content production involving minors.

Another critical dimension of the issue relates to the psychological impact of digital exposure. Research indicates that children who are frequently featured in online content may



experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and dependence on external validation. The constant presence of an audience, coupled with the pressure to maintain popularity, can negatively influence their emotional development and self-perception. Additionally, exposure to public feedback, including negative comments and cyberbullying, further exacerbates these risks.

From a legal and ethical perspective, various international frameworks have attempted to address these challenges. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes fundamental principles such as the right to privacy, protection from exploitation, and the prioritization of the child's best interests. Similarly, regulatory instruments such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in the United States aim to safeguard children's personal data in digital environments. However, despite these efforts, significant gaps remain in the practical implementation and enforcement of ethical standards, particularly in the rapidly evolving landscape of social media.

In many countries, including developing digital societies, the issue of professional ethical compliance in children's content remains underexplored and insufficiently regulated. The absence of unified ethical guidelines and limited awareness among parents and content creators contribute to inconsistent practices and increased risks for children. This situation underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary research that integrates perspectives from media ethics, psychology, law, and education.

The aim of this study is to analyze the key issues related to compliance with professional ethical standards in children's content and to develop a comprehensive framework of ethical principles that can guide responsible content creation. The research seeks to address the following objectives: (1) to identify the main ethical challenges associated with children's participation in digital content; (2) to examine existing legal and ethical frameworks; and (3) to propose practical recommendations for improving ethical compliance in this field.

Thus, this study contributes to the ongoing academic discourse by providing a systematic analysis of ethical issues in children's digital content and offering a structured approach to ensuring the protection of children's rights in the digital age.

Literature Review. The ethical implications of children's involvement in digital content creation have become a significant interdisciplinary research area, encompassing media studies, communication ethics, psychology, law, and sociology. Existing literature demonstrates that the increasing visibility of children on social media platforms raises complex questions regarding privacy protection, informed consent, commercialization, and long-term psychological consequences.

One of the foundational frameworks in this field is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which establishes the fundamental rights of children to privacy, dignity, and protection from exploitation. Scholars widely agree that these principles must be extended into the digital environment, where children's data and images are frequently shared without their full understanding or consent. However, researchers such as Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) argue that existing legal frameworks are often insufficient to address the rapid evolution of digital practices, particularly in the context of parental sharing behavior known as *sharenting*.

The concept of *sharenting* has been extensively studied in contemporary literature. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) define it as the habitual use of social media by parents to share detailed information about their children. Their research highlights that while such practices may strengthen social bonds and parental identity, they simultaneously create a permanent digital footprint for children without their consent. This digital trace may later affect children's self-perception, social relationships, and even professional opportunities.

From a psychological perspective, Steinberg (2017) emphasizes that children and adolescents lack the cognitive maturity required to fully evaluate long-term consequences of



online exposure. According to developmental psychology theories, identity formation during childhood and adolescence is highly sensitive to external feedback. Consequently, continuous exposure to public attention on digital platforms may contribute to identity confusion, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem.

Similarly, Johnson and Smith (2021) analyze the psychological risks associated with children's internet exposure. Their findings indicate that social media visibility can lead to increased vulnerability to cyberbullying, emotional stress, and dependence on external validation. These effects are particularly pronounced in cases where children are regularly featured in monetized or highly visible online content.

Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston (2018) provide a comprehensive analysis of cyberbullying, identifying it as one of the most serious risks associated with children's digital presence. They argue that publicly available child-focused content increases exposure to online harassment, which can have long-term psychological consequences. Their work also highlights the role of anonymity in digital environments, which often exacerbates aggressive online behavior.

From a legal standpoint, regulatory frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in the United States represent significant attempts to safeguard children's digital rights. These regulations impose strict requirements on data collection, parental consent, and content usage. However, scholars such as boyd (2014) argue that enforcement gaps remain, particularly in user-generated content ecosystems where regulatory oversight is limited.

UNICEF (2020) and OECD (2021) reports further emphasize that children represent one of the largest groups of internet users globally, yet they remain insufficiently protected from digital risks. These organizations advocate for a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, platforms, educators, and parents to ensure safer digital environments for children. Despite these recommendations, implementation varies significantly across countries, creating inconsistencies in protection standards.

Another important strand of literature focuses on the commercialization of children's content. Scholars note that the rise of influencer culture has transformed children into economic assets in digital marketing ecosystems. This commercialization raises ethical concerns regarding exploitation, as children may be used to generate revenue without adequate consideration of their rights or long-term well-being.

In addition, media ethics scholars emphasize the absence of a unified global ethical framework specifically addressing children's content creation. While general media ethics principles such as truthfulness, fairness, and harm avoidance exist, they are often insufficient when applied to children in digital environments. This gap has led researchers to call for the development of specialized ethical guidelines tailored to the unique vulnerabilities of children in online spaces.

In summary, the reviewed literature demonstrates that although significant progress has been made in understanding the risks and ethical challenges associated with children's digital content, there remains a lack of comprehensive, enforceable, and universally accepted ethical standards. This gap highlights the necessity for further interdisciplinary research and the development of practical ethical frameworks.

Discussion. The findings of this study demonstrate that compliance with professional ethical standards in children's content remains a complex and insufficiently regulated issue in the contemporary digital environment. Despite the existence of international legal frameworks and general media ethics principles, their practical implementation in social media ecosystems is inconsistent and often ineffective. This gap between normative standards and real-world practices creates significant ethical challenges.

