

# Parental Perspectives on Children’s Privacy in Social Media: Initial Survey Results

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## ABSTRACT

A great deal of evidence exists indicating that the majority of users are either not aware of the side-effects of sharing personal information online, or they have inadequate knowledge about their rights concerning privacy. This becomes even more troubling when we realize the vulnerability of children’s information in social media environments, whose information is often posted online by their parents or guardians, thereby compromising their privacy. In this research, we conducted a survey to understand parents’ perception of their children’s privacy. Our initial findings demonstrate that in some cases, parents’ online activity violates their children’s privacy.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Young children tend to be a step ahead of their parents and guardians when it comes to new media formats and internet use. Despite this, not only do parents have the responsibility to keep up with the latest social media tools, they also have to understand the legislation that governs their use, such as, in the United States, the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Laws like COPPA attempt to regulate young people’s participation in social media sites, protect young people’s privacy, and limit how much personal information is shared. In our study, we found that both children and parents are either unaware of these laws, or choose to ignore them. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, “45 percent of online twelve-year-olds report using a social networking site” [4]. In 2011, Boyd et al. [1] found that fifty percent of parents report that their children are using Facebook, even if they are minors, and further, that many accounts were created by parents for their children. In 2018 [2], as many young people have migrated away from Facebook and onto other social media platforms, many parents continue to support minors’ use of social media. Whether children or parents create the accounts, young people’s privacy is at risk. It is difficult—if not impossible—for parents to monitor whether or not apps are complying with laws such as COPPA. Those that do

not, can easily share a minor child’s information with a third party without the parent’s knowledge [3].

## 2. THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

In order to understand parents’ perspective on children’s online privacy, we conducted a survey of twenty-four questions using Amazon MTurks. Our questions targeted parents with children under 18 from all over the world, so their responses can be subjective based on their culture and community they live in. We included popular social media services (e.g. *Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube/YouTube Kids, etc.*) and game applications. The questions were created as multiple-choice and text options, and participants were anonymized for privacy protection.

## 3. INITIAL RESULTS

This is an ongoing research and so far we have collected 1,300 responses from parents in 51 countries. According to our initial results, Facebook is still the number one social media for parents who have children in all ages under 18. Parents who have children aged 11-13 showed the most concern about online privacy. We also found that parents who have children aged 0-5, 11-13 and 14-17 used Facebook as their major social media platform of communication, whereas parents with children age 6-10 use YouTube/YouTube Kids. The majority of the parents surveyed shared concerns about social media use, and they also regularly monitored their children’s online activity. More than 60% even “opted-out” and removed personal information from social media services. However, many parents freely posted and shared their children’s photos and personal information online, using their own social media accounts. They also tagged their children, friends and relatives when posting children’s photos and videos on their accounts. By age eleven, their children started to tag others. In addition, 36% of participants stated that they created accounts or a profile on behalf of their children—some of which were as young as five. The top five pieces of information that parents shared about their children on Facebook were gender, first and last name, birth date and age, photos/videos of themselves, and e-mail addresses. As

some of this information can easily be used to identify or locate a person, this provides strong evidence that many parents have shared their children's information without being aware of the consequences. Although more than 50% of the parents claimed to set parental control on their computer or mobile devices, others said they did not know how to do so, and some of them were still thinking about doing so. The primary reasons for setting parental control included preventing their children from being exposed to inappropriate content, and wanting to supervise and/or control children's behavior online. As for children's information being used online, the majority of the participants had never experienced any negative consequences, or had experienced their information being used elsewhere without their consent. However, the number of people who do not know, or were not sure if their data has been misused, was also high.

## REFERENCES

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