



Children Online:  
Research and Evidence

# Theories and Concepts for Understanding Children’s Digital Lives: An Annotated Bibliography

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This annotated bibliography provides a roadmap for understanding nine key areas of children’s digital lives. It has been designed for researchers and research users and provides essential and supplementary texts on each of the areas.

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Key areas of children’s digital lives

<b>Children and young people</b> The child, children, young people Development and evolving capacity Structures and cultures of childhood Diversity and difference	<b>Digital environment</b> Technology and affordances Uses, users and domestication Normative values in design Innovation, datafication and AI	<b>Access</b> Place and time of access In/equality and in/exclusion Fixed, mobile and wearable Transcending on/offline
<b>Opportunities and benefits</b> Internet engagement Engagement and participation Information and exploration Play, creativity, fun	<b>Skills and literacies</b> Learning and information skills Digital skills and competencies Data literacy and e-Safety Civic and other literacies	<b>Risk and harm</b> Content, contact, conduct, contract Familiar and emerging risks Cross-cutting risks including privacy Relation between risk and harm
<b>Health and wellbeing</b> Digital wellbeing and health Mental ill health and anxiety Resilience and coping Vulnerability	<b>Social support</b> Parental mediation Socialisation, family and school Sociality and peer support Professional help services	<b>Policy and regulation</b> Children’s rights in the digital age Law, policy and regulation Agency, voice and activism Responses to emerging challenges



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## POLICY AND REGULATION

The field of research on policy and regulation covers a wide range of substantive topics (such as platform regulation, content moderation or data protection). It has also developed its own theories, concepts and debates to address these topics and to critically examine the rationale for intervention or policy change. In relation to children, such concepts tend to concern child rights, equity and inequality, children's agency, voice and activism, and child protection.

In relation to the digital environment, much debate centres on the varieties of regulation – self-regulation, co-regulation, legislation – and on actions available to organisations – the state, international bodies, civil society organisations, the business sector and others.

 **Broughton Micova, S. & Jacques, S. (2020). [Platform power in the video advertising ecosystem](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 9(4).**

The authors propose a framework that operationalises the concept of platform power using a theory of harm and wellbeing to define the audiovisual advertising ecosystem.

 **Brown, I. & Marsden, C.T. (2013). [Regulating Code: Good Governance and Better Regulation in the Information Age](#). The MIT Press.**

This is an important text introducing the key debates in technology regulation. While this is a fast-changing area, this is a very solid foundation for the law/policy-oriented scholar.

 **Bulger, M., Burton, P., O'Neill, B. & Staksrud, E. (2017). [Where policy and practice collide: Comparing United States, South African and European Union approaches to protecting children online](#). *New Media & Society*, 19(5), 750–764.**

This is an interesting piece for two main reasons: first, it accounts for protection policies in both the Global North and the Global South. Then it questions the 'innocent-child-in-need-of-protection' framework informing many policies on children online, highlighting dilemmas of policies and practices.

 **Ciboci, L., Kanižaj, I. and Labaš, D. (2013). [The efficiency of regulation and self-regulation: Croatian media's protection of children's rights \(2008–2012\)](#). *Časopis za upravljanje komuniciranjem/Communication Management Quarterly*, VII(29), 147–170.**

A detailed analysis of the role of regulators in protecting children's rights in electronic media.

 **Ciboci, L., Kanižaj, I. and Labaš, D. (2015). [Public Opinion Research as a Prerequisite for Media Education Strategies and Policies](#). In S. Kotilainen & R. Kupiainen (eds) *Reflections on Media Education Futures* (pp. 171–182). Nordicom.**

This is an example of how public opinion research can help build new policies and initiate new projects at member state level. It argues in favour of improved coordination, new educational programmes and better cooperation among the relevant institutions.

 **Dulong de Rosnay, M. & Stalder, F. (2020).** [Digital commons](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 9(4).

