GROWING UP ON SOCIAL MEDIA: INDIAN ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES, PERCEPTIONS, AND PRACTICES

A Thesis Submitted to
University of Hyderabad
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

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December 2022

DECLARATION

I, *Devina Sarwatay,* hereby declare that this doctoral thesis, titled **"Growing up on social media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices,"** submitted by me to the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, India, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in Communication,* is a record of research done by me under the supervision of Prof. Usha Raman. This is bona fide research work and has not been submitted in part or in full for the award of any degree or diploma at this or any other University or Institution.

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Supervisor: Prof. Usha Raman
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This is to certify that the thesis titled **"Growing up on social media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices"** submitted by *Devina Sarwatay*, bearing registration number 17SNPC01, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in Communication*, to the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, India is bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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In addition, the student has the following publications and conference presentations based on her doctoral research work which have been featured in her thesis listed chronologically:

1. Sarwatay, D. (2017, December). *What's the story here? Children in the digital media landscape* [Conference Presentation]. International Communication Association Asia Regional Conference, Mumbai, India. https://www.sndt.ac.in/upcoming-event/2017/ica-asia-regional/default.htm
2. Sarwatay, D. (2018, September). *Approaches to Research on Children and Social Media* [Conference Presentation]. International Conference on Digitality and Communication, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India.
3. Sarwatay, D., Raman, U., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2021). Media Literacy, Social Connectedness, and Digital Citizenship in India: Mapping Stakeholders on How Parents and Young People Navigate a Social World. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics, 3*, 601239. https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.601239
4. Sarwatay, D. (2021, October). The digital lives of young people in India: Developing a culture-centred approach to media literacy and digital citizenship. *Parenting for a Digital Future*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2021/10/27/digital-citizenship-india/
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parental mediation. *Media International Australia,* 1329878X221127037. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X221127037

7. Sarwatay, D. (2022). In their voices: Foregrounding young people's social media practices and experiences. In S. Kotilainen (Ed.), *Methods in practice: Studying children and youth online* (pp. 41–44). Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI). https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.83031

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2. Herman, A., Markham, A., Luka, M. E., Carlson, R., Dilkes, D., Stirling, F., Pronzato, R., & Sarwatay, D. (2021). Collaborating at Microscopic and Massive Scales: The Challenge and Value of COVID Isolation for Critical Internet Studies. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research, 2021*: AoIR2021. https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2021i0.12116
3. Raman, U., Casey, N., Donohue, C., Edwards, S., Friesem, Y., Lisy, J. G., McLean, K., Minson, V., Paciga, K. A., Pellitteri, M., & Sarwatay, D. (2022). Intercultural Dialog: Media Practice Education. In Y. Friesem, U. Raman, I. Kanižaj, & G. Y. Choi (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Media Education Futures Post-Pandemic* (1st ed., pp. 296–304). Routledge.
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6. Samaddar, S., & Sarwatay, D. (2019, March). *Using Memory and Temporal Hybridity to Give Voice in Storytelling on Social Media* [Conference Presentation]. International Conference on the Future of Storytelling, Ajeenkya D. Y. Patil University.
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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of the coursework requirement for PhD:

	Course Number/ ID	Course Name/ Title of the Course	Credits	Results	Grade
1.	CC802	Advance Research	4	Pass	A+
2.	CC851	Advanced Theory	4	Pass	A+
3.	CC852	Digital Media Studies: Children and New Media Literacies	4	Pass	A
4.	EG825	Academic Writing for Doctoral Students	4	Pass	A+

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Date: 27th December 2022

To Buddy Sarwatay who crossed the rainbow bridge on 30th August 2022,

Hope you are stealing all the socks and hearts in puppy heaven…

I love you, always and forever.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Prof. Usha Raman – my doctoral supervising professor – and my participants, stakeholders and school personnel, as well as key resource-persons and advisors who helped me on my journey in generating this academic contribution.

Prof. Usha Raman has been my unwavering intellectual and moral support and has shown me immense attentiveness, patience, and kindness throughout my tenure as her doctoral student. Moreover, she has invited me to assist and teach in her courses, collaborate on projects, conferences, and publications and – as a result of her mentorship and these opportunities – given me the confidence to venture out as an early career researcher as I leave my student days behind me. In more ways than one, she has been a shining example of what a supervising professor, a senior scholar, and a human being can be and it is both aspirational and hopeful for me on my way into academia and research.

I also thank the Department of Communication, Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication, University of Hyderabad, especially Profs. and Drs. Vinod Pavarala, Vasuki Belavadi, Kanchan K. Malik, P. Thirumal, Girish D. Pawar, and all the professors, staff, and my colleagues and fellow scholars and students. The platform provided by them has been crucial for my learning and development throughout the time spent towards achieving a degree in Doctor of Philosophy in Communication.

I have so many professors, scholars, colleagues, and friends everywhere to be grateful for! Profs. and Drs. Usha Vyasulu Reddy, Manisha Pathak-Shelat, Arbind Sinha, Thierry De Smedt, Pierre Fastrez, Nancy A. Jennings, Dafna Lemish, Sonia Livingstone, Srivi Ramasubramanian, John Downey, Aswin Punathambekar, Vibodh Parthasarathi, Nimmi Rangaswamy, Mohan J. Dutta, Debalina Dutta, Keri K. Stephens, Liza Tsaliki, Sirkku Kotilainen, Divina Frau-Meigs, Stuart R. Poyntz, Michael Hoechsmann, Mary Beth Oliver, Katy E. Pearce, Laura Sawyer, Jeff Niederdeppe, Mirca Madianou, Stacey L. Connaughton, Chiara Valentini, Young Mie Kim, Jordan Soliz, Tang Tang, Angeliki Monnier, Joe F. Khalil, Sora Park, Nicole Martins, Drew Cingel, Gerard Goggin, Sun Sun Lim, Crystal Abidin, Jin Lee, D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, Jakob Ohme, Mary Elizabeth Luka, Nancy Baym, Amanda Third, Radhika Parameswaran, Devika Chawla, Tony E. Adams, Andrew F. Herrmann, Renee Hobbs, Yonty Friesem, Sevasti-Melissa Nolas, Christos Varvantakis, Radhika Gajjala, Madhavi Reddy, Sunitha Chitrapu, Jason Vincent A. Cabañes, Cecilia Uy-Tioco, Sudeshna Roy, Jeremy Shtern, Tomeka Robinson, Sumana Kasturi, Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Satveer Kaur-Gill, Lara Wolfers, Hoan Sarah Nguyen, Regina Ahn, Cecilia Zhou, Steph Hill, Florent Michelot, Zoë Glatt, Aniruddha Jena, Aditya Deshbandhu, Nidhin Patel, and so many more, I sincerely thank you.

To my family and friends who always knew when I needed some love and support, I appreciate you all so much. My profound apologies if I have forgotten to mention someone; I am but a sleep-deprived, coffee-powered, deadline-chasing girl who is undoubtedly grateful for you.

I always think about what my contribution to the discipline I have chosen to study will be and if it will add value to literature and life. Hope this work accomplishes to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge.

Finally, I thank my examiners and readers for taking the time to evaluate my work. I hope I can put the insights you share with me to good use.

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Abstract

Young people live in a digitally connected world. Their everyday practices and realities are mediated as they scroll through, make meanings, present and curate their identities, share and make content, and interact with others online. Indian children and adolescents are growing up on social media. They access and use apps and platforms to experience socialisation, learn to manage impressions as well as risks and opportunities, develop skills and practices to foster connections, and creatively express themselves.

In this doctoral thesis, I acknowledged the importance of foregrounding young people's voices regarding their social media lives to understand and qualitatively unpack their practices online. Technopanics in Indian media discourse add to adult anxieties regarding children's social media lives which can translate to restrictive parenting even as we should be protecting young people's digital rights and offering them a safe digital environment. By considering young people's testimonies, we can begin to recognise their need and ability for agentic, innovative negotiations and skills for social media access and use. Meaningful dialogue between young people and their adults offers a safe space and opportunity to maximise benefits and minimise risks in a social media world. Conversations about their online lives should begin early into their foray on social media to aid critical digital and social media literacy efforts.

It is also important to note the role and responsibility of other stakeholders in the bid to centre children's digital rights. Most technology used by young people in India is not built for them. With increasing complexities of datafication, dataveillance, digital creative labour, and commodification, it is important to bring everyone to the table so that we can begin to have broader conversations about children's digital rights to a safe online environment in an increasingly connected and complicated world.

Growing up on social media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices

Devina Sarwatay

The Need to Study Young People and Social Media

"Social media shockingly neutral on online child safety issues: NCPCR," (Sharda, 2022) reads the latest headline in The Times of India, a leading English language newspaper in the country. The article quotes the Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) as he states that children are being manipulated on social media, platforms are not ready to cooperate, and the government wants companies to give parents rights to access children's accounts. He goes on to suggest that parents need to be extremely cautious of their children's online activities because, "…the dark web is filthier than they can even comprehend…" (Sharda, 2022). While there are online risks and harms of course, young people's social media lives are more than the cautionary tale the article above might lead us to believe.

The ubiquity of digital and social media has led to considerable debate regarding their role in the lives of children and adolescents both in mainstream media as well as in academia. Countries like the USA, Australia, and those in Europe, collectively referred to as The Global North, have largely led this discussion with regards to research topics and methods and how these inquiries influence discourse and vice versa. Conversations have been around technology and its impacts like screen time, wellbeing, privacy and safety, risks and opportunities, media literacy, and digital citizenship. However, it is not clear to what extent and how these Anglo-

Eurocentric approaches translate to the various local realities of the Global South, i.e., countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, including India, which is the focus of this study. This is where increasing numbers of young people have either direct or indirect access to social media and the internet, while occupying very different social contexts. In India, for instance, low cost mobile phones, cheap data plans, and vernacularisation of content have furthered access across socioeconomic strata leading to several questions of academic and broader social interest. These include: what specific research priorities might emerge in this context; which methods can be employed to study these issues; how can we contextualise existing knowledge to help support young people and their parents maximise benefits of this social media world even as we take into account the nuances of the local; what do local stakeholders have to say about the state of affairs with regards to young people and social media in India; and, most importantly, what do the young people themselves have to say about their social media lives?

Young people's lives are inextricably tied in with the digital, whether it is for education, engagement, leisure, or work. Studies from the Global North have examined children and social media from several perspectives, with discourse now veering towards a rights-based approach to foreground young people's voices in a digital and social media world, something that is missing in countries like India. This doctoral research drew on deep interactions with young people from a large Indian metropolitan city to gain insights into their social media experiences, perceptions, and practices using in-depth interviews, guided social media tours, and ethnographic observations and interactions on social media. Contextual nuances become significant when framing regulatory policies, parental advisories and critical digital literacy and

media education programs. This work adds to the slowly growing literature from the Global South that enhances and diversifies our understanding of how the 'born digital' generation lives with/ in social media.

Background on Young People and Social Media

Global State of Affairs

Children and adolescents today live in a social media world that is 'digital by default' (Livingstone, 2020). This has led to considerable academic debate regarding the role of digital and social media technology in the lives of children and adolescents. The Global North, especially the USA, Australia, and several European countries, has largely led this discussion in matters of research priorities, methods, and approaches as conversations around screen time, wellbeing, media literacy, and digital citizenship (Best et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2020; Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2021; McDool et al., 2020; Swist et al., 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Yue et al., 2019) have already emerged and are being reflected in mainstream media discourse as well.

Literature in the Global North on young people and social media with special reference to media literacy, social connectedness, and digital citizenship, especially with regard to parent-child relationships, has mostly focused on topics such as online risks (Green et al., 2011; Livingstone et al., 2017; Staksrud & Milosevic, 2017), health and wellbeing (Best et al., 2014; McDool et al., 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2021), creative expression (boyd, 2007; Hogan, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2015; Subrahmanyam et al., 2020), education and learning (Bennett et al., 2008; Burn et al., 2010; Selwyn et al., 2020), digital safety (Green et al., 2011; Livingstone et al., 2014; Livingstone,

2012; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013), and parental mediation (Kalmus et al., 2015; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Schols, 2015; Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011; Tripp, 2011).

Be that as may, it is not clear to what extent and how these Anglo-Eurocentric approaches translate to various local realities of the Global South, where increasing numbers of young people have either direct or indirect access to social media and the internet, but occupy very different social contexts as compared to their counterparts in the Global North (Banaji, 2017; Bhatia & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016). In India, low cost mobile phones, cheap data plans, and vernacularisation of content have furthered access across socioeconomic strata (Arora, 2019; Deshbandhu, 2020; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016).

Children from middle and higher income families in India often have easy access to digital and social media. Larger scholarship regarding children's access, usage and its effects on identity formation, and social interactions has been equivocal and often polarised. Discussions in mainstream media have reiterated concerns articulated in research and policy circles about children's digital access and parental cautions about appropriate use. Against this backdrop, multilateral agencies like UNICEF have attempted to define and advocate 'Children's Rights in the Digital Age', drawing on research-based inputs from activists and academics. However , these efforts are largely based on understandings of children's lives in western contexts. While moral panics surrounding children's digital media use are just as pervasive in India and the global south, there has been little empirical work to inform a possible articulation of children's digital media use, their digital rights and literacies.

The Indian context

India has the advantage of the demographic dividend (Singh, 2022) which also makes this country an attractive market and site for research as more young people have access to the digital and opt to engage in leisure and entertainment as well as education and engagement online (Deshbandhu, 2020; Raman & Verghese, 2014; Rangaswamy et al., 2013; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016). Arora (2019) argues that it is in emerging economies like India where the 'next billion users' of the internet lie, and analysing their practices online is key to understanding the future of the internet. She also unpacks how digital leisure, entertainment, and connection are activities that people across the world enjoy online. Platforms like TikTok and games like PUBG (PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds) were very popular among Indian children before their ban in 2020, despite their parents' disapproval (Geyser, 2019; PIB, 2020; Vardhman, 2021). In fact, when these apps were banned in India, their parent companies saw a big loss in business valuation (OpIndia, 2020). India is a huge market for internet companies and Indian children and youth are quick to adopt new technologies and become social media users, thanks to increasingly affordable mobile devices and data packs (Arora & Scheiber, 2017; Rangaswamy & Cutrell, 2013). Digital divides exist, of course, and amplify inequalities (Roy et al., 2022; Tewathia et al., 2020), but there are several initiatives that seek to address these gaps and find solutions (Dutta & Das, 2016; Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, 2022; Sarkar, 2016). This is why it is important to study India, and Indian children and their experiences and practices on social media as increasing numbers of young people go online for education, entertainment, and engagement – more so since the

COVID-19 pandemic as it pushed our world to become digital by default (Livingstone, 2020) even as issues of digital divides, skills, and literacies persisted.

The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) conducted a survey on social media habits of children with 4,750 parents in metropolitan cities (IANS, 2015) claiming that 95% teens surveyed used the internet, 81% used social media and 72% logged into social media more than once a day. It also uncovered underage use: 65% kids under 13 years of age used social media. At the same time, media alarms us with stories like 'Indian teenagers show risky behaviour online: McAfee' (PTI, 2014) or 'Addicted to You(Tube): To say that toddlers are nuts about YouTube would be an understatement' (Kumar, 2015) or 'One in three teens lose sleep over gadgets, social media' (Dutt, 2016).

Social media and technology are not always portrayed in a bad light. There were articles about using social media for assignments and exam preparation (Pednekar, 2016) or experts wanting to include it in school curriculum (Pednekar, 2017), but positive, or even more reflective, stories are harder to come by. Perhaps, the older generation mirrors its struggles and anxieties of navigating through the complex web of social media on young people and their protective instinct comes to the fore? Children are considered vulnerable and in need of protection across almost all disciplines. Even so, young people's engagement with social media is very different from that of adults. Children's practices online have evolved differently because they are (often described as) 'digital natives' (Bennett et al., 2008; Burn et al., 2010). Of course, the impact of the COVID-19 related lockdown subsequent to March 2020 has shifted perspectives considerably in relation to some of these debates, with focus returning once more (in the popular discourse) to accessibility and digital

literacy and side-lining concerns around screen time and other related debates. Having said that, we do not often find Indian children's and adolescents' testimonies regarding their social media lives being foregrounded in research or media in India.

Need for foregrounding children's voices

In India as elsewhere, media discourse around young people and social media has veered between poles of technopanics and opportunity, with concerns like new media literacy (tips, warnings, dos and don'ts) and digital health featuring variously at both ends of the discussion (Bowles, 2018; Dutt, 2016; Kamenetz, 2018; Kumar, 2015). Broad-based, largely quantitative industry research (IANS, 2015; PTI, 2014) done in the Indian context suggests increased access and usage by ever younger audiences, moderated by sociodemographic factors including caste, region, and class. These studies further fuel the discourse around anxieties and their management, an approach that largely fails to recognise that children and adolescents engage with contemporary networked media very differently than do adults (Buckingham, 2006; Livingstone, 2014). As adults, are we mirroring our own struggles and anxieties of navigating through what we see as a complex web of social media onto the experience of young people? How do we take into account the fact that this generation has been 'born digital' (Bennett et al., 2008) and therefore is likely to see both the world and digital tools and environments very differently? This is not to say that having been born in a world immersed in technology does not offer challenges to children and adolescents, but to recognise that their adaptations to the digital world possibly occur in ways unfamiliar to adult caregivers. This study, therefore, draws directly on the experiences of young people to develop an understanding of how they make decisions

(Third et al., 2014, 2019) about their social media lives and self-making practices, and how they negotiate access restrictions and limitations, thus foregrounding their voices.

