

Sharenting & Its Implications on Children's Digital Rights in India

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Abstract: *The increasing prevalence of sharenting- the act of parents sharing their children's lives on social media- has raised significant concerns about privacy, safety, and children's digital rights. This paper delves into the motivations behind sharenting and evaluates its implications through a detailed analysis of parenting behaviors online in Indian context. Using survey data from 153 participants, the study tests these hypotheses: Educational Qualification vs Privacy Awareness & Sharenting Behaviours among males and females. The findings reveal key trends: the dominant use of WhatsApp for sharing child-related content, widespread ignorance of digital risks like identity theft and digital kidnapping, and a notable disconnect between parental beliefs and practices regarding children's consent. This is the first-ever study in the Indian context to explore these dimensions in detail, addressing a significant gap in the literature. Globally, there are very few studies that examine parenting behavior on social media, and even fewer focus on Indian parents. Recommendations emphasize the need for digital literacy programs, robust privacy policies, and a comprehensive legal framework to protect children's online identities. This research highlights the urgent necessity for collective action to safeguard children's rights in the digital environment.*

Keywords: Sharenting, Children's Digital Privacy, Social Media Parenting, Digital Literacy, Online Child Safety

1. Introduction of the Study

The advent of social media has revolutionized parenting practices, transforming how milestones and personal moments are shared. Sharenting, a term coined to describe parents' sharing of their children's lives online, is increasingly common on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. While this phenomenon allows parents to connect with a wider community and document precious moments, it comes with ethical and safety concerns that cannot be ignored. Social media provides parents with a unique way to share updates about their children with their online networks. (Michel Walrave et al., 2022).

The dangers of sharenting are manifold. Privacy risks emerge when sensitive information such as children's names, dates of birth, and locations are shared, making them vulnerable to identity theft and digital kidnapping. According to Pietro Ferrara et al. (2022), such data can be exploited for identity theft, posing significant long-term risks to a child's financial and personal security. Moreover, digital kidnapping, where photos are misused by predators or impersonators, is a growing concern. Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) is another grave danger, as innocently shared images can be exploited in harmful contexts. Finally, loss of ownership of photos on social media platforms often makes their removal difficult, given the lack of adequate legislative frameworks (Ferrara et al., 2022). The dangers of sharenting, as detailed in the document, include:

- 1) Privacy Risks: Sharing sensitive information like names, birthdates, and locations makes children vulnerable to identity theft and other privacy breaches.
- 2) Digital Kidnapping: Photos of children can be misused by predators or impersonators for nefarious purposes.
- 3) Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM): Innocently shared images may be exploited in harmful and illegal contexts.

- 4) Loss of Ownership: Photos uploaded to social media can be challenging to remove due to inadequate legislation, leaving them open to misuse.
- 5) Identity Theft: Shared personal information can be used fraudulently to create fake profiles or access sensitive data.

Globally, sharenting trends reveal striking patterns, with Western countries often focusing on platforms like Instagram and YouTube for public sharing. In contrast, Indian parents gravitate toward WhatsApp for sharing content, reflecting cultural nuances in privacy perceptions. However, the implications remain universal: creating a digital footprint without consent, exposing children to online predators, and inadvertently violating their rights to privacy and autonomy.

This study seeks to address these pressing issues by analyzing parental motivations, awareness, and behaviors. Survey data from 153 participants forms the basis for insights into these challenges, underscoring the urgency of interventions through policy, education, and technology.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To analyze the current practices and motivations behind sharenting in India
- 2) To evaluate parental awareness of digital risks such as identity theft and digital kidnapping.
- 3) To examine the relationship between parental education, digital literacy, and privacy behaviors.
- 4) To propose policy-level interventions and recommendations to protect children's digital rights.

Each objective is crucial for crafting a comprehensive response to the ethical and safety challenges posed by sharenting. Analyzing practices helps identify risk patterns, while evaluating awareness sheds light on gaps that education can address. By correlating digital literacy with behavior, the study emphasizes the transformative potential

of targeted training. Finally, policy recommendations offer a roadmap for systemic change.

