Chapter 6
A Safe Digital Future:
An Integrated Approach to Parental Controls in Social Media and Gaming Platforms

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ABSTRACT

In the fast-paced modern world, highly driven by the internet, children and adolescents are more exposed to the risks associated with social media and online gaming. While parental control tools exist across various platforms, their effectiveness remains fragmented due to improper implementation, technological limitations, and evolving online threats. This chapter explores an integrated approach to parental controls in social media and gaming environments, aiming to create a safer digital future for children. It examines the existing parental control mechanisms across social media and gaming platforms, highlighting their strengths, limitations and adaptability to emerging risks such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and online predators. This chapter proposes a strategic framework that combines AI-driven moderation, cross-platform integration, and parental education to enhance digital safety. Attempting to achieve a balance between protecting children, fostering digital literacy and empowering parents with mechanisms to safeguard children in an evolving digital landscape.

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern world the digital landscape is evolving rapidly. This change in the landscape has greatly affected children as social media and gaming platforms are becoming a central part of their lives. Currently, children are spending unprecedented time online, engaging with various social media and gaming platforms not only for entertainment but also educational opportunities. With the advent of the covid 19 there was a substantial disruption in the education system encouraging more and more usage of digital platforms for education. Since the post pandemic, it has become evident that the Gen Z and Gen Alpha's engagement with online platforms has increased drastically (McCrindle, M. 2021), not only social media platforms but also unwarranted time on gaming platforms. The gaming platforms frequently encourage hazardous gaming and challenges that can result in significant harm. Hazardous gaming is often linked with behaviours such as impulsivity, curiosity, and the thrust to belong to peer groups. Many children who spend surged time in gaming consider risky behaviours as a means of gaining popularity (Vasconcelos et al. 2022).

Although this digital submersion has many benefits, it also brings significant risks along with it. Social media and digital platforms enhances creativity, learning and communication, but also brings with it risks like cyber bullying, addiction, encountering online predators, inappropriate content etc. (Allen et al. 2014)

The widespread availability of smartphones, tablets, i-pads and high-speed internet has significantly changed the way children interrelate with digital content. According to recent studies, children's screen time has pitched in the past decade, with a growing number of children spending quite a few hours daily on digital devices. Research studies conducted by organizations such as "Common-Sense Media and the Pew Research Center indicate that children aged 8–12 spend an average of 4–6 hours per day on screens, while teenagers average up to 9 hours".

The increase in online activity has sparked worries about its effects on children's mental health, physical health, privacy, and more. Children who spent excessive time on the digital platforms show increased rates of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Vogel et al. 2015). The increased screen time and decreased physical activity, especially during and after covid-19 has led to various physical problems in children and adolescents like obesity, metabolic syndrome, chronic pain and musculoskeletal issues, decreased immune functions and so on (Ying et al. 2022). Online platforms get easy access to children's information that can be used destructively. This information can be used by the online platforms to expose children to stalking, harassment, sexual abuse etc.

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