Growing up on social media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices

Research statement and questions

This doctoral thesis is premised on the notion that children and adolescents are social actors who can bear witness to their experiences and perspectives about issues that concern them, especially if these are their lived experiences on social media. If we are to comment on these aspects of their lives, we must foreground their voices and tap into the knowledge of their experiences, perceptions, and practices of growing up on and with social media in India. This doctoral thesis aims to centre young users of social media, who have grown up connected and explore the ways in which they apply and enhance their understanding of this socially connected world.

To be able to gain an in-depth understanding and describe features of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of young people on social media, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do young people who have access in India experience social media?
- What are their social media practices?
- How do they perceive risks and opportunities on social media?
- How do they deal with these risks and opportunities?
- How do they understand and articulate digital/ social media competencies?

Concepts

Data was collected using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, guided tours of social media, and ethnographic observations of their profiles. In this section, I clarify and establish a common understanding of concepts used in my thesis.

Indian adolescents are participants from a large, metropolitan city in West India in the age-group of 10-18 years (including male and female, across the socioeconomic spectrum) who had access to social media in some capacity for at least two years before the interview.

Social media included websites and applications used by the above-defined participants to view, and/ or create, and/ or share content, and participate in social networking online, e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Musical.ly/ TikTok, WhatsApp, etc.

Experiences were related to their access (devices and internet) including nature of access to account for socioeconomic differences, and uses (viewing/ making/ sharing content/ interacting) of social media as well as their skills (for access and usage) and problem solving online.

Perceptions were their thoughts about safety and privacy as well as mediation and restrictions by parents. Did they think that they were safe online? Did they choose to keep their accounts public or private and why? What did they think about parental mediation and restrictions regarding their uses and practices on social media?

Practices were regarding their social media profiles and interactions online. How did they present themselves online through their account types, pictures, videos,

stories, bios, and other means? How and in what manner did their interactions on social media unfold?

Limitations

Given that I wanted to understand more about the whats, whys, and hows of young people's social media lives in India, a qualitative approach made sense. It was also important that I, as a researcher, was able to establish a rapport with my participants given their young age by connecting with them in a language that was familiar to them as well as assuring them that we came from the same city and near similar backgrounds, although this was not true for all participants since I tried to cover the socioeconomic spectrum. Hence, I chose to conduct this study in my home city of Ahmedabad, which, while different in its own ways, does share similarities in terms of living conditions and social media penetration with other cities like Mumbai, Jaipur, Delhi, Kolkata, and Hyderabad. Nonetheless, this was a localised study given the limited resources I had as a graduate student and, while I cannot say that young people in Ahmedabad were exactly as young people from different states in India, they are in some ways representative of the average Indian adolescent in their own ways. I would also like to believe that this is an attempt at foregrounding children's voices and eventually encouraging policymakers to include these voices in matters that concern young people; I know this is but the first step in that direction.

Significance

Social media is embedded among youth cultures across the world. This work helps gain in-depth understanding of children's social media lives in India by foregrounding their voices and contributes to larger scholarship on youth digital

cultures by focusing on their social media cultures, perceptions, and deliberations on privacy, safety, problem solving, and wellbeing, and negotiations regarding agency and resistance to restrictive parental mediation as well as divides. This study also hopes to add to existing discourse further attempting to place the social media lives of Indian children and adolescents in the context of the complex socio-cultural milieu in which they negotiate their identities and relationships that might eventually add to larger discussions at levels of local and national policy in these matters.

The structure of this thesis

Following this introduction that highlights the need to study young people and social media, we look at the literature and theories that frame this study in the second chapter. The third chapter outlines my methods and the fourth chapter contextualises my field. My findings are presented across two chapters, the first of which covers stakeholder and school voices on their thoughts about young people and social media in my field site and the second findings chapter focusses on participants voices that share their experiences, perceptions, and practices on social media. The final two chapters are the discussion and conclusion to how Indian adolescents are growing up on social media.

Framing the Study

Introduction

In most conceptions of society, children are considered a group that is both vulnerable and in need of protection. With children being treated as a group of special interest from early on, the field of communication and media studies is no exception. Extensive work has been done in the area of children and media including digital and social media (Banaji, 2017; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013; Buckingham, 2007; Green et al., 2020; Kapidzic & Martins, 2015; Lemish, 2015; Lemish et al., 2018; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Livingstone et al., 2012; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017; Wartella & Jennings, 2000; Wartella & Reeves, 1985). For children, the world of social media is attractive and exciting leading them into experiences which are full of opportunities as well as risks as has been the case with nearly all forms of media. In fact, this phenomenon has been observed through various forms or media and technology across time for this is a continuity in concerns and research right from early years of effects research (Livingstone, 2016; Wartella & Jennings, 2000; Wartella & Reeves, 1985). This is precisely why adults regulate (or try to regulate) this environment. As a result, children and social media have been researched from the perspectives of risks and literacy, health and well-being, uses (including expression and presentation), education and learning, safety (including bullying, shaming, violence and sexting), parenting as well as privacy. The literature review shows different research approaches including questions asked and methods used in aforementioned themes.

Young people are often enthusiastic about trying new things which offer them avenues for interpersonal communication like technology, games, social media

platforms, etc. (boyd, 2007; Buckingham, 2002, 2007). No wonder then, that children and youth have jumped at the opportunity to explore and create with social media for they offer new ways of communication, mediation, and representation (Buckingham, 2006). Children's use of social media has been the subject of research for some time now and enquiry ranges from usage to impact and everything in between and around it. While some hail these developments as opportunities for children to learn and grow, others fear the risks of exposure to a world we do not fully know and understand (Livingstone et al., 2017; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). There is also the fear of the older generation (parents, teachers, etc.) of being left behind due to their lack of understanding of and ability to manoeuvre through these media, as compared to the younger generation which is identified as 'digital natives' (Bennett et al., 2008; Burn et al., 2010), although this categorisation is contested (Banaji, 2016). Some also question the skills of these natives in navigating the complicated world of social media. Hence, the emergence of literature around literacy – ranging from information literacy to media literacy and digital literacy to social media literacy – to enable children to skilfully and safely engage with this virtual environment (Bennett et al., 2008; Buckingham, 2006; Livingstone, 2014).

This chapter aims to highlight the different themes that have emerged around research done on children and social media through literature review. Research approaches including questions asked and methods used to study this area are discussed below. Studies have been conducted from the perspectives of risks and literacy, health and well-being, uses (including expression and presentation), education and learning, safety (including bullying, shaming, violence and sexting), parenting as well as privacy. The focus was on literature that met criteria of relevance

(to the context and age group), research approaches and significance of findings and/ or policy recommendations made by the authors and researchers. This chapter also includes a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this doctoral study.

Background

Social media has contributed to the reimagination of how technology can be used for information, communication, and community and culture building (boyd, 2015; boyd & Ellison, 2007) even as complex architectures like the Instagram Feed and the TikTok For You Page (FYP) make the experience increasingly personal and immersive. Bhandari and Bimo suggested, "the experience of using TikTok is one of repeatedly engaging with one's own self: intra rather than interpersonal connection…" (2020, p. 3). The Instagram Feed is also an endless scroll, thus, viewed in this way, sociality on platforms like Instagram and TikTok relies on users' own interests, interactions with others on the platform, and the algorithmic recommender system that links together interests, interactions, and audiences (Abidin, 2020; Kaye et al., 2021; Leaver et al., 2020).

Parents, educators and other professionals have for long had concerns about the impact of media on children with regards to behaviours and values shaped by content and viewing patterns, and this has been reflected in research as well (Alwagait et al., 2015; Centre for Advocacy and Research, 2001; Coyne et al., 2020; Wartella & Jennings, 2000). There has been a sense of technopanics – moral panics surrounding children's use of technology – with some studies linking increased violent and aggressive behaviour and proclivity for high-risk activities to exposure to media like television and movies, rock music and music videos, advertising, video games, and – to some extent – computers and the internet. With the internet, one may posit the

possibility of a democratic and participatory environment, the promise of which raises expectations of a freer flow of ideas and content (Jenkins, 2006) prompting scholarly inquiry into media as also their impact on children and youth. In fact, with every new technology, we label the generation to go with it, e.g., the Nintendo generation, the PlayStation generation, the mobile generation and so on (Buckingham, 2006).

Essentially, scholars suggested that the new generation had been deeply impacted by the internet as the older one was by television. In his book, Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation, Tapscott drew a sharp contrast between people who grew up in the era of the television vs. those in the age of internet (Tapscott, 1998). Early on in the days of the internet, it was found that children lived in multimedia environments, had access to computers and internet easily if their parents were comfortable around these technologies and their attitudes were moulded by those of their parents (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Gradually, computers, internet and online gaming overtook children's lives so far as to affecting their sleep due to night time usage (Eggermont & Van den Bulck, 2006), eliciting concerns regarding exposure to inappropriate content (boyd & Marwick, 2009) and having parents mediate their internet use to reduce risk (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). The moral panics around internet usage in schools and at home were often fuelled by popular media making way into public discourse (Lawson & Comber, 2000). While these moral panics around the internet were still raging, social media came into the picture to further complicate matters.

Themes in and Approaches to Research on Children and Social Media

Early scholarship regarding children and social media were centred on impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure,

online/ offline connections and privacy issues (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Naturally, children and youth were not far behind in adopting what was an exciting medium for their own use. In fact, given access, they are often among the first to adopt and appropriate new technology. Scholarship surrounding children, especially teenagers and youth, concentrated on presentation of the self, creation and maintenance of relationships, and management of privacy and intimacy (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010).

Over time, the narrative shifted to risks encountered by children using social media. A clinical report for the American Academy of Pediatrics (O'Keeffe et al., 2011) described how children are increasingly found to be facing risks like cyber bullying and online harassment, Facebook depression, sexting, privacy issues, influence of social media advertising, peer pressure to join social media despite age restriction, internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation. While there were many discernible benefits of children using social media observed like communication, socialisation, access to information, learning and creative expression among others (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2008), there was also concern reported regarding appropriate usage. For instance, young people – who could use social media for positive self-expression and identity creation – were also reported to be using Facebook with narcissistic ambitions (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). There was some evidence of teen dating violence being perpetrated through social media (Korchmaros et al., 2013), social media were being used for youth sexual solicitation and harassment in some cases (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008) and social media had indirect effects on body related outcomes and life satisfaction in adolescent girls as evidenced in some research (Ferguson et al., 2014).

Discourse around using social media for positive outcomes was also reported. The American Heart Association, in a scientific statement, commented on the scope of using these technologies for specific content to address healthy lifestyles and scale up for broad implementation because of features like targeting, data collection and relative inexpensiveness (Li et al., 2013). Social media also afforded teenagers with chronic illnesses the ability to be 'regular teens' online (van der Velden & El Emam, 2013). Alwagait et al., (2015) found that there was no linear relationship between social media usage and students' academic performance in a study conducted in Saudi Arabia. They reported that students felt time management was a more important factor. On the other hand, Pea et al. (2012) discovered that interactive media are also marred by unhealthy social experiences like bullying and harassment. Drawing from these concerns, scholars started writing about parental mediation (Clark, 2011; Lee & Chae, 2007; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), the digital divide debate (Burn et al., 2010; Helsper, 2017) and literacy issues (Hobbs et al., 2010; Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2021; Nascimbeni & Vosloo, 2019; Stoilova et al., 2021). Here are some different perspectives that children and social media have been studied from. A trajectory of research as observed during my literature review and also observed in part in as a reframing of media effects and risks-based research moving towards rights-based approach (Livingstone, 2016; Staksrud & Milosevic, 2017) is below:

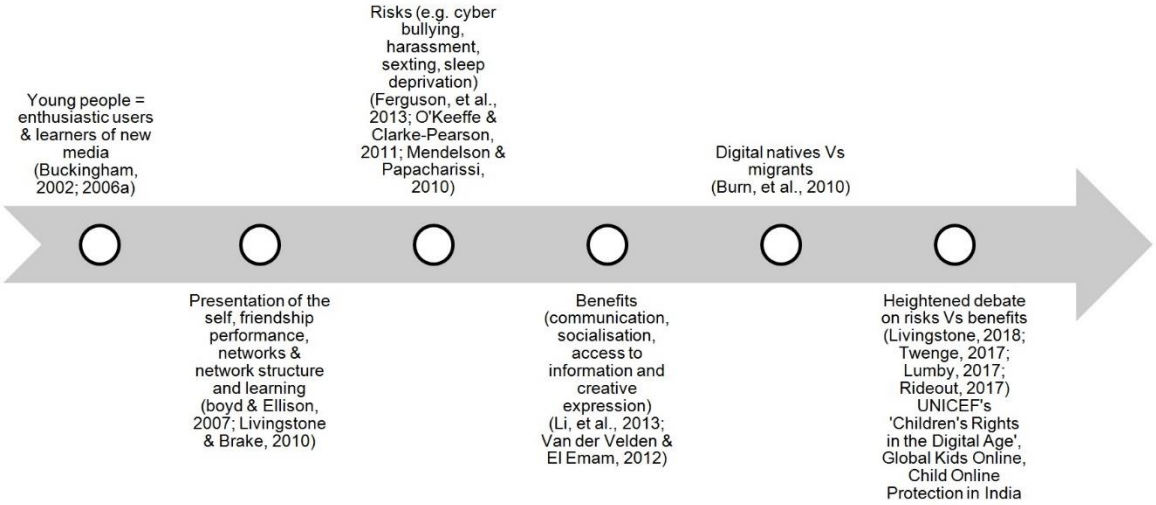

Figure 1 Research discourse on children and social media

Source: Author

The following themes stand out as they are closely related to the nature of social media and their impact on children. Researchers have also looked at how parents, educators and children themselves can optimally use the opportunities provided by social media, while mitigating and/ or managing risks as best as possible. Themes and approaches are highlighted in the table below along with details of their most striking findings.[1]

Table 1 Themes and Approaches of Studies Reviewed

Source: Author

Themes	Approaches		
	Author(s)	**Questions asked**	**Methods used**
Risks and Literacy	(Livingstone, 2014)	Risky opportunities children experience online; Introduces Social Media (SM) literacy	Interview and focus group
	(Staksrud et al., 2013)	If use of SM increases risks encountered	Interview and questionnaire
	(Marwick, 2008)	Technopanics: Links between media coverage and content legislation	Discourse analysis
Health and Well-being	(Best et al., 2014)	Impact of social media use on mental wellbeing of young people	Systematic narrative review
	(Ellison et al., 2007)	Relationship between use of Facebook and formation and maintenance of social capital and well-being	Quantitative approach, survey method
	(Valkenburg et al., 2006)	Consequences of SM for adolescents' self-esteem and well-being	Quantitative approach, survey method

Uses (including expression and presentation)	(Lenhart et al., 2015)	How teens use social media for romantic relationships	Mixed methods
	(Hogan, 2010)	How is the self presented on social media and its categorisation	Using dramaturgical and symbolic interactionism frameworks
	(boyd, 2007)	How youth use SM for their social life in networked publics	Ethnographic data
Education and Learning	(Friedman & Friedman, 2013)	Online learning activities through the prism of today's new communication technologies	Literature review
	(Burn et al., 2010)	Impact of new media on education given teachers' and students' cultures	Online survey and interview
	(Bennett et al., 2008)	Questions main claims made about digital natives and analyses nature of the debate itself	Literature review
Safety (including Bullying, Shaming, Violence and Sexting)	(Livingstone et al., 2014)	What bothers children on SM	Paper-based self-completion questionnaire
	(Marwick & boyd, 2014)	How American teenagers conceptualise the term 'drama', its relationship with social media and implications for understanding contemporary teenage conflict	Ethnographic data
	(Ringrose et al., 2013)	How young people experience sending and receiving of sexually explicit content through mobile and digital technologies	Focus group, individual interview and virtual ethnography data
Parenting	(Duggan et al., 2015)	How parents turn to social media for parenting-related information and social support	Survey method, phone interview
	(Kalmus et al., 2015)	Relationship between adolescents' excessive Internet use (EIU) and parental mediation	Quantitative approach, survey method
	(Tripp, 2011)	Role of the internet and SM in Latino immigrant families	Interview
Privacy	(Palfrey, 2016)	Discusses digital divide, use of digital and social media, privacy implications	Literature review
	(Marwick & boyd, 2014)	How social media has changed ways one practices visibility and information sharing	Semi-structured interview
	(Madden et al., 2013)	How teens share private information on public SM	Phone survey, in-person focus groups after questionnaire and online focus groups

Risks and Literacy

The discussion around risks and literacy has been about identifying the different kinds of risk social media bring with them for children and youth as well as ways of mitigating them. Early work on the same has also been about quelling fears regarding technopanics – moral panics over contemporary technology and its risks to

young users – e.g., cyberporn and online predators and showing links between hyped media coverage and consequent content legislation. While Marwick's (2008) work has been mentioned above, Cassell & Cramer (2008) too have made a similar contribution to this line of enquiry. The underlying problems are often ignored by adults as it is obvious that children who use social media will come across risks, thus what matters is how these platforms are used wisely and how children can learn to identify risks and act accordingly through social media literacy (Holmes, 2009; Livingstone, 2014). More recent work features how risks can be minimised and opportunities can be maximised for children online using parental mediation (Clark, 2011; Steinfeld, 2021), and ways in which children could prevent harms and protect themselves from risks online (Brown, 2017) including detailed literature review on risks and opportunities for young people online (Chassiakos et al., 2016) and how increased visibility about online risks might actually be helpful (Ging & Garvey, 2018). Latest work in literacy featured digital literacy among youth minorities in Southeast Asia (Yue et al., 2019), and the more fundamental work on defining digital literacy (Buckingham, 2010; Hobbs et al., 2010) and developing social media literacy (Livingstone, 2014).