2. Literature Review

Sharenting has not been extensively documented in academic and media literature, particularly in the Indian context. Globally, studies addressing parenting behavior on social media remain sparse, leaving significant gaps in understanding. However, the existing literature highlights critical ethical and safety concerns:

- **Privacy Concerns:** Kumar and Raghavan (2020) emphasize how parents underestimate risks associated with oversharing. Identity theft, unauthorized use of images, and digital kidnapping are frequent consequences, often exacerbated by insufficient privacy settings.
- **Children's Rights:** Livingstone et al. (2019) advocate for children's autonomy in managing their digital identities. They argue that creating a digital footprint without consent undermines the principles of child rights.
- **Digital Literacy Gap:** According to Collins et al. (2021), formal education alone is insufficient. Digital literacy—specifically on online safety—emerges as a stronger predictor of privacy-conscious behavior.
- **Types of Shared Photos:** Kumar and Schoenebeck (2015) highlight that parents primarily share four types of photos: milestones, family moments, social gatherings, and cute or funny instances involving children. Each type poses unique risks, especially when combined with personal details.
- **Legislative Gaps:** Ferrara et al. (2022) note that the loss of ownership of photos uploaded to social media, combined with inadequate legislation, makes content removal challenging, leaving children's images at risk of misuse.

Building on these findings, this study provides fresh data-driven insights, exploring the disconnect between awareness and action while offering policy-level solutions.

3. Research Methodology

The study utilized a structured survey distributed to 153 parents, across Indian from different social-economic backgrounds.

Key variables analyzed included:

- **Platform Usage:** Which social media platforms parents use to share content about their children.
- **Privacy Awareness:** Awareness of risks such as identity theft, digital kidnapping, and grooming.
- **Frequency of Sharing:** How often parents post content about their children online.

- **Consent Practices:** Whether parents seek their child's consent before sharing.

Data Analysis Tools:

- Descriptive statistics to understand parental behaviors.
- Cross-tabulations to explore relationships between education, awareness, and actions using excel and python codes.
- Chi-square tests to test hypothesis and assess the statistical significance of observed patterns.

Results and Discussions

1. Platform Usage: The Silent Rise of WhatsApp

Contrary to popular focus on public platforms like Facebook and Instagram, WhatsApp emerged as the most commonly used platform for sharenting, with 36% of parents using it exclusively. This reflects its widespread adoption for personal communication in India. Multi-platform sharing, combining WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, was also prevalent.

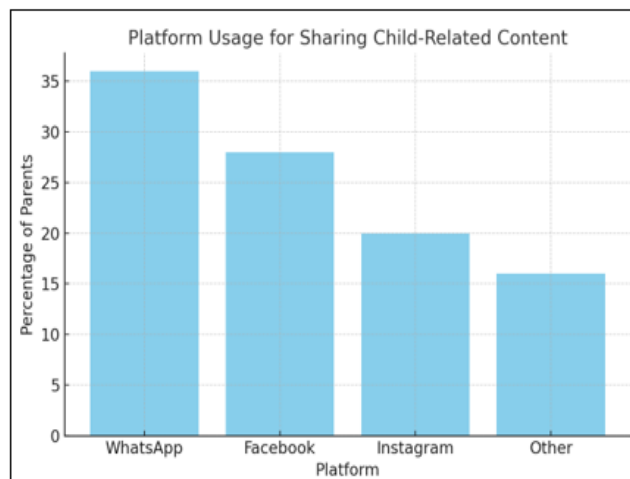


Figure 1: Platform Usage for Sharing Child-Related Content

While WhatsApp's encrypted nature creates a perception of privacy, this can lead to a false sense of security. Parents often share identifiable and sensitive content, such as children's names, birthdates, and locations, without fully understanding the risks. This is particularly concerning as even private platforms can expose data through unintended sharing, device vulnerabilities, or unauthorized access by recipients.

2) Milestone Sharing: A Goldmine for Predators

Over 58% of parents admitted to sharing milestone moments like first birthdays, school photos, and family vacations. These posts, often accompanied by identifiable information such as names, uniforms, or locations, pose significant risks.