This article discusses the principles and historical development of ‘digital commons’, where the resources are data, information, culture and knowledge that are created and/or maintained online.

 **European Audiovisual Observatory (2016).** [Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28](#). European Audiovisual Observatory.

This report provides an overview of media literacy projects in several European countries and lessons learned about media literacy education based on case studies.

**Frau-Meigs, D., Velez, I. & Michel, J.F. (2017).** [Public Policies in Media and Information Literacy in Europe : Cross-Country Comparisons](#). Routledge.

This book takes a long-term perspective of the development of media education in Europe, and includes an appraisal of media, information, computer and digital literacies as they coalesce and diverge in the public debate over 21st-century skills.

 **Gillespie, T., Aufderheide, P., Carmi, E., Gerrard, Y. Gorwa, R., Matamoros-Fernández, A., Roberts, S.T., Sinnreich, A. & Myers West, S. (2020).** [Expanding the debate about content moderation: Scholarly research agendas for the coming policy debates](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 9(4).

This article proposes the reconceptualisation of content moderation, recognising it as an expansive socio-technical phenomenon that functions in many contexts and takes many forms. It highlights policy implications.

 **Hestres, L., Rochman, A., Volmert, A. & Busso, D. (2021).** [How Are Advocates Talking About Children’s Issues? An Analysis of Field Communications](#). Frame works.

This report discusses the frames and narratives that organisations in the field of children’s advocacy use to discuss children’s issues, and suggests how new framing and a narrative strategy can be developed to mobilise children’s rights.

**Lievens, E. (2010).** [Protecting Children in the Digital Era: The Use of Alternative Regulatory Instruments](#). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

This book provides a valuable discussion of co-regulatory approaches, as well as an in-depth legal analysis of the alternative regulatory instruments that can be used to regulate content in the digital era, with particular attention to the protection of fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, privacy and procedural guarantees, internal market regulation, competition rules and implementation requirements.

**Lievens, E. (2016).** [Is Self-Regulation Failing Children and Young People? Assessing the Use of Alternative Regulatory Instruments in the Area of Social Networks](#). In S. Simpson, M. Puppis & H. van den Bulck (eds) *European Media Policy for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 89–106). Routledge.

This chapter provides a good overview of self-regulatory approaches and some of their shortcomings as well as the various alternative regulatory instruments.

Lievens, E. & van der Hof, S. (2017). [Protection of Children under the GDPR: How to Achieve Meaningful Control over Personal Data by Parents and Children?](#) Presented at the Children and Digital Rights: Regulating Freedoms and Safeguards.

This paper provides the context for enforcing Article 8 of the GDPR in the context of children's rights, and discusses the issue of meaningful consent under this regulatory framework. It is a very useful read in the context of children's privacy online

 Livingstone, S. (2016). [Reframing media effects in terms of children's rights in the digital age.](#) *Journal of Children and Media*, 10(1), 4–12.

This article is essential for researchers who are considering whether to frame their work in terms of effects or rights. Livingstone compares these frameworks with regard to the conception of children and media, assumptions, methodologies and evidence-based policy.

 Livingstone, S. & O'Neill, B. (2014). [Children's Rights Online: Challenges, Dilemmas and Emerging Directions.](#) In S. van der Hof, B. van den Berg & B. Schermer (eds) *Minding Minors Wandering the Web: Regulating Online Child Safety* (pp. 19–38). TMC Asser Press.

This chapter examines how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is helpful in mapping children's rights to provision, protection and participation as they apply online as well as offline. It discusses challenges at the policy level and their implementation for children online/offline using data from the EU Kids Online project.

 Lundy, L. (2019). [A lexicon for research on international children's rights in troubled times.](#) *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 27(4), 595–601.

Lundy provides a critical analysis of the lack of engagement and recognition of children's rights discourse in relation to protection, participation and wellbeing.