Health and Wellbeing

In the context of health and wellbeing, research has been quite equivocal. Works featured here talk about the association of social media use with children's wellbeing. While social media were found to have strong association with social capital, they were not directly linked with wellbeing. Researchers identified that there was absence of robust causal research pointing to direct impact. However, given that increase in social capital enhanced adolescents' self-esteem and as a result wellbeing

(Ellison et al., 2007), this perspective merits further research. There was also work done on using social media to engage with youth on health related matters on these interactive platforms (Byron et al., 2013; Evers et al., 2013; Hswen et al., 2013). Conversely, evidence was obtained about children's exposure to alcohol marketing on social media (Winpenny et al., 2014). Recently, McDool et al. (2020) used proxy data to point to potential adverse effects of increasing time spent online on children's wellbeing. Holmes (2009) outlined opportunities provided by socialisation online as it leads to increased social capital and support and fosters connectedness, thus making it possible for young people to have possible positive experiences in the future. Swist, Collin, McCormack and Third (2015) and, more recently, Coyne, et al. (2020) acknowledged the link between children's social media use and their wellbeing. In their exhaustive review (Swist et al., 2015), they observed that social media impacts children's physical and mental health, identity and relationships, learning and play, and risk and safety, among other aspects and those positive and negative impacts must be seen in context. On the other hand, in their eight-year longitudinal study (Coyne et al., 2020) based on the Flourishing Families Project at Brigham Young University, USA revealed that increased time spent on social media was not associated with increased mental health issues and implored research to move beyond its focus on screen time. Social media in itself is also not a big predictor of satisfaction among adolescents (Orben et al., 2019). This is especially relevant in the context of our pandemic world. Using social media for health by adolescents and youth was another strand of inquiry (Hausmann et al., 2017) which also included harmful health misinformation spread using platforms like TikTok (Marsh, 2020).

Uses (including expression and presentation)

Work on uses (including expression and presentation) of social media by children dealt with self-expression, identity formation, status negotiation and peer-to-peer sociality (boyd, 2007). Another take on this (Hogan, 2010) is about splitting self-presentation into performances – synchronously situated – and artifacts – asynchronously exhibited – derived from Goffman's work on dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959). Specifically speaking, teens use of social media for romantic purposes like flirting, wooing, breaking-up, controlling/ abusing and sharing a (usually offline) relationship online (Lenhart et al., 2015). This theme was also analysed from a uses and gratifications perspective (Dunne et al., 2010; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Latest work in this aspect covered the relation between face-to-face and digital interactions and the impact of these expressions and presentations on young people's self-esteem (Subrahmanyam et al., 2020), and understanding micro-celebrities and fan cultures and practices (Dezuanni, 2020).

Education and Learning

Using social media to enhance learning (especially online) (Friedman & Friedman, 2013), addressing the 'digital divide', suggesting media education as a bridge and creation of a 'third space' as a solution (Burn et al., 2010), and advising caution in dealing with the moral panic related to digital divide (Bennett et al., 2008) were the ideas dealt with in the education and learning theme. An interesting paper foregrounded the need for formal education of students on the professional use, design and implementation of social media systems (Jacobs et al., 2009). Till before the COVID-19 pandemic, research revealed several media literacy education initiatives internationally (Abreu et al., 2017), education for digital citizenship

(Cortesi et al., 2020; Frau-Meigs et al., 2017) and role of media literacy education in interventions for stereotypes for race and ethnicity (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Work on social media and technologies as avenues for informal learning (Wartella et al., 2016) for children who engage with them holistically as lived media experience (Woodfall & Zezulkova, 2016) show us new directions in research. Some foundational work on understanding concepts, definitions, and frameworks of children's digital literacy has also been done (Nascimbeni & Vosloo, 2019). As we moved into the pandemic and the world became digital by default, especially in terms of education, entertainment, and engagement for children online (Livingstone, 2020), recent work focussed on media education futures post pandemic to see how educators, children and youth dealt with learning going online (Friesem et al., 2022), and what might be the schools of the future (Selwyn et al., 2020).

Safety (including bullying, shaming, violence, and sexting)

Concerns regarding safety of young people on social media made up the next theme. Safety online has to do with the environment on offer for children and youth, just as one would expect safety at home, in school or at a mall. Livingstone et al. (2014) found solicitation of sex, porn, violence, bullying, shaming, etc. bothered children online. They categorised these items into three types of risks: content related, conduct related and contact related. Ringrose et al. (2013) found a link between online and offline lives with gender issues reported in sexting and shaming (girls especially) on social media. Additionally, Marwick and boyd (2014) wrote about understanding how 'drama' operates in teens' online lives and helped illuminate how widespread use of social media among teenagers has altered dynamics of aggression and conflict. Recent work in this area covered bystander intervention by children in cases of

cyberbullying (Vlaanderen et al., 2020), digital self-harm (Patchin & Hinduja, 2017) and need for safe sexting for young people's safety (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; Ringrose et al., 2013) as well as harmful social media cultures like algorithmically generated sexual content (Barry et al., 2021) and how women might be more susceptible to trolling and bullying online (Weimann & Masri, 2020).

Parenting

In the realm of parenting, it was noticed that mothers were likely to give and receive support on social media and mobile media and use them as parenting tools (Duggan et al., 2015; Lim, 2019). Active parental involvement was detected when the child had experienced online harm (Kalmus et al., 2015). Parenting strategies reflected anxieties about online risks and inadvertently contributed to limiting children's opportunities (Tripp, 2011). Lately, literature on parenting and parental mediation has shifted from active and restrictive (Lee & Chae, 2007) to co-using, meaning parents use technology with children (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), and prearming (preparing) and cocooning (sheltering) children from technology (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011) and about parental mediation for the digital age (Clark, 2011). Emerging research categorised parental mediation into the embrace (freely allow), balance (manage and communicate), and resist (blanket ban) approaches regarding children's technology use (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Literature also showed how parental mediation changed over time as children grew older (Beyens et al., 2019). Given the proliferation of mobile media and how important it is to study children and youth in these contexts (Goggin, 2013; Haddon, 2013; Vanden Abeele, 2016), there is also the emergence of transcendent parenting that is

continuously monitoring children in a media saturated family environment (Lim, 2019).

Privacy

One of the oldest themes in this line of enquiry is privacy. The idea of privacy centres around the control one exerts over what, how and how much personal information goes out on social media (Lee, 2013). Youth are sharing more personal information on their profiles than in the past. They choose private settings for Facebook, but share with large networks of friends. Most teen social media users said they aren't very concerned about third-party access to their data (Madden et al., 2013). Marwick & boyd (2014) concurred adding how social media have changed ways one practices visibility and information sharing. They offered a model of networked privacy to explain how privacy is achieved in networked publics. Additionally, another more recent study reported that youth dealt with media and privacy related issues in their own way. For them, online and offline lives were not different. Further research into how they deal with the internet as their social environment needs to be done (Palfrey, 2016). With platforms like Instagram and TikTok, privacy has taken centre stage in academic and mainstream media discourse. For instance, more recent work is on how privacy training affects children's online disclosures (Desimpelaere et al., 2020), children's voices on privacy and its management (De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; Stoilova et al., 2021), issues of privacy by design and its traps (Zaman, 2020), and sharenting and privacy (Leaver, 2020a).

Approaches

A range of approaches has been used to study the different aspects of children and social media. Researchers' questions have guided the use of quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and ethnographic approaches. In studies aiming to establish correlation and association, the natural choice has been the quantitative approach. In some cases, survey methods have been used to ensure privacy of the respondents and they included multiple choice, Likert scaling questions as well as open-ended ones. A qualitative approach was assumed when researchers wanted deeper understandings of the phenomena and mixed methods were used when they wanted to go broad and deep in their investigation. The ethnographic approach was called on when the 'Hows' needed answering: How do children use social media? How do we leverage literacy related tools to help children use online opportunities to the fullest? How do American teens conceptualise 'drama'? How do young people experience sexting? These studies have not only contributed to the field, but also helped policy decisions and, in some cases, combated mainstream media hype around sensitive topics. Some of them have also transcended into the world of application via the very platform they have researched. More recently, exhaustive resource building in terms of theories (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2022), methods (Kotilainen et al., 2022), and policymaking (O'Neill & Dinh, 2022) has been undertaken by CO:RE i.e., Children Online: Research and Evidence that is dedicated to studying and facilitating research on young people's online lives.

Theories Framing the Study on Indian Adolescents on Social Media

It is fairly easy to gloss over differences and diversities within contexts even as we argue for nuance across them. It is also easy to forget that these within context

diversities might actually find commonalities across the Global North and South. Global research on children's online experiences have shown how young people from different geographies but similar socioeconomic backgrounds might have comparable experiences on social media and how children from the same geographies but different backgrounds have nothing in common:

> 12-year-olds in Brazil might indeed be urban, white and middle class and spend time online playing games, chatting on social media, researching for school projects … Twelve-year-olds in India or Pakistan might be upper caste, middle class and urban, in strict disciplinarian schools for much of the day and in extra tuition during the evening, with family access to the internet, mobile phones and television. Or they might be urban working-class girls who labour as maids and cleaners, or boys who work as mechanics and tea boys,... might be rural and impoverished, from minority religious or Dalit communities, living in fear of social violence... homeless, in school seasonally and erratically,... and never having used an internet-connected mobile... (Banaji, 2016, p. 6)

It is thus important to pay attention to these within and across context differences as well as similarities and take a nuanced approach when talking about young people's social media lives. It is also important to make the effort to include diverse groups of young people when talking about their experiences, perceptions, and practices online. That is what this study aims to accomplish, although given limited resources at the doctoral research level, it only manages to cover young people in an urban, metro of India and tries to address diversities like gender and socioeconomic backgrounds. Of course, I have not been able to cover as much as I would have liked to, but I have tried my best to use reflexivity along the process so as

to keep my aim of foregrounding young people's voices about growing up on social media. To this end, I work with the following theories to frame this study:

Given how we live in a media saturated environment and constantly consume, produce, view, create, interact, remix, and live reality on social media to shape and be shaped by, make meanings, present and express, connect, and interact with people, platforms, and algorithms, we live a media life (Deuze, 2012), one that is indivisible from our sense of identity, our experience of the everyday, and how it mediates our perceptions and practices.

So, what do we do in the media life? We live out our everyday and carry out our daily needs and regular tasks on or mediated by platforms and technologies which help us be social, i.e., use media as practice (Couldry, 2012). This includes searching and search-enabling, showing and being shown, presencing, archiving, keeping up with the news (or latest), commentary, keeping channels open while screening out that which is deemed unnecessary or a nuisance. We also study this phenomenon for what it is and what it should be, drawing out two other strands of inquiry: a) how do young people experience, perceive, and practice their social media lives? and b) what ought to be the digital world that young people should be living in to safeguard their expression, identity, wellbeing, and rights?

By considering that children and adolescents are social actors who can bear witness to their social media lives and foregrounding their voices on their experiences, perceptions, and practices, I hope to unpack how they deal with the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959) on their social media profiles. Given the environment of technopanics and restrictive parental mediation around young people and social media in India even as research is trying to focus on literacy,

learning, wellbeing, and cultures, I use a range of work from researchers like Livingstone and Third who recognise children's rights in the digital age (CRC, 2021; Livingstone & Bulger, 2014; Third et al., 2019; UNCRC, 1989) and how young people have agency and negotiate their digital rights to have and continue with their social media lives.

Conclusion

In a world that is increasingly becoming technology based, it is difficult to pry children away from screens, especially as the world is now digital by default in a pandemic (Livingstone, 2020). It is up to the adults to ensure they are digital literates, know their digital rights and feel free to communicate with their peers, siblings, parents, teachers and others in their circle about their experiences online and, if needed, can confide about their problems and look for solutions to them together. Children might inherently also be more than or as digitally literate as adults and might navigate through opportunities and risks online better than or as well as 'digital migrants' and need guidance from time-to-time for new challenges coming their way as highlighted in several studies conducted so far (Bennett et al., 2008; Burn et al., 2010; Byrne et al., 2016; Livingstone, 2008, 2011; Livingstone et al., 2017).

Research based on children's practices and experiences is the need of the hour to approach these issues from evidence and child rights-based perspectives. We now need guided efforts into mapping existing ecosystems of children and digital and social media in the country and also need to hear children's voices in the matter. The following questions could be raised:

- What kind of research and advocacy is getting generated around this issue?

- What are the thoughts and concerns of practitioners, policy makers and civil society members working for children?
- How do children and adolescents (young people) access and use the internet and social media?
- What are young people's practices, experiences and perceptions?

And, armed with all this information and research, we need to find a way to weave the insights into our policies and practices impacting young people across the country because access to smartphones, internet, and social media is on the rise and part of our lives. Media coverage also needs to ideally shift in the direction which pushes discourse further by asking tough questions, leaning towards a rights-based approach for children's digital and social media lives, and spurring policy and regulatory frameworks to move at the desired pace. This thesis is but a step in this direction as I unpack media discourse in India about children and social media (chapter four) map local stakeholders and schools (chapter five) and foreground young people's voices (chapter six) regarding their social media lives.

Methodology and Methods

Approach

Research Problem

Research on young people and digital/ social media has received considerable attention in regions like Europe (Beyens et al., 2020; Livingstone, 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Vanden Abeele, 2016), North America (Marwick & boyd, 2014; Tripp, 2011; van der Velden & El Emam, 2013), and Australia (Green et al., 2011; Leaver, 2020b; Third et al., 2014). Issues raised around young people's media access, uses, experiences, practices, and literacies as well as related technopanics and parental mediation have found space in mainstream media discourse as well (Bowles, 2018; Collier, 2009; Kamenetz, 2018; Thierer, 2012) and have fed back into research (Livingstone, 2014; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015; Staksrud & Milosevic, 2017; Twenge, 2018). These topics are also being studied in the Global South (AlNajjar, 2019; Alwagait et al., 2015; Byrne et al., 2016; Cheung, 2009) and, specifically, in India (Patankar et al., 2017; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016; Sarwatay et al., 2021; Sarwatay & Raman, 2022; Willnat & Aw, 2013).

However, mainstream media discourse in India (detailed analysis in chapter four) is largely limited to technopanics surrounding social media, including hype around social media addiction and blue whale and momo challenges, parenting tips on how to guide children's social media presence, and descriptive accounts of positive social media use (Dutt, 2016; Kumar, 2015; Pednekar, 2016, 2017). More work and robust research are needed, given the country's size and diversity. Additionally, there is the belief that young people are vulnerable and in need of protection (Carter, 2009)

as well as a general distrust of their self-learning/ autodidactic skills, even though the digital is an environment they have grown up in and might know – maybe even better than everyone else – how to navigate and make the most of (Bennett et al., 2008). Interestingly, many underage children sign up for social media and most parents know about this and even help them sign up sometimes (boyd et al., 2011).

Children are social actors who can bear witness to their experiences and perspectives about issues that concern them, especially if these are their lived experiences on digital and social media – a world they were born into (Botturi, 2021; De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; James, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2014). This study aims to tap into that tacit and experiential knowledge possessed by young users of digital tools – those who have grown up connected – and the ways in which they apply and enhance this understanding. It is important and imperative that young people (children and adolescents) be considered articulators of their own experiences on and practices in social media if we are to understand and intervene in these aspects of their lives.

Research Questions

To be able to gain an in-depth understanding and describe features of the uses, experiences, and practices of young people on social media, the following research questions were framed:

- How do young people who have access in India experience social media?
- What are their social media practices?
- How do they perceive risks and opportunities on social media?
- How do they deal with these risks and opportunities?

- How do they understand and articulate digital/ social media competencies?

Different types of data were collected to answer the research questions using necessary methods and tools described below.

Types of Data Collected

Since most of the research questions in this work were related to the hows of young people's social media practices, a qualitative/ ethnographic approach (boyd, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016; Ringrose et al., 2013; Tripp, 2011) was deemed fit. This would ensure that children's voices were foregrounded (De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; James, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2014) and their experiences and narratives provided the evidence to understand their social media lives. Multimodal data (Bagnoli, 2009; Boden & Eatough, 2014) were collected and the following tools (described below) were employed to this end:

- In-depth interviews with participants (individual and group)
- Guided social media tours of participants' social media profiles
- Ethnographic observations of participants' social media profiles

Participants were interviewed one-on-one or in groups – depending on their preference – in a mix of three languages: English, Hindi, and Gujarati for an average of 60-90 minutes. I also took them through guided social media tours of my profiles online on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat. Some participants reciprocated and showed their social media feeds/ 'For You' pages, their profiles on either Instagram or TikTok recorded at the end of the interview, and by following each other on these platforms that enabled me to conduct longer ethnographic

observations – limited to one month after their interview due to resources constraints – of participants' social media profiles over time.