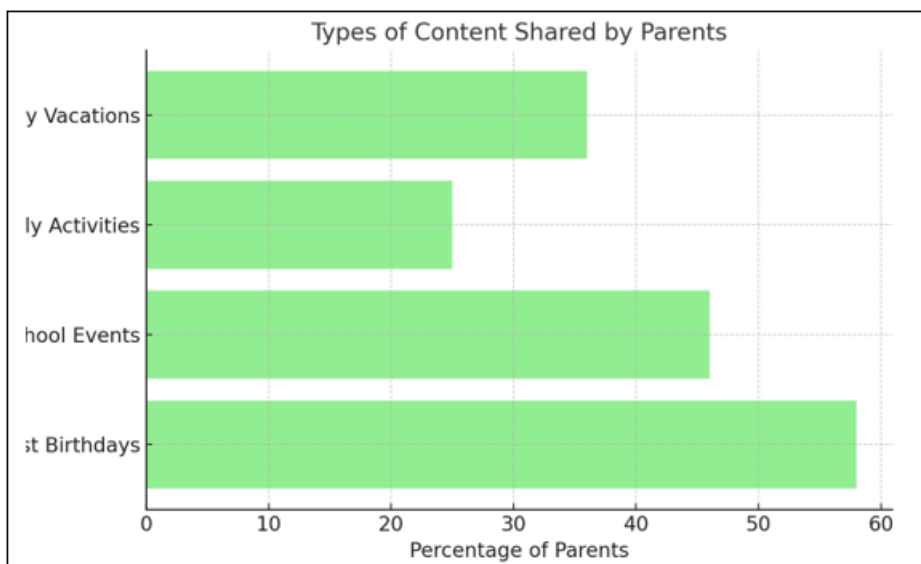


Figure 2: Types of Content Shared by Parents

Personal details shared online can be exploited to create fake profiles or gain unauthorized access to accounts. Photos of children are downloaded and misused by predators to impersonate parents or exploit children’s images. This growing trend highlights the importance of controlling audience visibility and being mindful of metadata embedded in photos.

The seemingly innocent act of milestone sharing can inadvertently provide predators with tools to profile, track, or target children.

3) Privacy Awareness vs Behavior: The Disconnect

Despite 60% of parents claiming awareness of risks like digital kidnapping, only 42.7% consistently adjusted privacy settings, and 28.1% never used them.

This significant gap between awareness and action reveals the following:

- **Complacency:** Parents often assume that their limited circle of friends on platforms ensures safety.
- **Lack of Technical Knowledge:** Many are unaware of advanced privacy features or their correct application.
- **Inconsistencies Across Platforms:** Parents using multiple platforms may overlook configuring privacy settings uniformly.

4) Children’s Rights: Belief vs Practice

While 71.9% of parents believed that children should have a say in their digital presence, only 38.5% actively sought their child’s consent before posting.