 Macenaite, M. & Kosta, E. (2017). [Consent for processing children's personal data in the EU: Following in US footsteps?](#) *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 26(2), 146–197.

This article assesses the provisions of GDPR as it relates to children. Drawing on COPPA in the US, the authors identify pitfalls to consider when moving forward in the implementation of the EU parental consent requirement.

Milosevic, T. (2018). [Protecting Children Online? Cyberbullying Policies of Social Media Companies.](#) The MIT Press.

This book provides a critical overview and evaluation of social companies' policies designed to fight cyberbullying (a largely understudied aspect of the topic), together with an overview and analysis of self-regulatory, co-regulatory and traditional approaches to regulation of bullying on social media platforms. Policy recommendations are provided in the context of balancing children's rights to protection and participation.

Montgomery, K.C. (2015). [Youth and surveillance in the Facebook era: Policy interventions and social implications.](#) *Telecommunications Policy*, 39(9), 771–786.

This article provides an overview of the policy implications of data collection taking place on social media as well as an understanding of the process and methods and shortcomings of current regulation.

 O'Neill, B., Staksrud, E. & McLaughlin, S. (2013). [\*Towards a Better Internet for Children? Policy Pillars, Players and Paradoxes.\*](#) Nordicom/UNESCO Clearinghouse for Children and Media.

This book provides an overview of policy-making for online safety in a European context. It is organised around the main pillars that have defined the EU response, with particular reference to the Safer Internet Programme (2000–12) that features education, awareness-raising and a hybrid approach in self- and co-regulation as its main anchors. A number of chapters focus on the emerging consideration of children rights in a digital context.

Savirimuthu, J. (2012). [\*Online Child Safety: Law, Technology and Governance.\*](#) Palgrave Macmillan.

This is a very good survey of the policy field with a particular focus on regulatory and governance issues. It is a good introduction to the principles of law and internet governance.

Staksrud, E. (2016). [\*Children in the Online World: Risk, Regulation, Rights.\*](#) Routledge.

Staksrud provides a critical analysis of the policy approaches to child online safety in the European Union, applying Beck's institutionalised individualisation theory in the context of children's rights.

Third, A. & Collin, P. (2016). [\*Rethinking \(Children's and Young People's\) Citizenship Through Dialogues on Digital Practice.\*](#) In A. McCosker, S. Vivienne & A. Johns (eds) *Negotiating Digital Citizenship: Control, Contest and Culture* (pp. 41–59). Rowman & Littlefield Int.

This calls for a rethinking of what digital citizenship means in the context of children's rights. It provides a very different agency-driven conceptualisation from dominant takes on digital citizenship.

Third, A., Collin, P., Walsh, L. & Black, R. (2019). [\*Control Shift: Young People in Digital Society.\*](#) Palgrave Macmillan.

This book advocates children and young people's rights in the digital environment by focusing on the intergenerational tensions that shape and limit their opportunities. In particular, the adult society that has the power to influence young people's outcomes is critically examined for its anxieties, near-exclusive focus on risk and safety, and its persistent misunderstanding of the perspectives of young people. The authors call for a move away from efforts to 'control' young people's digital engagement and for greater intergenerational understanding.

 UNESCO (2005). [\*The Precautionary Principle.\*](#) United Nations Educational.

This book explains the nature and value of the precautionary principle in guiding policy and regulation, especially at times of rapid change or in cases where evidence is insufficient or contested.

 van Audenhove, L., Vanwynsberghe, H. & Mariën, I. (2018). [\*Media literacy policy in Flanders – Belgium: From parliamentary discussions to public policy.\*](#) *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 10(1), 59–81.

This article presents a theoretical overview of three trends in media literacy debates, with specific application to Flanders' policy formulation.

 **White, D. (2020). [Digital inclusion and well-being](#). *Internet Policy Review*, 9(2).**

White discusses the relationship between digital inclusion and different aspects of wellbeing and how these have informed the work of the Carnegie Trust UK.