These multimodal data were key as the focus was on unpacking young people's social media cultures, rather than following up on a narrow set of assumptions of their social media use or generalisations (Varis, 2014). This approach enabled me to engage with participants such that they described their social media lives in-depth anchored by the interview questions that focussed on different aspects like access, uses, practices, safety, privacy, skills, problem solving, and mediation. They also guided me through their everyday practices and social media lives when giving the tours and during longer digitally mediated interactions.

Rationale

Why this Methodology

Qualitative enquiry helps unpack how something is thought about, perceived and experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research focused on young people's experiences and practices on social media and unpacked the qualitatively different ways in which people experienced, conceptualised, perceived, and understood social media and used it for meaning-making, identity creation, self-curation, self-presentation and social construction of reality. The ability that the qualitative approach lends me as a researcher to use the interpretive paradigm and emic understanding such that I can foreground young people's voices about their social media lives made it the most suitable for this doctoral thesis.

Developmental psychology – in some instances – argues that children's thinking is different from that of adults and many of the 'taken-for-granted learnings'

of adult thinking do not apply to the thinking of young people as they are both being and becoming while growing up (Walkerdine, 2005). They also are considered digital and social media natives which lends them an advantage at navigating a socially connected world they were born in (Bennett et al., 2008). Hence, this study aimed to map young people's conceptions of social media, i.e., to characterise how social media was perceived and experienced by young people in India using a qualitative approach.

Studies on children and digital/ social media employing the qualitative approach often used focus groups, interviews, and ethnographic data to study young people and social media (Sarwatay, 2018). To uncover risks encountered on social media by children and introduce social media literacy, interviews were used (Livingstone et al., 2014; Staksrud et al., 2013). Young people's social media uses including expression and presentation were studied using mixed methods (Lenhart et al., 2015) and using ethnographic data including multimodal data like focus group, individual interview and virtual ethnography (boyd, 2007; Marwick & boyd, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013). These studies covered an array of topics and concerns like safety, bullying, shaming, violence and sexting. Rangaswamy has worked extensively in the slums of urban India to uncover how youth use mobile internet. In her article with Arora, she used an ethnographic approach to understanding the use of Facebook on mobile phones among a young population whose digital lives and cultures are largely ignored (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016). In another article with Cutrell, she presented an anthropological study using interviews and observations of teenagers in slums adopting mobile internet (Rangaswamy & Cutrell, 2013).

This study draws from a rich tradition of qualitative/ ethnographic work done in this area and tries to build on it by using multimodal data so as to foreground young people's voices regarding their social media lives.

How this Approach Contributes to New Knowledge and Understanding

This study aimed to look at young people's access, uses, skills, practices, problem solving and involvement/ mediation by parents, teachers and/ or siblings. This was made possible by holding in-depth interviews with children and adolescents (one-on-one or in groups, depending on their preference) who shared their experiences and narratives about their social media lives. They also took me, the researcher, on a guided tour of their social media profile (Instagram or TikTok) to give me a first-person narrative of what goes on in children's lives through their social media profiles and the back and front ends of the meaning-making, curation, presentation of the self and identity construction by them.

Some of the participants also followed me and allowed me to follow them for longer participant observation and interaction (direct or indirect) on these social media apps. All this ensured that participants' experiences and narratives took centre-stage and they became empirical experts of their social media lives which led me to an in-depth understanding of how they access, use, experience, practice, and negotiate mediation of their social media lives.

This approach of letting children drive the narrative by using this kind of multimodal data have not been employed in India and other similar Global South countries as often as we would like. Hopefully, this is the beginning of acknowledging the importance of foregrounding young people's experiences on their

social media lives. This might eventually be taken into consideration when parents and other adult carers at the micro level and advocacy and policy decision-makers at the macro level want to weave a more participatory, children-led approach regarding their rights and practices in the digital world (Third et al., 2014).

Difficulties, Limitations, and Strengths

Working with young people can be extremely rewarding and challenging. While adolescents had slightly more nuanced and easier to get to responses, participants in their middle childhood (10-12 years) and coming from certain socioeconomic backgrounds (some middle and lower income families) were not always able to verbalise things in a way that I was familiar with. This called for devising a strategy to ensure they were comfortable and could answer in more/ different ways than I usually used. So, I ensured flexibility during the interview process, e.g., conducting individual or group interviews as per the participants' wish or starting the interview with a social media tour and then taking up the questions I had. This is one of the reasons why the guided social media tours and ethnographic observations were used.

Other ways to elicit responses during this strategy were to have them select social media posts and details on their profile to discuss with me during our interactions. Of course, some younger children were more candid in their experience sharing and older ones had reservations about the process which were eventually alleviated through rapport building and sharing my own experience on social media. Hence, the use of my own social media profiles and actively asking for their opinions on my work as a strategy was envisioned to get through the teenagers much like the

'Walking Through, Going Along and Scrolling Back' article describes (Møller & Robards, 2019).

Another challenge was the potentially invasive nature of this study and how adults would react to my interactions with their children/ students. The university's ethical guidelines as well as the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) approvals helped in avoiding these concerns. In the initial phases of the study, data collection was challenging, but through snowballing and personal contacts, I managed to interact with participants while fully adhering to ethical and IEC norms.

Finally, I will have to deal with – yes this is ongoing – the personal guilt of taking someone's time, work, and experience for my own benefit into account and coming to terms with the bargain my participants are making for having their say recorded in my research work. I did manage to give back to some of my stakeholders by leading sessions and giving invited talks on 'Fake News on Social Media' and 'Cyberbullying' at their request. I also hope to take this doctoral thesis forward by informing policy, design, and education.

This work is a starting point for more dialogue regarding young people's social media lives in a diverse, complex, non-Western, postcolonial context. I acknowledge that a major limitation of this study is that this is a small sample of young people in a metro in India. However, this study gives an entry point into unpacking young people's social media cultures in India.

Policy formulation in India in this area, and more importantly implementation of those policies and guidelines, needs to take into account these narratives and a more flexible approach sensitive to young people's multiple lived realities –

socioeconomic, religious, geographic, media lives – of children across India. This data was also collected pre-pandemic and lockdown related realities are not reflected in this study. I did not go back to my participants for two reasons: the challenges we were facing due to abrupt shutdowns, and to adhere to the scope of this study and the timeline of my doctoral work.

Of course, we need additional work in this area to map how young people's social media lives have changed co-pandemic. Nonetheless, this study is a foot in the door to encourage more research centring children's voices regarding their lived realities.

Ethical Considerations

UNICEF Guidelines for Ethics

The UNICEF guiding documents about Ethical Research Involving Children (Graham et al., 2013) and Ethical Considerations When Using Social Media for Evidence Generation (Berman et al., 2018) were taken into consideration.

Institutional Ethics Committee Approvals at the University

While I had a supervising professor who has worked in the area of children and media and been on several ethics committees as well as a Doctoral Review Committee (DRC) with two other professors who kept track of my progress at every stage, I proposed to get clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) at my University (comparable to the Institutional Review Board) since I was dealing with young people. All materials used in this study were cleared by the IEC and informed assent and consent from the participants and their parents respectively was sought after a thorough briefing process which were also vetted at the three levels:

supervisor, DRC, and IEC. Participants were made fully aware of what the research involved and how it will be used. Secondly, confidentiality of participants has been protected and data collected is used only for the purposes of the study and destroyed after completion of the project and the limitations period. Finally, participants had the right to withdraw at any time and/ or inform the researcher if there was any data (in full or part) they were uncomfortable with being used as part of the study. The pilot helped alleviate most of these concerns and the full data collection and the process after has gone without any issues.

Methods

Following the year-long coursework at the department which also included a readings course with my supervisor that led to the finalisation of my thesis topic, I defended my proposal at the Department in the presence of my supervising professor and Doctoral Review Committee (DRC) along with other faculty members who provided feedback. I also applied to the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) – comparable to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) – at my University for ethics approvals for my proposal. I shared all my tools and materials: the recruitment flyer (see appendices), assent and consent forms (see appendices), interview guide (see appendices), and methods of analysis, and received approval (IEC Reference Number: UH/IEC/2019/146) to conduct a pilot study in the summer of 2019. After submitting a report of my pilot study, I received approval for the full data collection in the period of 2019-2020 and completed my data collection just before the pandemic related lockdowns went into effect.

Tools, Procedures, and Materials

I shared my recruitment flyer on my social media accounts, and distributed them in housing societies and schools in Ahmedabad. Wherever I got the chance, I also briefed potential participants and adults about my doctoral research and answered questions, if any. I visited four housing societies (after permissions from the chairperson or secretary of the society) and four schools (after permissions from principals). I also took the assistance of a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) that ran an educational centre after school for young people to ensure I had participants from across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

After going through the flyer to explain the research project, assent and consent forms were explained to participants and the parents/ adult carers who were sitting for the briefing either in participants' homes or schools or the NGO. This briefing included my introduction and what this project was about as well as what was expected of the participants and how they could choose to answer questions they wanted and be excused from ones they did not. They were also told about their right to withdraw or stop the interview at any time. I also informed them how I would process and use the data I was collecting.

Once the forms were signed, I sat with the participants and went through the interview guide to ask them about their social media lives. I used a notepad, voice recorder, and my mobile phone to record notes, the interview, and to take participants on my social media tour. Some participants also used my phone to show me their Instagram and TikTok profiles and added me to their connections (friends/ followers). Once the interaction was over, I notified the adults and – with their permission – offered a box of chocolates to participants to thank them for their time and input. In

total, I interacted with 51 young people during my pilot study (summer 2019) and full data collection (monsoon 2019 to winter 2020). More details about participant demographics are in chapter six.

Recruitment

Participants were young people with access to social media from Ahmedabad, a metropolitan city in West India, in the age group of 10-18 years who have been using social media for two years or more. Social media included websites and applications used by the above-defined participants to create and share content and participate in social networking online, e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Musical.ly/ TikTok, WhatsApp, etc. A pilot study was conducted in summer 2019 to iron out any irregularities in the interview guide and identify any topics that were left out. This guide was a broad list of questions that may not be fully used in all the interviews and depended on participant interaction. The complete data collection was concluded between 2019 and 2020, before the pandemic lockdowns in India.

Types of Questions Asked

After the briefing and initial rapport building, I asked participants basics about their social media access, and uses and practices online. Questions then covered aspects like skills and problem solving, safety and privacy, and mediation by others (parents, teachers, siblings, etc.). For the detailed question guide, please see appendices.

Where, When, and How Data was Collected

A detailed information flyer about the study was created along with an assent form for children and a consent form for their parent/ adult carer. The flyers were

distributed in person in housing societies, and schools, as well as on social media. Participants were recruited through these flyers and snowball sampling was also employed. Three age blocks of 10-12 years (middle childhood and underage use in case of some social media), 13-15, and 16-18 years (adolescence) were utilised as per (Newman & Newman, 2015). Diversities like gender and inequalities like class were also addressed during the recruitment as far as possible for research has shown that boys and girls experience social media differently (Ging & Garvey, 2018; McDool et al., 2020; Ringrose et al., 2013).

Care was taken to ensure equal or close to equal participation from both sexes and across socioeconomic backgrounds. I sought out specific housing societies, schools and the NGO to ensure participants from higher, middle, and lower income families were part of this study. I referred to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (Sharma, 2022) classification and considered a modified version for my thesis. In my study, lower income families were those earning below INR 2 lakh per annum, middle income families earned up to 10 lakh per annum and higher income families earned more than 10 lakh per annum. This meant that young people with multiple devices of their own as well as those with no device for personal use were also part of the study as long as they had some background in viewing, using, or creating on social media for at least two years before the date of the interview.

Interviews were conducted at participants' homes, in schools and at an NGO, where participants felt comfortable talking about their social media practices and experiences. Others (parents/ adult carers) who were not part of the discussion were sometimes in the periphery, around the house, or classroom but did not participate in the discussion.[2]

Analysis

Data Preparation and Processing

Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai and translated as needed for analysis. Participants' personal data collected through their social media tours and ethnographic observations were anonymised. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants for all presentations and publications arising from this study, and all traceable or identifiable details were removed.

Methods of Analysis

Given that I wanted to analyse young people's interpretations of their social media lives and build theory around their voices, the grounded theory approach made most sense to be employed in my analysis. While I had existing literature and theoretical underpinnings (chapter two) guiding my inquiry, I did not begin with any specific theory governing my analysis and instead let my participants' interviews, guided social media tours and profiles i.e., data help me generate theoretical interpretations.

Interview data was marked for specific phrases and paragraphs of relevant information along with the context in which they occurred also known as open coding. This coded data was classified into the different concepts which was further classified into specific categories through axial coding. Quotes and examples from data were used to illustrate the theorising occurring out of this process.

I made detailed field notes about the entire process of getting the interview and the interview itself as well as the guided tour of the young person's social media. These notes were used for the recursive process of further interviewing and, finally, as data

for the study. Broadly, the researcher used grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) for this work and identified key themes related to how participants lived their social media lives.

Contextualising the Field

Introduction

Children from middle and higher income families in India often have easy access to digital and social media these days. An ASSOCHAM (IANS, 2015) survey found that children with both parents working were more prone to being addicted to technology like smartphones and social media. Scholarship regarding children's access, usage and its effects on identity formation and social interactions, among other things, has been equivocal and often polarised. Dr Jean Twenge's book, iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood based on research in the United States, where she posits that an entire generation has been lost to smartphones, sparked off a contentious debate across academia and popular media (Twenge, 2018) with some scholars taking issue both with Twenge's findings and her interpretation of children's media use and more broadly, the consequences of screen time. This discussion reiterated concerns articulated in research and policy circles about children's digital literacies, digital rights and parental cautions about appropriate and productive digital media use/ participation.

Against this backdrop, multilateral agencies like UNICEF have attempted to define and advocate for 'Children's Rights in the Digital Age' (CRC, 2021; Livingstone & Bulger, 2014; Third et al., 2019), drawing on research-based inputs from activists and academics. However, these frameworks and analyses are almost all based on understandings of children's lives in western contexts, with some work coming from Latin America and Central Europe. While the moral panics (as seen in the works of (Bennett et al., 2008; Cassell & Cramer, 2008; Marwick, 2008; Tripp,

2011)) surrounding children's digital media use are just as pervasive in India and in other parts of the global south, there has been little empirical work that can inform a possible articulation of children's digital rights and digital literacies in these contexts even as intersectionality and diversity give way to exciting research (Alper et al., 2016) and necessary importance to children's contexts augur deeper understandings to their inequalities and exclusions (Banaji, 2016; Helsper, 2017). These moral/ technopanics, however, do find a place in mainstream media discourse in India, which is described in this section of the chapter. This section maps the discourse on children and social media in the Indian media space, based on newspaper coverage and analysis of the topic. This section also makes clear the paucity of research in this area in India.

Research and Discourse on Children and Social Media in India

Google Scholar searches for terms "social media" and "children and social media" generate millions of results, but most of these studies come from the Global North. There is rich interdisciplinarity in these topics for results are from varied fields like management studies, communication and media studies, computer sciences, (paediatric) medicine, women's studies, political science, children's studies, and visual studies, among others. However, the search for the term "children and social media" did not yield substantial results for work in India. This certainly does not suggest that no work has been done in India; although very little is available to view and even less so of the so far limited work that is done is available to download freely.

I could only find limited industry research done on this topic (from organisations like ASSOCHAM (IANS, 2015), and McAfee (PTI, 2014)), research conducted by teachers and students and some mainstream media reportage circling

sensational stories, like addiction, underage use, the ‘Blue Whale’ and ‘momo’ challenges and tips to parents plus some positive stories of internet use benefits. But, robust literature from India regarding children, adolescents, and youth in a digital world is growing and adding to the knowledge on young people’s social media cultures.

Children and young people in India used social media like TikTok – before its ban – for meaning-making, self-expression, creativity, and activism (Sarwatay, 2020; Sharma, 2021; Subramanian, 2021; Verma, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). With increasing access to smartphones and mobile internet, youth were also adopting digital leisure and social media for friendships, connections, and dating (Arora, 2019; Deshbandhu, 2020; Raman & Verghese, 2014; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016). There is also work on critical media literacy education pedagogy for children and digital privacy with regards to social media practices of young people in Indian slums (Arora & Scheiber, 2017; Bhatia & Pathak-Shelat, 2017) among other mainstream media work such as reports on content espousing harassment that already exists on several platforms (Bose, 2020) and more below.

Nimmi Rangaswamy has studied youth in the slums of urban India to uncover how this group (especially young boys) use mobile internet. In a co-authored paper with Arora (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016), she uses an ethnographic approach to understand the use of Facebook on mobile phones among a young population whose digital lives and cultures are largely ignored. In another article with Cutrell and others (Rangaswamy et al., 2013), she presents an anthropological study of teenagers in slums adopting mobile internet. Payal Arora’s book The Next Billion Users was featured in The Economist (Arora, 2019) as she wrote on how people in the Global

South are increasingly going online for leisure. More specifically, some excellent work on children and media and foregrounding their voices has been done by Banaji who also highlighted existing inequalities in research on children's online experiences (Banaji, 2016, 2017). Nonetheless, compared to the research and media attention given to this topic in the Global North, these endeavours are but a start to focusing on an increasingly important topic.