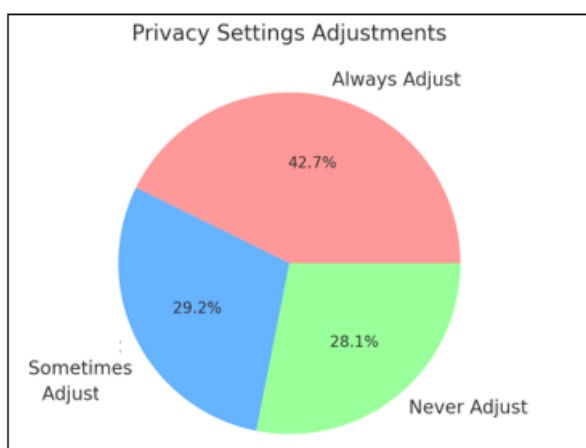


Figure 3: Privacy Settings Adjustments

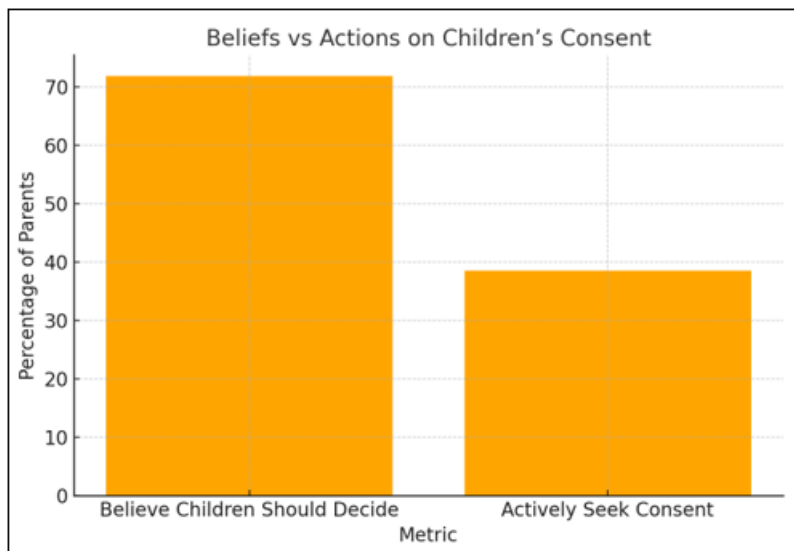


Figure 4: Beliefs vs Actions on Children's Consent

This disconnect highlights two critical issues:

- **Ethical Gap:** Parents recognize the importance of consent but may dismiss it due to cultural norms or perceptions of children's lack of understanding.
- **Autonomy Overlooked:** Children's long-term autonomy over their digital identities remains underappreciated, risking future consequences as these shared moments become part of a permanent digital record.

5) Social Media Pressure: A Dangerous Catalyst

45.3% of parents feel pressured to share child-related content due to the culture of social media validation. This pressure stems from the desire for likes, comments, and recognition, leading parents to share intimate moments of their children for social approval.

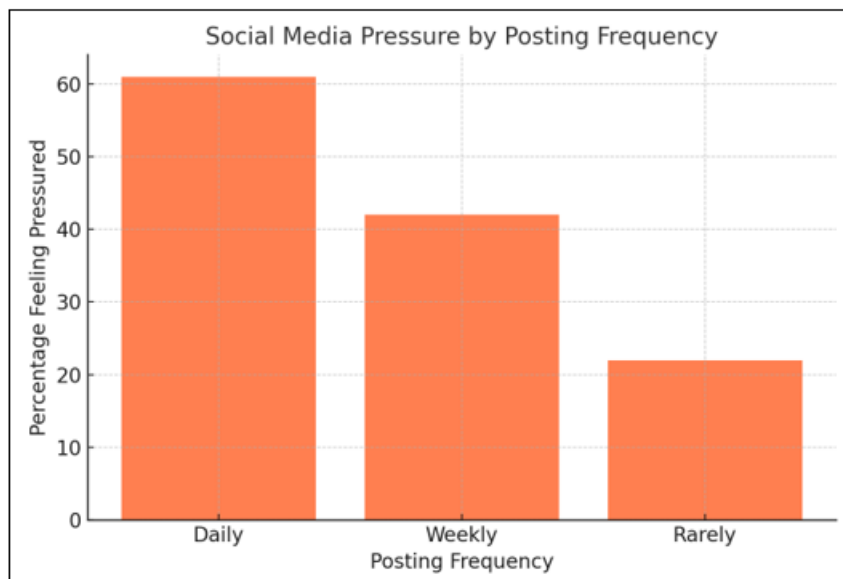


Figure 5: Social Media Pressure: A Dangerous Catalyst

However, this creates several risks:

- **Loss of Privacy:** Children's personal lives are exposed, potentially compromising their privacy and safety.
- **Normalization of Over-Exposure:** Constant sharing can set unrealistic standards and normalize privacy violations.
- **Security Risks:** Sharing locations or activities may make children vulnerable to online predators.
- **Psychological Impact:** Parents may feel anxious about social media approval, and children may struggle with their digital presence as they grow.

- **Ethical Concerns:** Posting without children's consent raises questions about their right to control their own image.

Data Analysis Interpretation & Testing Of Hypothesis

The chi-square tests were conducted to evaluate the relationships between education and privacy awareness (Hypothesis 1) and gender and sharenting frequency (Hypothesis 2). The p-values will determine if these relationships are statistically significant.

Hypothesis 1: Parents with higher education levels are more likely to be aware of privacy risks associated with sharenting.

Method:

- Contingency Table: A cross-tabulation was created between "Educational Qualification" and "Privacy Awareness" to observe the distribution of responses.
- Chi-Square Test: This test was used to determine if there is a statistically significant association between education level and privacy awareness. The null hypothesis assumes no association.
- Visualization: A count plot was generated to visually assess the relationship between education levels and privacy awareness.

