

The Young and the Watched and the Future of Child Privacy in the Age of AI

Prachi Tripathi

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0005-4706-3708>

Rai University, Ahmedbad, India

Ausaf Ahmad Malik

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0002-4112-8476>

University Institute of Legal Studies, Mohali, India

Hazra Maaz Baki

 <http://orcid.org/0009-0009-9502-0533>

Alliance University, Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, children among the most vulnerable digital citizens are exposed to unprecedented data surveillance and profiling. This article critically examines the intersection of AI technologies, data security, and the evolving concept of child privacy in the digital age. It explores how AI-driven platforms collect, process, and exploit children's personal data through educational tools, social media, smart toys, and surveillance systems. The chapter highlights key ethical concerns, such as the lack of informed consent, algorithmic bias, and the permanence of digital footprints. It evaluates current legal frameworks and identifies gaps in policy and enforcement, particularly in contexts where children are treated as data subjects rather than rights-holders. Emphasizing the urgent need for child-centric AI governance, the chapter proposes stronger safeguards, transparent data practices, and a redefinition of privacy norms to protect the digital futures of children in an AI-powered world.

INTRODUCTION

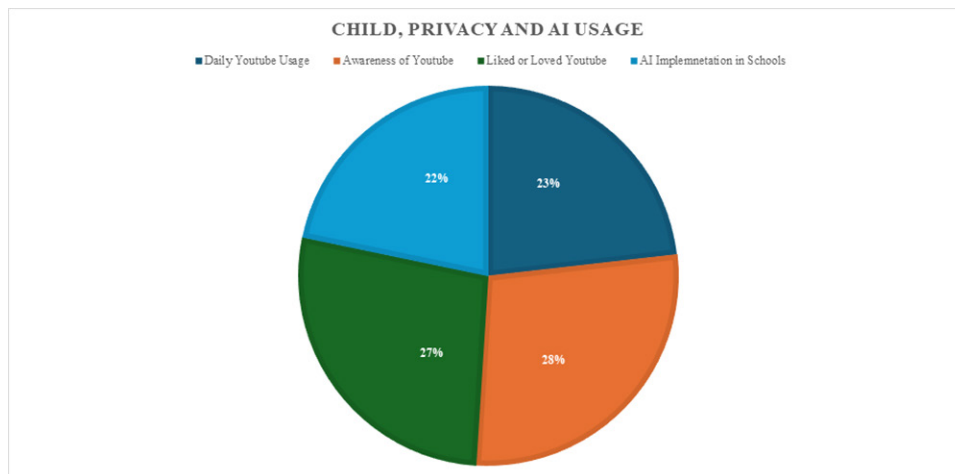
In our hyper connected age, children are coming of age and living in a digital environment where technology makes almost every activity, learning or play possible. Smart toys, learning apps, social network sites and even school monitoring systems now pervade so much of a child's daily life. These

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technologies provide conveniences, interactivity and customized learning, but so do risks that are unprecedented most of which involve privacy, data security and surveillance infrastructure built into these technologies (Goel & Chaudhary, 2024).

Artificial intelligence (AI) is at the forefront of this new digital universe. From facial recognition in school surveillance systems to algorithm-driven content on video platforms, AI-driven technologies are constantly tracking children's behaviour, interests, emotions and interactions. This is done with minimal consent and knowledge because children and parents are not informed about the extent to which data are being gathered, stored and traded. The result is the creation of rich digital tracks that may follow a child deep into adulthood and have possible effects on educational choices, future careers and even court cases (Jefferson, 2018).

Figure 1. Pie chart showing selected statistics on children's interaction with digital platforms and AI-related privacy concerns



This chapter explores the changing child privacy landscape in an era of intelligent machines and open data streams. It raises critical questions: How is AI reshaping what it means to be a child in a surveillance society? What are the ethics, laws and psychological consequences of children being watched from birth? And how does society balance innovation against the fundamental right to privacy of its youngest citizens? With the intersection of AI, data privacy and childhood as its frame, this chapter aims to illuminate the invisible costs of coming of age under the regime of digital surveillance and propose ways toward a safer, more ethical future one where children can learn, explore and experiment without being subject to constant monitoring and algorithmic judgment.

Significance of the Study

The comparison is on a global context. Although the research borrows from global legal frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), national case studies from certain regions of the world like the United States, the European Union, China and India are also incorporated. The case studies are employed to highlight different regulatory styles, cultural contexts and levels of technology

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