At the beginning of my doctoral research work, I looked at newspaper coverage on children, the internet and social media from Hindustan Times – headquartered in Delhi – and The Hindu – headquartered in Chennai – for a five-year period, i.e., 2013-2017. These newspapers were selected because (a) they are two of the largest circulated English newspapers in India as per the Audit Bureau of Circulations (as per the 2018 report) (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2019) and (b) they cover the country's length and breadth and hence have the potential to impact academic and public discourse as well as policy. Seventy articles (inclusive of news and press reports, features, and opinion-editorials) were found by using the search function in websites of Hindustan Times and The Hindu and by excluding duplicate results. These dealt directly with the topic of children, the internet and social media in the title and the lead paragraph.

After a casual reading of the articles, a coding frame for content analysis was constructed to analyse aspects of manifest content regarding the topic of interest. This was later examined closely to classify articles into the following thematic categories of 'risks', 'addiction', 'problems', 'monitoring', 'action taken' and 'learning'. Each of the main thematic categories had three sub-categories; e.g., 'risks' was further categorised into 'cybercrime', 'bad online experience' and 'children and risky

behaviour' and so on with the others after a closer reading of the articles. Each sub-category was then populated by illustrations that unfolded from the media discourse. For instance, 'cybercrime' had cyber bullying, cyber stalking, sexual abuse etc. as themes emerging from the analysis. Similarly, 'bad online experience' consisted of humiliation, targeting of girls, cruel behaviour, trolling, among others. 'Children and risky behaviour' highlighted the Blue Whale Challenge and how children were vulnerable. Below are the themes from the newspaper analysis:[3]

Table 2 Newspaper coverage on children, internet & social media in India

Source: Author

Risks		
Cybercrime	***Bad Online Experience***	***Children and Risky Behaviour***
Children unaware of cybercrime	70% teens have had one	Underage use violating laws
Cyber bullying	Use of Social Media (SM) to embarrass, humiliate	40% believe home address should not be shared but still do
Cyber safety	FB 'other' folder used to send lewd messages	Children are vulnerable
Cyber stalking	Girls targeted	Blue Whale Challenge (BWC) issues
Sexual abuse	40% witnessed cruel behaviour online	BWC ban won't work
1/4 children in metros bullied	Trolling	No clarity about how BWC works
Addiction		
Types	***Reasons***	***Ways out***
Smartphone/ Tablet/ Computer	Internet penetration in younger age	Digital detox
Internet	Younger children hooked to online games	Hospital in Pennsylvania 1st to offer de-addiction
Gaming	Just like gambling	Several hospitals and NGOs now across India
Social Media		E.g., NIMHANS, CCITD, etc.
Problems		

Physical	***Psychological***	***Others***
Sleep disturbed	iDisorder = caused by internet addiction	Threats made
Weak immune systems	Depression	Shaming, slut shaming, etc.
Health being affected	Distress due to prolonged use	Identifiable features of girls described
Self harm	Irritability	Working families = more time online
Suicides	Concentration problems	If intent is misuse, nothing safe
	Brain development hampered	Studies being affected
	Negativity affects children	
Monitoring		
Parents	***Schools***	***Restrictions***
Access under supervision	Children monitored	Ban online games in school
Computers in living rooms	CCTV in computer labs	Age appropriate sites should be accessed
Parents ask for passwords	Software to monitor grades, homework, attendance, etc.	Online helicopter parenting!
Use parental controls	Talk about internet habits	Communication with strangers online strict no
Apps to monitor children online		No sharing personal info online
Action Taken		
Parents Do's	***Parents Don'ts***	***Schools***
Inform and interact with children	Respond aggressively	Colleges crack down on confession pages
Limit screen time	Take hasty decisions	Parents informed & instructed
Set a positive example	Be a satellite parent hovering over your child	Discuss pros and cons of SM with children
Help children rediscover joys of real interaction	Forget to prevent misuse	Install firewalls, filtering and monitoring software and review everything periodically
Report cyber safety issues	Forget to fix family time	Stress on internet safety must
Limit access to sensitive sites		Counselling sessions organised
Learning		

Digital Literacy	***Education***	***Others***
Safe internet uses essential	50% use SM for assignments	Facebook used by children for games, learning, networking, etc.
Schools should educate children and parents	Online tuition	SM can help students relieve stress and learn better
Online storytelling	Self-organised learning environment	Apps and websites help young and restless connect with tradition
Internet will change the way we learn	Sex education	Students use video chat for learning new hobbies, tutorials and chatting with parents/ grandparents

Risks

The main category of 'risks' was further classified into 'cybercrime', 'bad online experience' and 'children and risky behaviour'. General media discourse regarding cybercrime drew from the coverage of different kinds of crime and how children were unaware of them. Cases of cyber bullying, stalking, abuse and harm were also covered. Many children had bad experiences online and more often than not, they did not tell anybody about them. For instance, one of the newspaper articles analysed for this study reported a survey conducted by two students of a Mumbai college that recounted low awareness regarding cybercrime and cyber safety among children with the young researchers finding "less than 40% students knew about cyber bullying", and that they were not sure who to share problems with when they came across something alarming online (Bhandary, 2017).

Another article, titled, 'Confessions or cyber bullying?' dealt with 'confession pages' on social media and how they are often used for cyber bullying, and serious confessions – which should get attention and action – as well as cases of bullying online often remain anonymous or go unreported as young people do not come

forward; a student was quoted, “Most confessions target the girls which are highly abusive and bullying, even the words that are used in the post are disgusting. Most take it as a chance to make fun of girls in their institution,” (Gowri, 2013).

The Blue Whale Challenge was covered widely receiving seven articles in 2017, most of them being featured in Hindustan Times. These articles – like ‘Chandigarh education dept issues advisory on Blue Whale game; instructions for teachers, parents’ (Arshi, 2017), ‘What is the Blue Whale Challenge’ (HT Correspondent, 2017a) and ‘Remove links to Blue Whale Challenge or face action, Minister tells social media firms’ (PTI, 2017) – had descriptions of alleged cases of the fatal game, sharing tips and guidelines and commenting on legal and other aspects about it.

Addiction

Online addiction has come a long way from being ‘discovered’ as a “thing now” (Goswami, 2013) to overtaking other priorities in the lives of children and becoming a genuine cause for concern by, e.g., distracting children from their exam preparation (Dutt, 2017). Different types of addiction were found: smartphone addiction, internet/ online addiction, gaming addiction, social media addiction, etc. Media discourse, as mentioned above, went from dismissing it as over dependency to actively talking about reasons and de-addiction methods. Articles were littered with anecdotal evidence and among the reasons identified were engagement and pleasure that stimulates a dopamine spike getting young people hooked (Dutt, 2017), internet availability at a younger age (Kumar, 2015). Articles also went on to suggest ways to battle addictions like ‘digital detox’ and de-addiction centres across India.

Problems

Various physical, psychological and allied problems were reported due to excessive use of digital and social media. From disturbed sleep to suicide and distress to depression, children were reported as having experienced an array of problems due to over use of technology (Dutt, 2016, 2017; Goswami, 2013; Gowri, 2013; Kumar, 2015). Media coverage in the newspapers studied reported everything from children's sleep being disturbed at night due to smartphones, internet, social media and gaming resulting to their health being affected because of compromised immune systems caused by long-term overuse and alleged self harm cases and suicides. Many other reporters/ authors, also came up with a checklist for online addiction, red flags and tips for parents, and dos and don'ts for children and parents. Some articles also threw light on problematic behaviour like shaming, slut shaming, bullying and showing off weapons on social media. Articles spoke ominously about the Blue Whale Challenge (BWC) and its links to alleged suicides and self harm along with helpline numbers for psychological support to teenagers.

Articles also highlighted other cons of smartphones like, "lower academic performance, fear of missing out, weak eyesight, disturbed sleep cycle, headaches and fatigue" and touched on the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) 18-point guideline for safe and effective use of internet and digital technologies in schools and school buses. For its part, CBSE (2017) in its official communications hails the internet as a "valuable learning resource" but also warns children to use it with "safety awareness" to avoid falling prey to cyber bullying, online fraud, etc. and highlights the schools' role to control and monitor children's use in schools and school buses. To

this end, they have advised schools to take certain measures for children's education, awareness, and monitoring.

Monitoring

The need for parents and schools to monitor children's smartphone and internet usage was a topic that was widely discussed in newspapers. Several methods ranging from technological interventions to communication were cited as ways to combat these problems. "Supporting them by talking to them, spending more time with them, making them understand the pros and cons can help children develop a better understanding about smartphone usage," an article (HT Correspondent, 2017b) quoted a New Delhi based psychiatrist who offered tips that went beyond monitoring. This seems to follow the broad approach taken by the education sector, with the CBSE guidelines also including pointers like having CCTV in computer labs, software to monitor and alert administration about attendance, homework and grades, and hold sessions on internet habits and dos and don'ts. Parents were advised to keep children under supervision while accessing smartphones, computers, social media, internet and games. However, they were also discouraged from helicopter parenting and advised instead to form a mentor-mentee bond with children rather than restricting it to strict monitoring.

Action Taken

Action taken in terms of dos and don'ts by parents and steps taken by schools was the next thematic category that emerged. Articles reported on some of the best ways to help young people navigate through the virtual world with tips like informing and interacting with them, limiting screen time and setting up other activities like

reading and playing instead, setting a positive example for them, reporting cybercrime and safety issues, and helping children rediscover the joys of face-to-face interaction. Dutt (2017) quoted a psychiatrist in her report who advised, “The best antidote for online addiction is real face-to-face communication. Talk to your child; encourage him to visit friends or family members. Encourage them to step out and participate in group activities like various outdoor games, dancing or singing.”

Guidelines by education governance institutions (CBSE, 2017) were also put to action by schools and several steps were taken to safeguard children from harm like keeping parents informed of their wards’ performance, discussing the pros and cons of technology, and installing firewalls, filtering and monitoring software and periodically reviewing their online presence. Some schools and colleges also cracked down on confession pages (Gowri, 2013) that acted as spheres of cyber bullying and slut shaming and organised counselling for their students.

Learning

Not everything about digital and social media was seen negatively in the newspaper coverage. These technologies and environments were used positively for education and learning as well. From school assignments to online tuitions and even sex education was accessed online. It was found that effective, short duration usage of social media actually boost students’ performance. A village student who travels quite the distance daily to attend school interviewed (Sandhu, 2017) said, “This is for the first time that I am using these social networking platforms for study. Best part is that you can instantly exchange notes and clear any doubts. Luckily, in my WhatsApp group, there are classmates who are top scorers and their guidance is very helpful.”

Students also mentioned a sense of freedom in asking questions online vs. in class where they might feel shy and nervous as well as how positive use of technology helps in saving time and other resources and aids learning. For some children, experiencing internet for the very first time was also their doorway to learning as they watch online math and science videos. These technologies were also used to keep in touch with our tradition and families and many youngsters are using it to question stereotypes and use humour to parody clichés. Some schools also wanted to include social media in their curriculum as students used it for assignments and many of them also reported that their parents had access to their social media (Pednekar, 2016, 2017; Sandhu, 2017).

Overarching Themes

In this analysis of media discourse surrounding children and social media, two overarching themes were noticed: 'technopanics' and 'digital literacy'. A large part of the media narrative is constantly making internet and allied technologies look like the villain and how our children are vulnerable and helpless and need to be taken care of at home and school. Marwick elaborates:

> Technopanics have the following characteristics. First, they focus on new media forms, which currently take the form of computer-mediated technologies. Second, technopanics generally pathologize young people's use of this media, like hacking, file-sharing, or playing violent video games. Third, this cultural anxiety manifests itself in an attempt to modify or regulate young people's behavior, either by controlling young people or the creators or producers of media products. (Marwick, 2008)

Like every other technology around us, there are pros and cons to social media as well. It is our engagement with them and our children that determines what use they will be put to. One might argue that large-scale technopanics have led to a digital literacy movement that has been directly or indirectly become part of children's, parents' and teachers' lives. This can be extended to the world of smartphones and social media, and has been alluded to in newspaper coverage by means of tips and dos and don'ts list to parents and guidelines to schools, urging them to become more digitally literate and ensure that young people are mindful of the same too.

It was interesting to note that there was a deep chasm between western and Indian media discourse regarding social media platforms' abuse of personal data and monetisation via tracking and advertising. Children's datafication and active targeting as an emerging market is a growing cause for concern in the global discourse (Barassi, 2020; De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Third et al., 2019) as well as media discourse, but newspapers and academia in India have not touched on this topic in as much detail as may have been expected. Guidelines from the CBSE also do not specifically address this issue. This is an important theme that is absent from media discourse and, while the profit-making aspect of social media may not be the focus of this article, it certainly is one of the most significant topics that is not being discussed in media, schools or among parents, teachers and young people.

At this point, it is also of note to see some commonalities in the broader research discourse and some aspects of the mainstream media coverage on social media and children in India. Given that we see technopanics in Indian media around this topic, stories focussed on risks and harms with parental mediation taking a

restrictive turn as parents were encouraged to monitor and take action. Broader research discourse around the globe also focussed on risks and harms online but balanced the narrative by delving into topics like literacy, safety, and privacy at the same time. They have also started looking at young people's social media lives with a rights-based approach lending importance to their voices reflecting their uses and perspectives while focussing on learning, wellbeing and balanced parental mediation strategies. Indian researchers are – in their own way – acknowledging the importance of studying young people and their digital lives along these lines.

The field: Welcome to Amdavad!

> … The Shah, while on a gracious walk,
>
> stopped at the bank of the river Sabarmati
>
> The ground was clean and charming,
>
> The water pleasant, the air pure.
>
> On seeing these attractions, by the grace of Allah,
>
> he dreamt of a wondrous city …
>
> - Hulvi Shirazi, Tarikh-i-Ahmedshahi (as quoted in Yagnik & Sheth, 2011)

The city of Ahmedabad – colloquially known as Amdavad – is a large metropolis in West India. It is the second-oldest metropolitan city after Delhi, dating back to its establishment in 1411 AD by Sultan Ahmed Shah, hence the name Ahmedabad (Doshi, n.d.; Yagnik & Sheth, 2011). It is the largest city in the state of Gujarat and – with more than 55 lakh (5.5 million) inhabitants – ranks first in the state and fifth in the country in terms of population as per the 2011 Census (ORGI, 2012).

Ahmedabad lies in the basin of the Sabarmati river which flows such that it divides the city into two: the old city – historically called the 'walled town' (Doshi, n.d.) – and the new city, as it is locally known (see figure below). The old city, also known as East Ahmedabad, is dominated by precolonial and colonial architecture featuring heritage buildings and sites like museums, halls, libraries, bridges, old factories, offices, closely-knit residential buildings called '*pol*s' and larger ones known as '*haveli*s', and other historical sites. This architecture is inspired by Hindu, Jain, Islamic, Dutch, and British influences. The new city, also called West Ahmedabad, is dotted with high-rises, malls, multiplexes, and glass buildings which are more modern/ contemporary in design (Patel, n.d.).

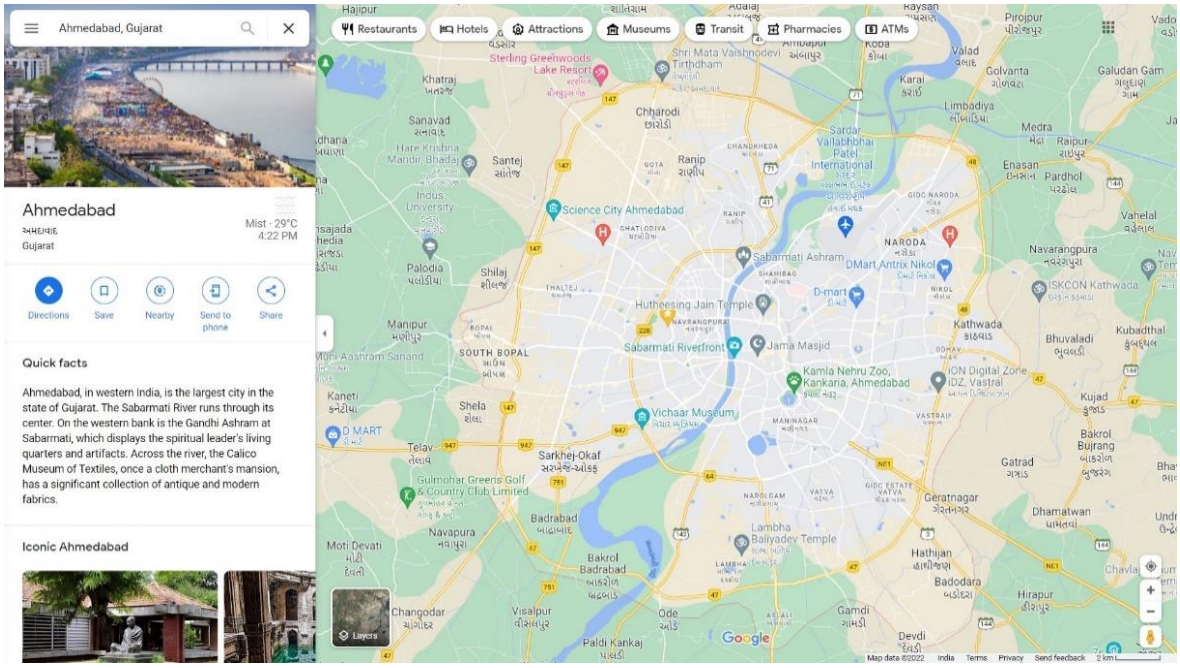

Figure 2 City split into West and East Ahmedabad by the River Sabarmati

Source: Google Maps

Ahmedabad has historically been and still is a major industrial and trade centre in the state, and the commercial and educational capital of Gujarat (Directorate of Census Operations, Gujarat, 2015). It is cosmopolitan and attracts people from

different socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. While Hindus, Jains, and Muslims of different castes dominate the city, it is also home to many people from Christian, Parsi, Sikh, and other tribal communities. Ahmedabad city has a sex ratio of 898 females per 1,000 males and 88 percent literacy rate, with a nine percent male to female literacy gap (Directorate of Census Operations, Gujarat, 2015). Ahmedabad has 24 schools available per 10,000 population (Directorate of Census Operations, Gujarat, 2015) which puts the total number of schools to above 13,000 schools including government-funded and -run public as well as private educational trust-run schools.