Results:

- Chi-square statistic: 16.363211274407377
- p-value: 0.05967341957081885

Interpretation: The p-value (0.0597) is slightly above the common significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that there is no strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there might a correlation between education levels and awareness around sharenting related risks. However, the result is borderline, indicating a potential weak association that might warrant further investigation with a larger sample size.

Visualization

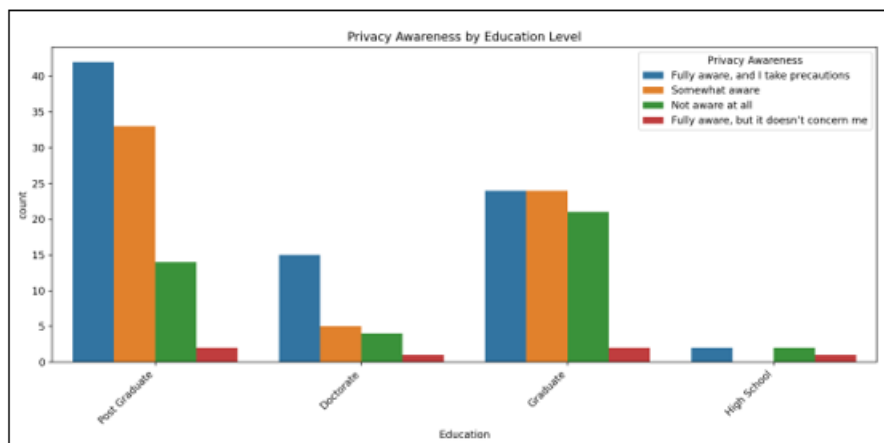


Figure 6: Privacy Awareness by Education level

Hypothesis 2: Females are more likely to indulge in sharenting than males

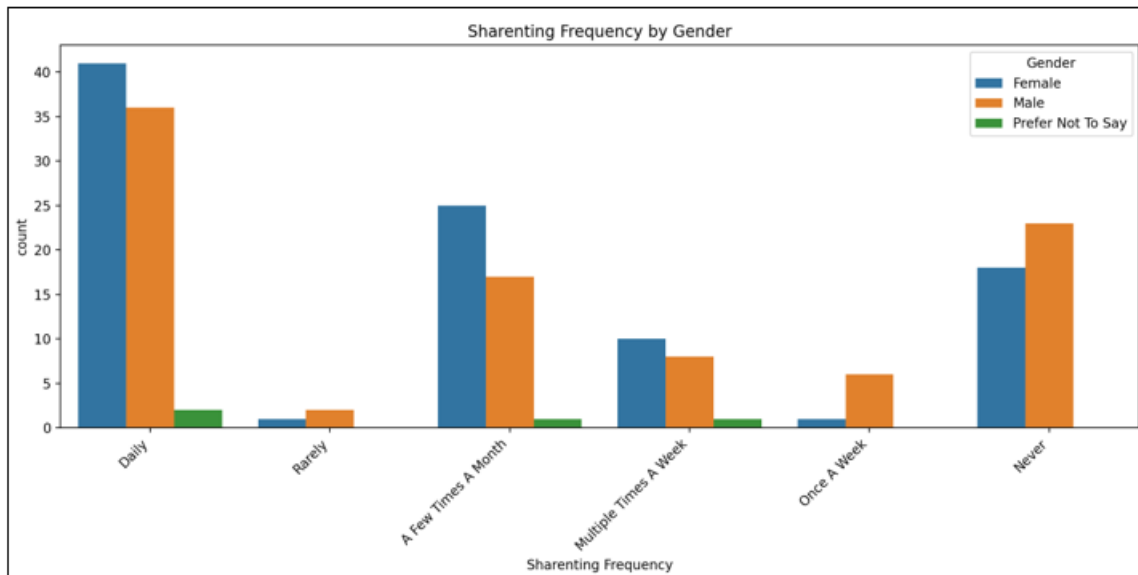
Method:

- Contingency Table: A cross-tabulation was created between "Gender" and "Sharenting Frequency" to observe the distribution of responses.
- Chi-Square Test: This test was used to determine if there is a statistically significant association between gender and sharenting frequency. The null hypothesis assumes no association.
- Visualization: A count plot was generated to visually assess the relationship between gender and sharenting frequency.

