

## **Discussions Surrounding International Implications Behind Online Safety Acts**

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## **Introduction and Hypothesis**

The internet is home to a lot of dangers that affect its users, especially children. This especially comes in the form of child sexual exploitation, which a recent study in the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine defines as “the use of technology as means to sexually manipulate or harm a minor (person <18 years)” (Zeyzus Johns et al., 2025). Trends in the past decade have shown a drastic increase in these cases, with 8 million cases of sexual enticement increasing to 18 million from 2016 to 2019, and online enticement towards minors increasing 97.5% from 2019 to 2020. This study also introduces the responsibility of primary care physicians educating children on internet safety, with the idea that not all parents may be fully educated in the dangers of anonymous online interaction (Zeyzus Johns et al., 2025).

While this is an example of an internet-based threat that many nations are currently working to oppose, in 2023 the United Kingdom introduced a bill called the Online Safety Act. This act aims to minimize distribution of illegal content, with an article posted on the website for the UK Parliament stating “Under the act, all platforms must implement measures to reduce the risk of their services being used for illegal activity. They must also put in place systems for removing illegal content when it does appear. Search services must also take steps to reduce the risk of users encountering illegal content via their services.” (Woodhouse, 2025). Some examples of this content include but are not limited to child sexual abuse, extreme sexual violence, selling illegal drugs or weapons, or promoting or facilitating suicide. The article also states that platforms based in the UK are

responsible for conducting their own assessments to survey for illegal content, as well as implementing their own age-checking measures (Woodhouse, 2025).

The UK isn't the only country to introduce these types of regulations, as the United States reintroduced the Kids Online Safety Act in May of earlier this year. Rather than enforcing strict bans on defined types of illegal content, KOSA places various responsibilities on platform owners to create safeguards to prevent minors from interacting with troubling content and users as well as preventing these platforms from exposing minors to problematic interface features (Kids Online Safety Act, 2025). Some primary features required in these safeguards are enabling minors to block potentially dangerous users, filter out content deemed dangerous or inappropriate for children or minors, as well as preventing marketing data being collected on minors by these platforms. Restrictions on the interfaces of these platforms pertain more to the design, mentioning limits on "infinite" scrolling systems, in-platform purchases, or incentives for spending large amounts of time on these platforms (Kids Online Safety Act, 2025). Like the Online Safety Act from the UK, this bill does address the safety of children online in the context of child sexual exploitation, but it's not the primary focus of the bill.

My personal drive for researching this topic stems from the need for a balance between the right to data security and the right to interact safely with the internet. When it comes to the potential collection of data for the enforcement of these policies, I become increasingly concerned about age-checking systems that require the submission of official documents like an I.D. (Woodhouse, 2025). In 2022 there were over 4,900 data breaches worldwide according to the World Economic Forum (Bana et al., 2025) and in relation to

this concern, I expect a common topic of discussion among peer-reviewed legal critics to be focused on balancing this worry with child safety.

### **Significant Methodologies**

This section entails the research method I will use to analyze this issue, as well as commonly used methods in the papers I used for my analysis. My paper uses secondary data collection, as it's the best method I have access to. The purpose of this paper is to strongly educate myself about these issues, and analyzing perspectives from experts in this field to combine these ideas will drive me to draw bigger connections and create the novelty for my ideas.

The peer-reviewed papers I analyzed primarily research the implications of these bills by sharing the input of law professionals in an academic presentation. While these articles don't contain studies with strict scientific methods like interviews, the peer review backs the credibility of these perspectives.

### **Findings and Discussion**

One of the primary issues that I found discussed the Online Safety Act of 2023 were concerns regarding net neutrality. If this act were to pass, certain media outlets deemed more trustworthy would gain special privileges to talk about serious topics that would normally violate the bill's definition of "illegal content". While this would mitigate misinformation, disinformation, and improper media coverage, it also creates a "privilege paradox" on smaller outlets not having the freedom to cover these stories (Kira & Townend, 2025). This article also references the lack of specificity on what content counts as

“harmful” or “illegal”, causing the possibility of overregulation to stand as a threat to media freedom. Another study in the Journal of Media Law explores this further, bringing attention to the concept of a “bypass strategy” where said lack of specificity drives outlets to overregulate on purpose to not risk being near the line of illegal or harmful content (Judson et al., 2024).

An article in the Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter discussed a multitude of possible benefits to implementing the Kids Online Safety Act. Not only does it reiterate the idea of the bill holding platforms accountable for child safety, but it also discusses the future that this bill will allow for researchers to create programs to study the effects of these platforms on children (Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter, 2025). A major criticism, however, is the law’s controversial history. While the bill did always have a direction focused towards protecting children online, it used to be considered to promote censorship in subsections of teenagers, primarily the queer community. An article published in Quality Management in Health Care also discusses how restrictions on the data collection of minors weren’t as strict in the previous iteration of the bill, giving users and parents the option of opting out rather than completely preventing it (Alemi et al., 2023).

While discussions surrounding the Online Safety Act focused around criticizing a combination of future bias in the media industry and a power imbalance between bigger and smaller news outlets, discussions surrounding the Kids Online Safety Act were primarily positive. While the bill did face criticism in the past, the new iteration of the bill addressed these criticisms and progressed towards a less restrictive method for enforcing

child safety. The Online Safety Act also demands more sensitive data for its protections compared to the Kids Online Safety Act, which demands resources of the platforms to enforce these policies.

### **Limitations and Conclusion**

One of the biggest limitations I faced was finding a better selection of articles discussing the Kid's online safety act. Apart from sources referencing government websites, all my articles are peer reviewed except for the Letter to the Editor (Alemi et al., 2023). I was also hoping to address my hypothesis on discussions around data breach concerns, but I struggled to find any peer-reviewed articles that presented experts discussing these issues. Regardless, this research took my learning in an interesting direction and I'm happy that the inability to provide evidence for my hypothesis drove me to learn about different perspectives. I also wanted to discuss the implications of using AI tools in governance around these issues, but I failed to find any peer-reviewed articles on that as well.

The other primary limitation I faced was being limited to secondary data collection as I had originally planned to conduct a survey with a multitude of cybersecurity professionals. Surveys for research aren't in the scope of this assignment or this course, but if they were, I would have been able to get personalized information I needed from professionals rather than relying on finding information that is already published.

The internet has dangers and it always will, especially making it a dangerous place for minors. When the internet connects the world, it becomes an international issue which

leads to different countries creating different laws and regulations to handle these issues separately. While the United Kingdom is currently tackling this issue through controversially placing age-checking responsibilities on users, the United States corrected past criticisms by placing more responsibility on platforms. Judging by the United States's response to establish a plan to continue to monitor these issues in the future (Kids Online Safety Ace, 2025), it's important that this is monitored as these regulations have the potential to change significantly in the near future.

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