The city has had a rich socio-political and cultural history since its establishment. There have been several ups and downs, of course: with communal harmony and violence as well as caste and class struggles through the city's past (Mahadevia et al., 2014; Spodek, 2011). In modern history, Ahmedabad featured prominently as one the major sites where the foundations of the freedom struggle of India were laid, and was known as Gandhi's *Karmabhumi* (Spodek, 2011; Yagnik & Sheth, 2011). More recently, UNESCO declared Ahmedabad as India's first heritage city for its more than 600 year-old 'walled city' and its Hindu, Islamic, Jain, and other architectural marvels (The Hindu Correspondent, 2017).

Ahmedabad was also chosen to be part of the National Smart Cities Mission (Times News Network, 2016), whereby the government allocated funds to modernise the city's technological infrastructure and integrate information and communication technologies with networks of the internet of things for datafication and optimisation to improve governance efficiency and effectiveness. Hence, the local governance body, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), geared up for a digitally connected

city by providing free Wi-Fi zones (Raval, 2017) and smart schools (Times News Network, 2019). Ahmedabad featured in the top ten metros of internet users in India in 2019 (Basuroy, 2022). Private telecom providers have looked forward to expanding their consumer base in the city by providing better speed (Gurnaney, 2016).

This was the site of my doctoral research, and while my focus was on finding out young people's experiences and practices on social media, I thought it was also important to contextualise my field by looking at what other stakeholders in the city like professionals, civil society and research and advocacy experts, as well as schools (teachers, counsellors, administrators) thought about young people and social media.

Conclusion

Technopanics are visible in Indian media discourse surrounding children and social media. While the same technologies can be used to keep a hawk eye on our children, research in other contexts has shown that it is much better if we communicate with them, show them the pros and cons, set a positive example and trust them to make the right choice. In a world that is increasingly becoming technology based, it is difficult to pry children away from screens, especially as the world is now digital by default in a pandemic (Livingstone, 2020). It is up to the adults to ensure they are digital literates, know their digital rights and feel free to communicate with their peers, siblings, parents, teachers and others in their circle about their experiences online and, if needed, can confide about their problems and look for solutions to them together. Children might inherently also be more than or as digitally literate as adults and might navigate through opportunities and risks online better than or as well as 'digital migrants' and need guidance from time-to-time for

new challenges coming their way as highlighted in several studies conducted so far (Bennett et al., 2008; Burn et al., 2010; Byrne et al., 2016; Livingstone, 2011).

As the Indian user base increases, we will find newer and many more challenges in ensuring the digital rights of our children and that they have a safe and enriching experience online. Further research and input to policy and practice is something we all owe to our next generation, the 'digital natives', who should be digital literates as well. While digital and media literacy is also about safekeeping from manipulation of social media's affordances for profit, this work does not deal with that aspect, and this debate needs its own investigation. However, it is curious how mainstream media in India does not reflect these apprehensions in the context of children and social media. Western academia and mainstream media have often dealt with the topic of social media companies targeting children as a market for apps and/ or sales (Barassi, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2019; Lupton & Williamson, 2017). This leads us to asking questions about and possible future research on media framing regarding children and social media, political economy of social media, young people's digital labour, and youth as a commodity for targeted advertising, surveillance, and datafication, among other concerns.

There is already demand for a separate law in India to regulate children's social media exposure (Dutta, 2018). While the Information Technology Act, 2000 exists to protect Indians from cybercrimes, UNICEF India's Child Online Protection in India Report (Singh & Bishnoi, 2016) stated an urgent need to have a legal framework to protect young people from crimes on social media given the rapid proliferation of cheap smartphones and access to internet through mobile data plans. This report helps understand online risks faced by children, identify the legislative

gaps and how they can be filled including a stakeholder analysis that can help guide and implement the process. Their categorisation of online child abuse into two kinds, viz. harmful and abusive online behaviour between children, and online sexual exploitation of children is a great start towards guiding further action. While the former kind of abuse could presumably be tackled by ensuring we become and enable others (especially young people) to become digitally literate, among other solutions, the latter definitely requires legal action. UNICEF already has a team of experts working on these issues.

Research based on children's practices and experiences is the need of the hour to approach these issues from evidence and child rights-based perspectives. We now need guided efforts into mapping existing ecosystems of children and digital and social media in the country and also need to hear children's voices in the matter. The following questions could be raised:

- What kind of research and advocacy is getting generated around this issue?
- What are the thoughts and concerns of practitioners, policy makers and civil society members working for children?
- How do children and adolescents (young people) access and use the internet and social media?
- What are young people's practices, experiences and perceptions?

And, armed with all this information and research, we need to find a way to weave the insights into our policies and practices impacting young people across the country because access to smartphones, internet, and social media is on the rise and part of our lives. Media coverage also needs to ideally shift in the direction which pushes discourse further by asking tough questions, leaning towards a rights-based

approach for children's digital and social media lives, and spurring policy and regulatory frameworks to move at the desired pace. This thesis is but a step in this direction as I map local stakeholders and foreground young people's voices regarding their social media lives in the following chapters.

Stakeholder and School Voices

A Quick Refresher: What, How, and Why this Study

This doctoral study – as detailed in chapters one and three – aimed to tap into that tacit and experiential knowledge possessed by young users of digital tools – those who have grown up connected – and the ways in which they apply and enhance this understanding. It is important and imperative that young people (children and adolescents) be considered empirical experts of their own experiences on and practices in social media if we are to understand and intervene in these aspects of their lives. However, we have noted that media discourse has already generated a sense of technopanics and often prescribes tips for adults and carers to deal with young people's social media lives. In this scenario, it became important to ask stakeholders like professionals, civil society, and research and advocacy experts, as well as schools (teachers, counsellors, administrators) what they thought about young people and social media in the city.

In this part of the project, I took an ecosystem-based approach to understanding media literacy, digital citizenship, and social connectedness in the Indian context, using a series of in-depth interviews with a selected group of stakeholders. As literature reviewed previously suggested, informal and formal learning environments have shaped how youth engaged with digital citizenship, how media literacies are practiced, and how social connectedness emerged in various contexts. Various contextual factors such as family environments, school curricula, socio-political climate, and technological access influenced how youth used media to connect, learn, and participate in creative, personal, political, and civic activities. Therefore, it is important to examine the role of stakeholders such as parents,

teachers, social workers, children's advocates, and others who may contribute to shaping the media environment for young people.

Several educational and research organisations as well as the media in India have shown interest in youth and social media and have considered – in varying levels of detail – how parents and children navigate experiences online. Specific research priorities have emerged in the Indian context, and, given the relative recency of such research in the Global South, most often, quantitative methods like surveys (questionnaires and structured interviews) have been employed, the main target of these being teachers and parents (IANS, 2015; PTI, 2014). However, little attention has been paid to other influencers of youth and media spaces such as social workers, industry experts, and children's advocacy groups, all of which also influence meso-level and macro-level policies and practices related to digital and social media literacy.

From the management of technology and innovation standpoint (Tsujimoto et al., 2018), one of the significant ecosystems perspectives is the multi-actor network perspective. The actors are government, universities, consumers, firms, policymakers, user communities, etc. and they are concerned with forces like power, regulation, and knowledge, among others. This multi-actor network is but one aspect of the wider ecosystem of connective media theorised by van Dijck (2013). This includes invisible technical dimensions of online platforms including business and commerce aspects, infrastructures that enable and support online activities, and social and democratic dimensions (van Dijck et al., 2019). Experts interviewed in this study are actors in this network of connective media. These actors exist in a system where forces – regulation, power, knowledge – operate to varying degrees in business, social, and

democratic dimensions of the ecosystem. Interviews as a method to map stakeholders and ecosystems have been used across several fields (Raum, 2018; Woods et al., 2019) and was thus the chosen method for this study as well.

There has been some thoughtful dialogue on issues relating to digital media and children's social media lives; however, these discussions tend to happen in rarefied and often disparate spaces like academia and some civil society, and have not yet begun to make a dent on policy in the Indian context. This study was an attempt to understand how key stakeholders understand these issues, and what they see as key concerns based on their deep understanding of the culture, and socioeconomic contexts in which Indian children live their varied lives. In-depth personal interviews (16) were conducted from October to December 2019 (pre-COVID-19 period) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India with professionals working directly and indirectly with young people and their parents in India in both informal and formal learning contexts. These individuals collectively represent a group that plays a significant role, some as policy advocates and others as key influencers of media discourse and interlocutors of media practice within and outside educational institutions.

Roadmap to the Results: What Stakeholders and Schools have to say

The main questions that guided the interviews were:

- How do stakeholders and school personnel frame and perceive issues related to young people's media literacy, social connectedness and digital citizenship?
- What insights have these experts gained through working with parents and children?

The nine stakeholders interviewed[4] are briefly described (see table below) with their relative positioning (see figure below) along the policy-praxis-research axes. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their identities.

Table 3 Details about the stakeholders

Source: Author

Sr. No.	Pseu-donym	Gender	Socio-economic background	Work	Details
1	Jaya Kulkarni	Female	Higher income	Civil Society: Child psychologist and parent-educator	Founder-director of a preschool and consultant for usually well-to-do families on parenting issues including those related to digital and social media usage
2	Sima Ahmad	Female	Middle income	Civil Society: Social media and parenting expert	Involved with several social media initiatives some of which focus on how parenting needs for middle and higher income families to adapt to a digital world
3	Aruna Misra	Female	Higher income	Civil Society: Mom-blogger	Assists relatively high-end private schools with their web presence, organises events related to parenting for the school's clientele which is generally middle to higher income families
4	Aniket Das	Male	Higher income	Professionals: Head, Digital and social media marketing company	Works with corporate organisations and schools to cater to their digital/ social media marketing needs, clientele usually comes from middle to higher income families
5	Kartik Jain	Male	Higher income	Professionals: Cyber lawyer	Trains corporate and government employees on cybersafety and runs an initiative on online safety for schools and colleges across the socioeconomic spectrum
6	Manu Kaur	Female	Higher income	Professionals: Advocate and professor	Managing director of an organisation that works for victims of cybercrimes, deals with people from different castes and classes
7	Dileep Patil	Male	Higher income	Research and Advocacy: Head, Child rights centre	Research and capacity building activity at a centre working on child rights that is supported by UNICEF in a reputed private university

8	Kavita D'Cruz	Female	Higher income	Research and Advocacy: Director, Centre for development communication	Associated with Global Kids Online and UNICEF Innocenti that aims to reach young people across the spectrum regarding their online habits
9	Harish Korrapati	Male	Middle income	Research and Advocacy: Expert in digital and social media	Interest in media for social change; his work tends to focus on organisations engaged with disadvantaged communities/ vulnerable people

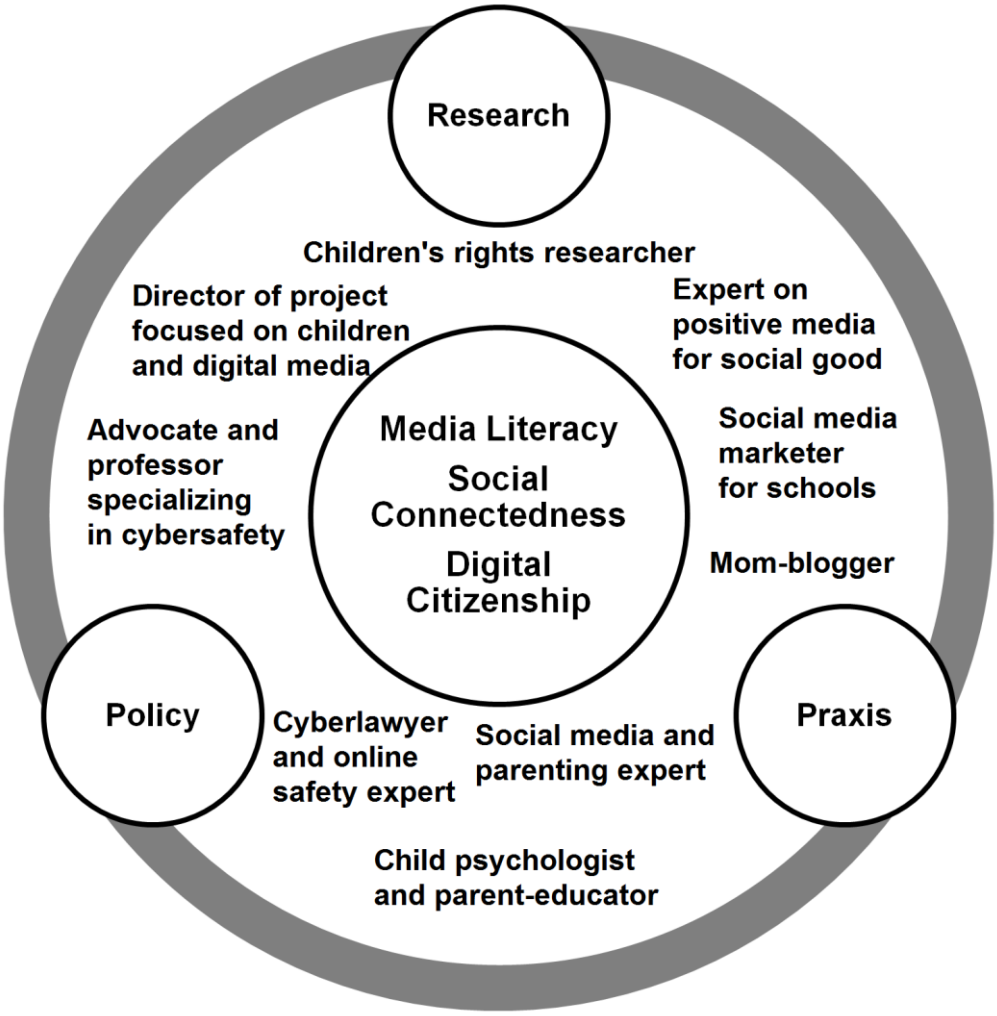

Figure 3 Stakeholders' positions across the policy-praxis-research axes

Source: Author

These stakeholders are either directly or indirectly working with parents and young people, schools and teachers, international institutions and organisations to become part of the ecosystem of connective media through their practice, research, and/ or eventually policy and have grounded insights as to how young people and parents navigate a social media world. They come from a relatively privileged section of the Indian society and are in a position to impact policy directly or indirectly within their local ecosystem while their work covers people across the socioeconomic spectrum.

I also interviewed teacher-trainers, teachers, administrators, and counsellors working directly with children and educators in schools from East and West Ahmedabad. These seven school personnel were from a mix of government and private schools affiliated to international, central, and state boards of education. These school personnel were involved in everyday interactions with students and educators within schools with regards to education and extracurricular affairs and were especially aware of or had dealt with issues related to children and digital/ social media in their respective schools either directly speaking with children about this topic or engaging teachers on how this topic could be addressed in class or with parents. Details about the school personnel are in the table below.

Table 4 Details about the School Personnel

Source: Author

Sr. No.	Pseu-donym	Gender	Socio-economic background	Work	Details
1	Raji Rao	Female	Higher income	Lead teacher trainer	Part of an international-board school in East Ahmedabad & Interacts with other schools for capacity building & training teachers & administrators
2	Sapna Gupta	Female	Middle income	Assistant teacher	Assists in language & ad-hoc teaching at a state-board school in East Ahmedabad
3	Lav Singh	Male	Middle income	Teacher	Senior computer teacher at a state-board school in East Ahmedabad
4	Parv Kumar	Male	Higher income	Vice Principal	Teacher & administrator at a central-board school in Ahmedabad Cantonment area
5	Sunder Chaudhri	Male	Higher income	Principal	Founder-Principal & Administrator at a central-board school in West Ahmedabad
6	Manju Sarma	Female	Middle income	Teacher & Coordinator	Computer & Math Teacher & Primary School Coordinator at a central-board school in West Ahmedabad
7	Trishna Joshi	Female	Middle income	Counsellor	Counsellor at a central-board school in West Ahmedabad, dealt with cyberbullying & social media harassment

I defined media literacy as young people's ability to safely access and use digital/ social media for identity and relationships, learning and play, and consumer and civic practices (Hobbs et al., 2010; Livingstone, 2014). Social connectedness was characterised as the sense of belonging between young people and their adult caregivers as well as peers in a social media world where digital citizenship was closely tied to the two concepts above in the broader context of engaging with the digital society around them (Ellison et al., 2007; Frau-Meigs et al., 2017; Papacharissi, 2012; Steinfeld, 2021).