Results:

- Chi-square statistic: 8.718327372221859
- p-value: 0.5590277001610999
- Interpretation: The p-value (0.559) is much higher than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant association between gender and sharenting frequency. This suggests that males and females engage in sharenting at similar rates.

Visualization



Conclusion:

- Hypothesis 1: There is weak evidence to suggest that education level might influence privacy awareness, but it is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
- Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in sharenting frequency between males and females.

4. Recommendations

- Nationwide Campaigns Focused on Sharenting Risks: A significant portion of sharenting is driven by a lack of awareness about the risks involved. Digital literacy programs should be launched at the national level to educate parents, caregivers, and educators on the risks associated with sharenting. These campaigns should focus on educating parents about how sharing children's images or personal details can expose them to online dangers like cyberbullying, identity theft, and exploitation. The campaigns could be run through government agencies, non-profits, and tech companies in collaboration. The content should emphasize the importance of thinking critically about what is shared and the long-term consequences for the child's privacy and online safety.
- Integration into Schools and Community Centers: Schools and community centers are ideal locations for fostering digital literacy, as children and parents alike frequent these spaces. Curriculum integration in schools can help children understand the implications of their online presence early on. For parents, community workshops and local outreach programs can provide education on privacy settings, how sharenting affects children, and how to safely engage with social media. This can be supplemented with easy-to-follow guides, workshops, and online portals for ongoing learning.
- Inclusion of Sharenting Awareness in Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs): Parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) are an important touchpoint between schools and parents. These meetings should be leveraged as a platform to raise awareness about sharenting. Schools should allocate time during PTMs to educate parents on the potential dangers of oversharing children's images online and the impact it can have on their digital footprint. By inviting

experts or hosting informational sessions during PTMs, schools can help parents understand the importance of managing their child's online presence responsibly. Teachers and school administrators could present guidelines for safe digital practices, offer tips on privacy settings, and encourage parents to discuss these matters with their children. Raising awareness during PTMs would create a direct line of communication between schools and parents, fostering a collaborative approach to safeguarding children's digital lives.

- Enforce Default Private Settings for Content Involving Minors: Social media platforms play a central role in the practice of sharenting. Platforms should be required to implement and enforce default privacy settings that automatically restrict the public sharing of content involving minors. This means that unless a parent or guardian actively opts to make a post public, content featuring children should default to private or limited audience settings. By defaulting to privacy, platforms reduce the risk of children's images being exposed to a broader audience without parental consent.
- Tools for Anonymizing Children's Photos: A technological solution could assist in mitigating the risks of sharenting. Platforms and apps could integrate tools designed to automatically anonymize images, particularly those that include children. One such feature could be automatic face blurring or pixelation, making it difficult to identify the child in the photo, without compromising the content of the post. This tool would be particularly useful in reducing the long-term impact of oversharing while still allowing parents to share moments with their communities. Such tools should be incorporated into all major platforms to empower parents to safeguard their children's privacy with minimal effort.
- Legal Recognition of Children's Rights: There is a growing need for the legal framework to recognize and protect children's digital rights. Consent mechanisms and the right to erasure would empower children to regain control over their online identities and remove unwanted content. This legal recognition would further support the notion that children have the right to privacy, even in the digital age, and that their consent matters when it comes to the sharing of their personal data.

Ultimately, the goal is to create an ecosystem where both parents and children are educated and empowered to make responsible choices in a digital landscape, and where children's privacy and safety are paramount. Addressing the consequences of sharenting through a combination of education, policy enforcement, and legal reform will pave the way for a safer and more respectful digital environment for future generations.

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Author Profile

Salik Khan is a tech policy and communications professional and the Co-Founder of PIIR Foundation (Proto Infans Internet Rights Foundation), where he works at the intersection of children's rights and the digital world. His work focuses on advancing a rights-based understanding of children's experiences online, grounded in frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 25. With nearly a decade of experience collaborating with law enforcement agencies, governments, and organizations including UNICEF, he has led research, policy engagement, and large-scale public awareness campaigns on issues such as sharenting, online harms, and digital consent. He is also the curator of national conversations like *Infantia* and *Juventica*, which bring together police, educators, policymakers, and young voices to rethink how society approaches children's digital lives.