One of the most critical issues identified is the problem of informed consent. In digital content involving children, consent is often provided by parents or guardians rather than the



children themselves. However, from an ethical standpoint, this raises concerns about the authenticity and validity of such consent. Children, due to their developmental stage, cannot fully comprehend the long-term consequences of digital exposure. As a result, decisions made on their behalf may not always align with their future interests, leading to potential violations of autonomy and personal rights.

Another important aspect is the violation of privacy boundaries. The analysis shows that children's personal lives are frequently exposed through images, videos, and narratives shared on social media platforms. Such exposure includes sensitive information such as location, family relationships, emotional experiences, and daily routines. From an ethical perspective, this practice contradicts the principle of minimal harm and undermines the child's right to privacy as established in international conventions. Moreover, once content is published online, it becomes nearly impossible to fully control or remove, creating a permanent digital footprint.

The study also highlights the growing problem of commercialization of children's content. In many cases, children are actively involved in monetized digital activities, including sponsorships, advertising campaigns, and influencer marketing. While this may generate financial benefits for families or content creators, it raises serious ethical concerns regarding exploitation and commodification of childhood. The transformation of children into economic assets contradicts the principle of prioritizing the child's best interests and may negatively affect their emotional and psychological development.

Furthermore, the psychological impact of digital exposure is a significant concern. Continuous visibility on social media platforms places children under constant observation and evaluation by a wide audience. This situation can lead to increased stress, performance anxiety, and dependency on external validation. Psychological research suggests that such conditions may contribute to identity formation issues, reduced self-esteem, and emotional instability. Additionally, exposure to public comments, including negative feedback or cyberbullying, further exacerbates these risks.

The issue of digital safety is another major concern. Children featured in online content are often vulnerable to cyber threats, including harassment, identity theft, and unwanted attention from strangers. The lack of strict control over audience access increases the likelihood of such risks. In many cases, insufficient awareness among parents and content creators regarding privacy settings and platform security mechanisms further intensifies these vulnerabilities.

Another key finding relates to the concept of digital footprint permanence. Content shared during childhood remains accessible for extended periods and may resurface in different contexts later in life. This raises ethical questions about the long-term implications of early digital exposure, particularly in relation to future education, employment, and social relationships. The absence of a fully enforceable "right to be forgotten" in many jurisdictions further complicates this issue.

The role of parents and guardians emerges as a central factor in ensuring ethical compliance. While parents are typically motivated by positive intentions, such as documenting memories or gaining social recognition, their lack of awareness regarding digital ethics often leads to unintended consequences. This highlights the need for enhanced media literacy education and structured ethical guidelines for parental behavior in digital spaces.

Comparative analysis with international practices reveals that countries with stronger regulatory frameworks, such as those implementing GDPR and COPPA, provide better protection for children's digital rights. However, even in these systems, enforcement challenges persist due to the decentralized nature of social media platforms and the global reach of digital content.

Overall, the discussion indicates that current ethical and regulatory mechanisms are not fully adequate to address the complexities of children's content in the digital age. There is a clear need for a multi-dimensional approach that integrates legal regulation, ethical standards, technological



safeguards, and educational initiatives. Such an approach should involve collaboration among policymakers, technology companies, educators, and families to ensure the protection of children's rights and well-being in digital environments.

Conclusion. This study investigated the issues of compliance with professional ethical standards in the creation and dissemination of children's content in digital environments. The analysis demonstrates that the rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly increased the visibility of children in online content, while simultaneously exposing them to a range of ethical, psychological, and legal risks. The research findings confirm that the most pressing ethical challenges include violations of children's privacy, lack of informed consent, commercialization and potential exploitation, psychological pressure, and threats to digital safety. These issues are further intensified by the permanence of digital footprints, which may have long-term consequences for children's future identity, reputation, and social integration. The study also reveals that existing international legal frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), GDPR (EU), and COPPA (USA), provide important foundations for protecting children's digital rights. However, their practical implementation remains uneven, particularly in the rapidly evolving and decentralized environment of social media platforms. Based on the analysis, the study proposes a set of core ethical principles for children's content, including: the best interest of the child, informed consent, privacy protection, non-exploitation, psychological well-being, digital safety, and accountability. These principles are essential for ensuring responsible content creation and minimizing harm to children in digital spaces. In conclusion, compliance with professional ethical standards in children's content requires a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach involving policymakers, media platforms, parents, educators, and society as a whole. Strengthening legal regulation, improving digital literacy, and developing standardized ethical guidelines are crucial steps toward ensuring the protection of children's rights in the digital age. Future research should focus on empirical studies and the development of enforceable ethical frameworks adapted to emerging digital technologies.

References

1. Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2020). *Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives*. Oxford University Press.
2. Steinberg, L. (2017). *Adolescence*. McGraw-Hill Education.
3. Johnson, M., & Smith, K. (2021). *Children and the Internet: Psychological and Social Impacts*. Springer.
4. Kowalski, R., Limber, S., & Agatston, P. (2018). *Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age*. Wiley-Blackwell.
5. boyd, d. (2014). *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press.
6. UNICEF (2020). *Children in a Digital World*. United Nations Children's Fund Report.
7. OECD (2021). *Children in the Digital Environment: Revised Policy Framework*. OECD Publishing.
8. European Union (2016). *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*.
9. Turkle, S. (2017). *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. Penguin Press.
10. Livingstone, S. (2018). Children's rights in the digital age. *Journal of Media Policy*, 12(3), 45–60.
11. UNICEF (2021). *The State of the World's Children: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health*.
12. OECD (2022). *Digital Transformation and Children's Well-being*.