The stakeholders and school personnel helped me map the ecosystem and understand the current scenario of children and social media in India, specifically my field – Ahmedabad – as they engaged with me in semi-structured interviews around the following topics:

- Digital and social media, including the Internet
- Children and social media in the local context
- Understanding of existing systems, media discourse around this topic
- Gaps in research, advocacy, policy, and academia

Informed consent was obtained from participants at the start, and a scanned copy of the form was sent to them after completion of the interview. Interviews were recorded, and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in English with conversation sometimes slipping into Hindi or Gujarati. An interesting methodological side-note is that an application (Otter.ai) was used to transcribe interviews instantly and while it performed fairly decently in English, it had trouble recognising the Indian accent in some places and failed to transcribe non-English words correctly. I had to correct those parts by listening to the recording and editing the mistakes out. With the exception of two participants, who preferred to be interviewed by phone and email respectively, all interviews took place in person at their offices, homes, or schools. Interviews were scheduled after explaining the purpose, with each lasting between an average of 30 to 60 minutes. All participants remarked on the importance of the topic in current times.

The interviews began with broad questions aimed at drawing out their ideas about digital/ social media and their understanding of the local children and media landscape. Across participants, there was a common theme of children and

adolescents being inundated by media messages, the compounding effect of digital/ social media, and increased importance of parenting in these times to safeguard children's rights. This led to a deeper dive into issues they outlined to elicit responses related to existing systems, perceived gaps, media discourse, and possible solutions. Responses to these questions varied, reflecting their different locations.

Data from interviews was supplemented with my review of literature and media discourse (detailed in chapter four), background/ peripheral conversation with experts, and field notes, suggesting:

- Nearly all interviewees had children and brought some context from existing experiences or voiced concerns about anticipated problems
- Solutions cited came from personal experience, peer discussions, events about digital parenting, and other professional avenues
- Identification of relevance of this topic and gaps in research, advocacy, policy, and academia stemmed from reflections above

While guided by literature, I did not approach data with pre-existing themes and used an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data. A semantic approach was applied to thematic analysis, i.e., I tried to stay close to the content derived from my interviewees. However, I also brought out interpretive meanings as my coding and analysis progressed during the months leading up from interviewing to writing (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The transcripts were coded and themes were generated as shown below. In-depth interviews help participants express themselves and speak freely even as they are guided by the interview questions. This allowed me to take a more conversationalist approach such that I could remain and make my interviewees comfortable and open to developing and digging into ideas further,

seeking new directions and interpretations (Brenner, 2006; Glesne, 2011). After familiarising myself with the interview data, I generated the initial codes leading to broad themes which were then reviewed and finalised. Quotes were used to illustrate the themes and have been translated where required and edited for clarity and conciseness to bring out the stakeholders' and school personnel's perspectives.

I want to bring to note why I have differentiated between stakeholders and school personnel, although schools are also part of the stakeholders like young people – covered in the following chapter – who are stakeholders as well. The stakeholders covered here work for children through their position in civil society, research and advocacy, and as professionals who work in social media and cyber law. They might not directly interact with children and their social media lives on a daily basis but the work they undertake has an impact in the research, policy, and praxis aspects of children and social media. The school personnel interviewed work directly with children and educators on an everyday basis and bring forth how schools and the systems supporting education play a role in children's lives and their interactions with digital and social media.

Mapping Local Stakeholders

The child psychologist focused on the importance of goal-setting and communication, those involved with social media spoke about co-use and balanced consumption, experts who dealt in cybercrime took a cautionary stance, and academic and research experts focused on the need for research and foregrounding children's voices. Many asked why this topic was chosen, perhaps to place it in loop of the discourse surrounding these issues.

Issues of child-centred-design, dearth of knowledge about opportunities and risks of social media among parents, and confusion around how to navigate this social media world were some of the themes that emerged from the interview data. Questions were raised about children's wellbeing, including what parents could do about this, the possibility of (and the problems with) regulation, and the need to focus on how parents could foster trust and a meaningful connection with young people that would frame their engagement with technology.

Main themes from the interview data with stakeholders are shown, see figure below. Respondents pointed to what they saw as problem areas, such as technopanics, digital divides, navigation confusion, and technology design that was not child-centric, but also indicated possible approaches to addressing these issues, through regulation, improved parental engagement, and more open communication with all stakeholders. These were grouped into three broad themes per my interpretation of coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2012): media literacy, social connectedness and digital citizenship, roughly corresponding to the themes in the global scholarship as outlined in earlier chapters.

Some experts spoke from a cautionary perspective while others focused on safeguarding young people's interests. Jaya Kulkarni was vehemently against giving social media access to very young children observing that handing over phones to toddlers as a behavioural incentive was a bad idea. She also opined that teenagers are going through a rough phase in life as it is, and parents need to be extra careful when they observe behavioural changes in their adolescent children, possibly due to social media.

Sima Ahmad applied co-using social media with children as a strategy to digital parenting. While she or her child had not faced cybercrime personally, she was wary of coming across unpleasant or dangerous experiences and felt one needed to be prepared. Many sessions she organised for her mothers' club focused on this theme. Her mantras were 'practice what you preach' and 'precaution is better than cure' and this reflected throughout the interview.

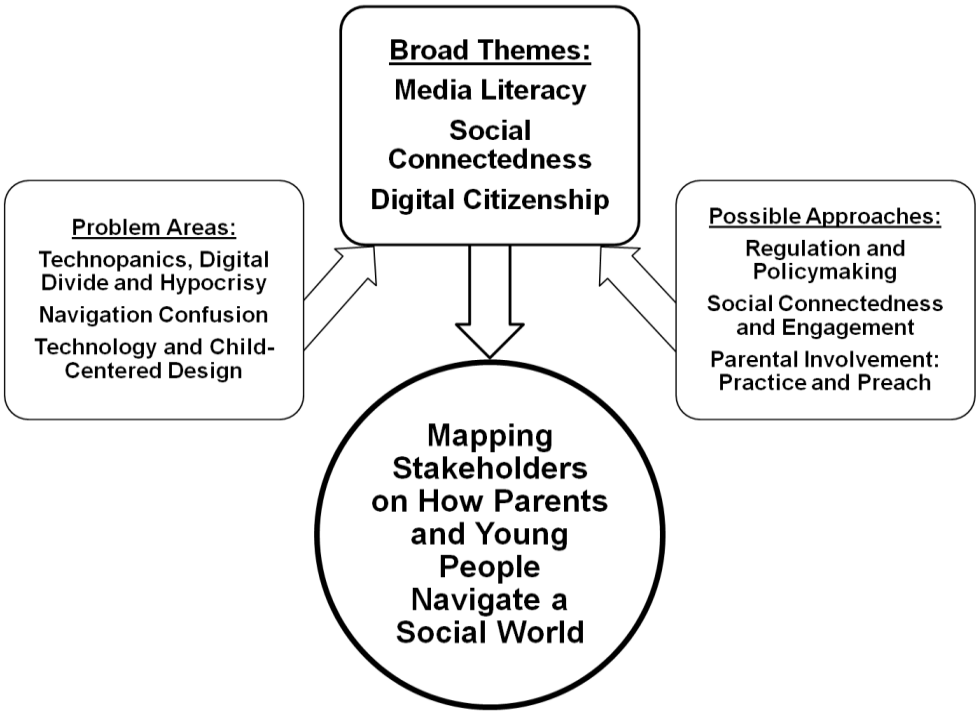

Figure 4 Main themes from the stakeholders' interview data

Source: Author

Aruna Misra and Aniket Das believed parents exert a lot of control over children's media diets (especially younger children) and they (parents) needed to be aware of the social media world to make the right decisions for their wards. They had identified an acute lack of awareness about several issues like privacy, safety, tools to safeguard young people online and hence organised/ participated in events aimed at

parents to spread awareness and aid parental mediation regarding children's technology use.

Kartik Jain and Manu Kaur had seen many cases of cybercrime and victimisation. They were aware of the level of ignorance related to risks in a social media world. They held frequent workshops and training/ counselling sessions for young people, victims or high-risk individuals or organisations like corporate and government entities.

While Dileep Patil's work was not directly focused on the impact of social media on young people, he worked on children's rights and capacity building which ties in with awareness and training.

Kavita D'Cruz strongly believed young people's attention span and sleep are adversely affected and this needs research attention. When asked about young people's love to binge watch, she countered with the nuance of viewership vs. engagement and how the latter is getting more superficial.

Harish Korrapati posited a generational shift in media consumption and engagement patterns, noting that young people are moving towards a visual medium of expression, however many of them struggle with communicating verbally. He also mentioned a lack of acknowledgment of personal responsibility for actions on social media and opined how that might contribute to increasing cases of cyberbullying.

While the opening questions helped build context regarding the local realities, responses to specific follow up questions yielded the following themes.

Technopanics, Digital Divide, and Hypocrisy

Issues of risks and literacy, health and wellbeing, safety (including bullying, shaming, violence, and sexting), and privacy were raised by experts who work directly and indirectly with young people and parents, schools, organisations, etc. Lack of (digital/ social) media literacy was cited as one of the reasons why most parents and some young people were concerned regarding their online uses, practices, and experiences. Media discourse also added fuel to fire as coverage about social media addiction, challenges like blue whale and momo (Pednekar, 2017), and safety and privacy issues were sensationalised to some extent as acknowledged by interviewees. However, this is a challenge that can be met by inculcating media literacy and digital-smart parenting which is an uphill climb because we are still battling technopanics, digital divides, and hypocrisy.

Sima Ahmad was frank in her admission when she said:

> We held a panel discussion recently on 'digital media parenting'…on what should be the role of parents in today's digital media scenario, how do we cut down on screen time? But sometimes we act like hypocrites. We ask them [children] not to use it and as parents we use it so it [a part of the panel] focussed on how to balance it [screen time].

Kartik Jain had the opinion that privacy does not exist in a datafied world and that a lack of awareness regarding online safety and privacy among majority citizens is a problem. Manu Kaur concurred when she opined that usually people become aware of risks when something untoward happens,

> New media forms are much more easily accessible than other forms [of media]. However, we must also note that such media are plagued by fake news, non-consensual images, revenge porn, etc. Sometimes, this makes young minds glued to such media because they may have never seen such things. Due to adolescent curiosity, they may be more than willing to share such things in groups secretly which may increase humiliation of victims.

To this end I found in my initial review that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) – a national level board of education in India managed by the Union Government and implemented in several public and private schools throughout the country – recognised the need for steering discourse and issued the 'Guidelines for Safe and Effective Use of Internet and Digital Technologies in Schools and School Buses' including 'Tips to stay safe on social networking sites for students' (CBSE, 2017). This serves as a primer for ideal online behaviour and can guide parents regarding technology mediation at home as well.

Experts also insisted that parents need to set aside their reservations about digital divides and not being tech-savvy enough. They have to be more digitally clued in so they could pass on literacy lessons to children. Manu Kaur found patterns in levels of awareness and corresponding styles of parenting in different regions of the country. She reported:

> ...my organisation receives cases from all across India. However, I can highlight [patterns] from three regions: Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Gujarat, specifically. Parenting style may differ as per the culture of the region. I have seen that compared to Gujarat and West Bengal, Tamil Nadu parents are more aware and stricter when it comes to using of internet and social media by children…Parents

> may be busy and they may not be able to monitor children always. Cybersafety issues still remain lagging behind when it comes to comparing Southern, Western and Eastern regions.

Clearly, given the diversity and breadth of India, one may find different trends in different regions. She observed that awareness regarding cyber victimisation was higher in South India compared to West and East India, as they seemed to only spring to action after a crime has been committed. However, it is important to note, she said, that pre-existing notions regarding adults' or children's digital abilities influenced by technopanics or digital divides will only exacerbate the problem at hand. This gets compounded when parents give out and act on contradictory sets of norms for uses and practices online as children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Navigation Confusion

Interviewees brought up issues like risks and benefits of social media, generational divides in ways of accessing and using social media, and differences arising due to the abovementioned problems of technopanics and hypocrisy, leading to confusion about navigating the social media world. Jaya Kulkarni was of the opinion that digital and social media technologies do more harm than good for especially young and impressionable minds that can be swayed by the glamour and glitz of online platforms if a certain opportunity-based perspective was not built into young people's psyche. She suggested,

> It is our responsibility as parents and teachers to show the younger generation, through our actions, that these are but tools you use in life after receiving due

> instruction in how to effectively utilise them for your benefit becoming ideal digital citizens.

Reflecting on her practice as a child psychologist, she gave the analogy of children being soft as clay and how we can mould them through our words and actions. She gave the example of a goal-setting exercise and how it is important to ensure children forge and follow a certain path for themselves. She added,

> And, that we can't just teach them this by talking about it, we have to show it to them to avoid navigation confusion. Digital and social media can work for or against our children's positive experiences depending on how we have shaped their perspective about it.

She elaborated how this works by citing a phenomenon she has come across many times, especially among teenagers:

> ...because they are in the phase where they want to show off. They want to show that they are something! 'I have friends. I have boyfriends. I have done this…' as a status symbol. So, for teenagers, I firmly believe that, in their formative years, if we get them into the habit of goal-setting, then [social] media can be of good use because then it will serve as a positive influence. Like, when they follow celebrities on social media, they will focus on how Virat Kohli (cricketer) became such a great sportsperson, what does Bill Gates (businessman) say [about becoming successful]. But, if this connection [between goal-setting and how social media is perceived and can be used for our benefit], has not been established, then they [teenagers] get into the show-off mode where they try to put up a show of that which doesn't exist!

This connects with the current understanding that opportunities and risks exist in a social media world just as they did in earlier times, and tools like goal-setting can help utilise social media affordances to our advantage.

Sima Ahmad agreed as she ruminated about ‘sharenting’ – parents sharing about kids’ lives and their photos and videos online; she went back to issues of hypocrisy and lack of policies to protect children from online risks. She insisted that we are confusing children when we create social media accounts for infants and then insist that they should not use these platforms because they are bad for them. She also attributed a lack of awareness among parents and young people about safely navigating online to making contradictory and/ or restrictive decisions. She believed cybercrime is hard to face and said, “Consequences of cybercrime also affect you mentally, so we must know about online safety precautions. Every school and college should have sessions on cybercrime.”

She mentioned that while guidelines (like those from CBSE referred to above) are helpful, we need to do more to spread awareness and help parents mediate children’s technology use. This is because parents in India can sometimes go from one extreme of sharenting and making accounts for underage children to another extreme of announcing blanket bans for adolescents usually based on academic performance and feedback, she observed which has been found in my literature as well (Leaver, 2020a; Lim, 2019). This can confuse young people and raise questions like: How do we navigate in this social media world? What can be the consequences of navigation confusion? How can we stop negative consequences? These were also some of the questions raised by the stakeholders. The next section gives us more insight into the genesis of this navigation confusion.

Technology and Child-Centred Design

Digital and social media are considered to be platforms for connection, communication, and community building. However, sometimes platforms can alienate people even as we have a false sense of security from being on the application or website. We take social media affordances for granted as suggested by professionals interviewed for this study, even as they observed that these technologies are not necessarily built for/ in the Indian subcontinent and not designed with children in mind as possible users. This was part of the problem as mentioned above when describing navigation confusion.

Aruna Misra shared how websites she creates for schools to keep parents clued in on attendance, homework, and performance of students, sometimes fosters a deeper disconnect between the individuals involved while maintaining the illusion of information richness. This is where an emphasis on social connectedness becomes important. Issues of technology and child-centred design enable you to have access to (sometimes large scale aggregated) data, but you miss out on nuances that are unique to an individual. She shared,

> ...there is no communication between the teacher and the parents. Everything is updated on the website or application; in a way, technology does lessen the burden, but there is no personal touch. But it depends on the school as well. I have enrolled my daughter in a school that uses technology [like smart board, WhatsApp groups] but also believes in personal connection and communication.

Navigating a social media world also depends on the intrinsic design of the platform. Aniket Das who heads an online marketing firm insisted that a lack of child-

centred-design is to blame for risks faced by young people and added that low levels of awareness among adults is also problematic. He cited examples of cybercrimes and cyberbullying and made his case by explaining:

> Online safety is currently not taken too seriously until they become victims or someone closer [to them] becomes a victim and at that time they surrender [to the situation] and say 'Oh I should do that [take precautions].'...we are not [a] kids-driven [society]...like [e.g.] finding a restaurant that has kid-friendly food! You only realise these things when you experience them.

Aruna Misra insisted that technology is only an enabler and it is our responsibility to lean toward or away from it to balance the communicative aspect of our relationship with and surrounding children. She posited that there is a three-way relationship between parents, children and teachers/ schools and this triad is mediated by technology and personal communication. The child needs to be the common focus of this triad and technology should help, not harm while centring young people in a mediated communication design. Social media technologies respond to user behaviours; their affordances can be shaped by deliberate (and informed) patterns of use. We can either create silos and echo chambers or actively seek multiple perspectives to foster understanding.

Regulation and Policymaking

Media literacy is often cited as one of the solutions to risks that digital/ networked media bring along with benefits. However, is it too much to ask that individual users be aware of everything and the repercussions? Should the industry

self-regulate? Should the government bring legislative regulation? Kavita D'Cruz agreed that this problem needs industry and government involvement and added:

> If we give free rein to corporate and media companies, they do what they do and then every time [something new comes out], the individual or parent has to constantly worry about what new [impact] it will have on me or my kid…But at the same time censorship and regulation will always be problematic, right?

Harish Korrapati, who is also part of a think tank on digital media platforms, asserted the importance of keeping discourse around digital and social media and its impact on society alive and current. He urged,

> It's important to bring experts together to put forth their ideas and perspectives on how digital and social media are impacting people's health and mental wellbeing. Young people are digital natives and we are witnessing a generational shift in the way these new media technologies are being used.

However, experts pointed out, young voices are distinctly absent in the policymaking process. A possibility in regulation could be evidence-based policy and decision-making where digital natives participate along with older generations as proposed by stakeholders and observed in literature (Andersson & Danielsson, 2021; Banaji & Buckingham, 2013). Currently, there appears to be a gap between what happens on ground vs. legislation or even advocacy around these issues. Illustrative in this regard are recent bans on TikTok and PUBG, etc. popular platforms (PIB, 2020), which young people I spoke to used for identity creation, self-expression, community building, among others.

Social Connectedness and Engagement

Social connectedness in a digital world depends on our communication and engagement with and demonstration of it to our children. Jaya Kulkarni emphasised:

> [Social] media is absolutely fine because that's the world we live in where everything is digital and that's how it's going to be and there is nothing to worry about. But as a parent or educator or school, which direction do you show your children towards? Do they think [social] media is a resource for learning or to show off?

Sima Ahmad echoed the sentiment:

> Parenting in a digital and social media world is just like a coin with two sides...the internet has everything from porn to [tips on] parenting. It is up to us where we draw the line and choose and tell our kids what is good and bad. Kids are after all kids and we as parents need to control ourselves and check our behaviour…practice what we preach.

Some experts, though, thought social media for very young children was a complete no-no. If social media was having a negative impact on teenagers, parents were encouraged to limit/ rescind access for older children too. Nonetheless, the quantity and quality of social connectedness depends on goal setting as you help create a systematic template for children to follow, conveyed interviewees. Young people have a sense of direction and will most likely find ways to optimise opportunities and disarm risks in this online experience, navigating these social worlds without confusion and with confidence. Jaya Kulkarni added:

> Assigning specific responsibilities to and setting goals with/ for your children ensure they use their screentime wisely. And this needs to start at the young age of two to two-and-a-half years, because this approach becomes the way of life as your child becomes a teenager.

This becomes easier to do when you share a communicative and engaging relationship with your children. Sima Ahmad shared,

> I heard a panel expert say, 'we should always add 'co-' in front of everything we do with our kids like co-play, co-sleep, co-read in the initial years'...because we cannot completely shun these new technologies and their exposure in today's world. How long will you not tell your kid not to use any of the gadgets when you yourself are using it for hours?

This brings an interesting dynamic to notions of trust and communication between parents and children. Parents can bond with children over the latest online or do things together like watch a movie. This helps foster and strengthen social connectedness and engagement and is in line with parental mediation techniques like 'balance' (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020) where the parent-child relationship is about doing things together and in moderation.

Parental Involvement: Practice what you Preach

The involvement of parents in children's social media lives is crucial towards ensuring young people's long-term wellbeing. A healthy relationship must be based on communication and trust. It is important that parents practice what they preach and remember that young people have rights in this digital age just as in other spheres of life. Dileep Patil, who heads an initiative for children's rights, reiterated, "Children

need guidance regarding their online practices just as they need guidance in education, sports, career, and life; this is their right and digital citizenship is becoming essential in our ever-changing world."

Kavita D'Cruz recounted that people usually use media positively in their daily lives i.e., using media to enhance life, and added "...getting new friends, getting new knowledge, making you aware of something that enriches your life, making you feel valued as a citizen: all of these things [enhance life]... [it's not unimportant] just because it's on new media."

She said that parent-child communication can foster discipline and moderation in use, chalk up multiple options for activities, and ensure certain minimum hours of sleep for everyone as essential – something that people are missing out on these days. Further, insights from interviews derived were that parents and young people could navigate a social world better by understanding how media literacy, social connectedness, and digital citizenship can help them with:

- A better sense of links between policy, governance, and regulation
- Social connectedness and engagement with young people
- Practicing what they preach

There could be many social factors including family income and background along with emergence of digital and social media contributing to trends in children's uses, practices, and experiences online. Additionally, as Manu Kaur noted, parenting styles may differ as per the regional culture, and given the world we live in, Kartik Jain reiterated digital parenting as the need of the hour. We need to understand why

and how young people use social media to express and present themselves and focus on opportunities like education and learning to make the best use of these platforms.

School Speak

The seven school personnel were a mix of teachers, administrators, and counsellors who dealt with students and teachers in schools on a regular basis. They also interacted with their students' parents when the need arose or when these meetings were scheduled in school. In some cases, their interaction with teachers and other administrative staff who dealt with students and parents was the primary aspect of their jobs as they were in more senior positions. The lead teacher trainer, vice principal, and principal fell in this category, although they did interact with some students and parents as need arose. These school personnel were more involved in training teachers, managing the school environment, and liaising with resource-persons to ensure their schools were aware of issues like children and online safety. The other teachers and the counsellor interacted with students on a daily basis and encountered questions on or faced issues about children's social media lives.

These interviews also helped the researcher gain an understanding of the school ecosystem in the city. Schools in Ahmedabad were a mix of government-funded and -run, government grant-in-aid public, or educational trust-run private entities. Depending on their funding and operational background, they either followed the Gujarat State Education Board (GSEB), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), or one of many international boards like the International Baccalaureate (IB) or the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE). Differences in boards translated to variations in breadth and depth of curricula and pedagogies implemented. Access to resources, infrastructure, and personnel were also affected

based on boards implemented and the corresponding tuition and other fees charged by schools. By and large, parents from relatively less economically privileged backgrounds opted for government-funded and -run schools, which charged a low or no fee, but often lacked infrastructure, resources, and personnel.

Interviewees explained that public schools tended to follow state or central boards and sometimes invited experts, usually pro-bono or from their alumni network, for special workshops or lectures to keep their students updated. Private schools had support from their education trusts and groups which were quite similar to large corporate structures housing innovation and research centres to insert additional modules in their existing central or international board curriculum to ensure students do not miss out on anything, as per the school personnel interviewed. These schools would also be the first in the city to tap into initiatives from the Ministry of Education like support to setup a coding or an AI lab in their schools given they could afford space and other resources to supplement and launch the government initiative as observed by me during school visits to recruit participants.

Many of the school personnel I interviewed stated that they either had additional workshops or modules added to their teaching to supplement the curriculum and ensure children were updated about the latest in the social media world and aware of issues like online safety and bullying on social media. As part of my agreement with the schools and in the spirit of giving back to the field, I held workshops on topics requested by schools for their teachers and students. As an aside, despite my best efforts and multiple meetings with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation School Board that runs schools for students from economically weaker sections, I could not access the government-funded and -run schools in Ahmedabad. I

did manage to get some understanding of the way these schools functioned but these employees requested to speak with me off-the-record and thus these interviews have served only as background information.

Throughout the interviews, the seven school personnel highlighted the importance of a holistic school environment for students' wellbeing, called attention to the gaps in knowledge and resources, and stressed on the importance of digital and media literacy for children as well as adults (see figure below).

Raji Rao is the lead teacher trainer who is part of an international-board private school in East Ahmedabad. She believed that a holistic school environment is necessary for students' wellbeing. A culture of learning and sharing needed to be fostered in schools and there was a "balance between the culture and pedagogy that complement and supplement each other in many ways in our school," she said. This holistic school environment is also something that their training programme strives to help achieve other schools who employ their services.

Rao felt that the benefits of a personal connection with the teacher far outweighed those of technology and her school only incorporated technology in classrooms for higher standards when it became inevitable.

Sapna Gupta and Lav Singh are teachers with the same state-board school under the aegis of an educational trust in East Ahmedabad which tries to provide their students access to technology based on their trust's vision of holistic education. Gupta and Singh noticed that children have a lot of access to different kinds of information, especially online and this can lead to information overload as well as create the need for critical thinking and analytical skills. This need, said Singh, merits thoughts to

existing gaps - across schools boards, in curriculum, and in information and communication - that need to be managed for students' welfare.

Parv Kumar is the vice principal of a central-board school which is part of the central school organisation that falls directly under the Ministry of Education, Government of India. He acknowledged the aforementioned gaps and added that India was lagging behind in research on the topic of children and social media. He said that Western scholars might have some deliberations and solutions, but they might not always work in our contexts.

Sunder Chaudhri, Manju Sarma, and Trishna Joshi were at a central-board school run by an educational trust which has a wide network across India. Their innovation centre supplemented the central-board curriculum with their own modules on the latest in tech innovation, among other topics and current affairs. They also shared key observations on how digital and social media affected their students at times physically, mentally, or emotionally. Below are the main themes that emerged from interviews with the school personnel.

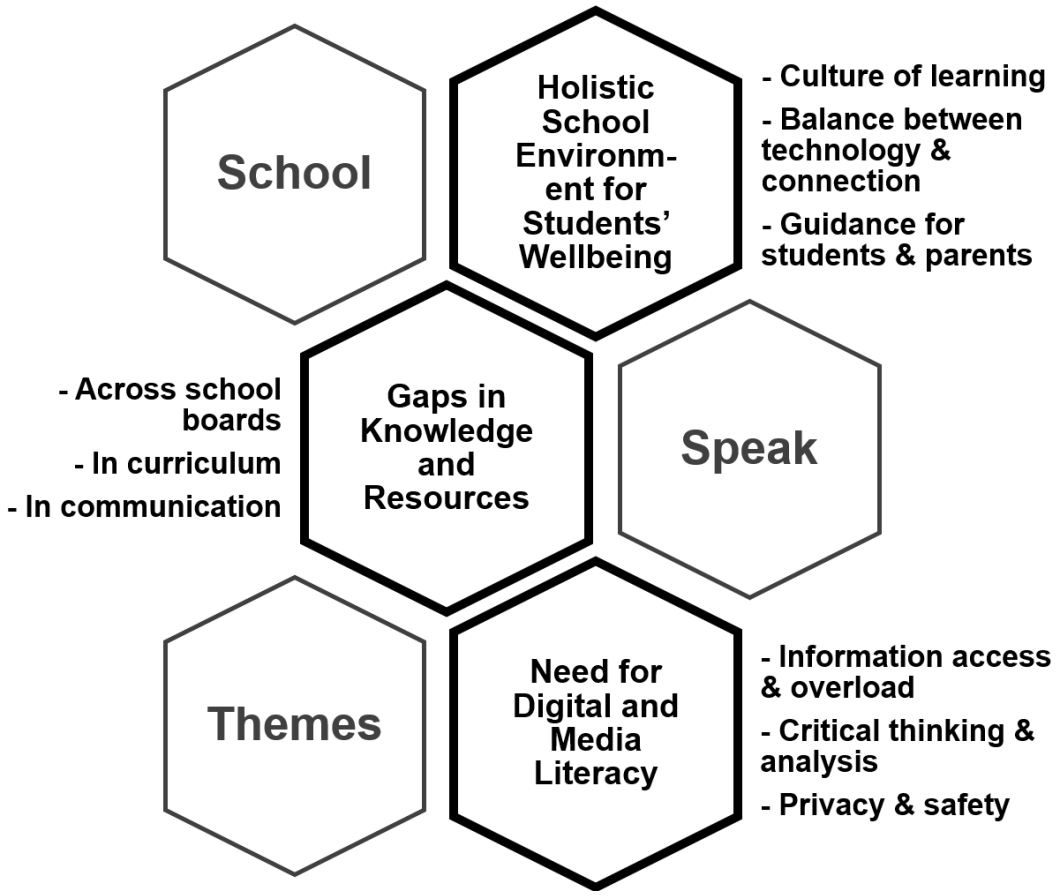

Figure 5 Main themes from interviews with school personnel

Source: Author

Holistic School Environment for Students' Wellbeing

The school environment plays a huge part in students' wellbeing, according to the school personnel interviewed. A culture of learning and sharing helped children observe and practice the same in their lives at school and this was not just at the classroom level but the overall, holistic school environment including administrative and support staff. Interviewees believed that children learned from and mimicked others around them, so it was important to practice what they were preaching. Raji Rao explained:

> Students are interacting with so many different individuals, and not just teachers. The teacher is at the centre but not the only person responsible for a child's learning. Every individual, whether it is from the admin department or the support staff, matters. So, what kind of culture as an organisation are you building that will allow for a child to thrive?

This also translated into ensuring a balance between technology and personal connection. Students below a certain age were usually engaged in classroom with no to low technology. Computers and other digital and social media were introduced only as necessary for older children once it became an inevitable part of their education, informed Rao.

Parv Kumar opined that screentime – whether at home – for very young children was a bad idea and even for older children – irrespective of at home or in school – needed some limits and guidance:

> A big concern for very young children is screentime. If you ask any paediatrician, they'll tell you that for children aged 0-2 years, there should not be any provision for screentime. But, if you look around, children are always getting exposed to screens like the television, laptop, smartphone, etc. It also matters what that screentime is being used for. There is so much content and so many distractions for children online, that it needs some guidance.

Since the digital age is moving so quickly, teachers often found it was important to keep themselves updated to the latest in social media and technology so that they could provide guidance as required to students and parents. Administrators tried to ensure their teachers were trained and students were updated on topics like

online safety and cyberbullying. School personnel also reflected on the importance of infrastructure, resources, and training available for students and teachers to keep up with the latest in technology and incorporate it in the curriculum. Manju Sarma shared,

> Our school has an advisory body, an innovation and research centre, that recommends latest inclusions in the syllabus like 3D printing, AI, robotics, and other practice-based innovations and digital developments so that children are technologically sound and have good exposure... Within a few years, we'll also have a robotics lab in our school. Our Gandhinagar (capital of the state of Gujarat and Ahmedabad's neighbouring city) school already has a robotics lab setup and it'll be functional from next year. We have also had workshops on cyberbullying and online safety.

Sunder Chaudhri agreed and added, "Cybersafety is a part of our curriculum but we also need to make the parents aware that they need to supervise these aspects in their children's lives."

While schools were actively involving teachers and students to keep them updated, parents were generally only informed about these activities as part of monthly reports about the school and what their children were doing. In case some parents were more involved or needed to be contacted, they were spoken to about these things in detail, but this was on a case-to-case basis.

Gaps in Knowledge and Resources

There were several gaps in knowledge and resources highlighted by school personnel. Largely, these gaps could be categorised as those across school boards, in

curriculum, and in information and communication. As mentioned before, Ahmedabad and, in fact, all over India, there are different boards and governance structures managing schools leading to several differences in resource and personnel deployment and consequent gaps in infrastructure, curriculum, and pedagogy. Usually, government schools – barring a few – had the bare necessities to ensure a certain basic level of literacy for their students shared school personnel in interviews as well as observed during visits to different schools for recruitment. Public schools that were grant-in-aid or run by trusts were slightly better off, but and usually depending on the board they followed, had gaps that they filled with workshops and lectures from their alumni network or NGOs to ensure children were at least aware of the latest in issues related to digital and social media and online environments and technology as delineated by Singh:

> I have a specialisation in teaching computers along with my degree in education. My school appreciates the importance of my qualifications and they hired me based on my expertise. More often than not, this specialisation or expertise is not stressed on during recruitment in most government-funded or state-board schools. This leads to a gap in teaching skills and implementation of curriculum and pedagogy.

Parv Kumar acknowledged the differences in boards and funding as a legitimate issue and added that his was a central-board school but it was also beneficial that it was directly under the aegis of the central school organisation and the ministry which ensured constant updates to the curriculum and resources to stay current in addition to the central-board guidelines regarding digital and social media.

There was also a gap between the curriculum proposed by the government to be taught in schools and mobilisation of resources to actually implement the curriculum. Lav Singh gave an example:

> Microsoft Office and its tools were part of computer teaching, but we don't always have access to necessary hardware and software in different schools to be able to teach this module… Policy and decision makers are sometimes reactive to situations on the ground, instead of planning with foresight. For instance, once they realised that licensed versions of software might be difficult for schools to obtain, they updated the course to open-source software. But they didn't make the necessary arrangements for teacher training across schools. The last computer teacher training session happened all the way back in 2010-11 and we're now in 2019. These topics definitely get updated way more than that, and of course, we haven't even mentioned social media.

Interviewees felt that these gaps were definitely worse in government schools which depend on public funds for everything. There are issues of recruitment, training, resources, etc. Private schools invest in resources and personnel to ensure their students don't miss out on anything.

There were also information gaps among teachers of different schools and communication gaps between teachers and students as well as teachers and parents within schools, and students and parents. Interviewees felt that there were differences in information intake and comprehension between adults and children leading to gaps in communication between children and their teachers as well as parents. While adults were mostly able to keep up with the latest in news or their fields of expertise,

children were more active on social media like Instagram and TikTok which the adults did not always use or understand. Parv Kumar reflected:

> The fabric of the urban Indian society is also changing. We are no longer living in joint families and big houses. We live in nuclear families in small flats where parents go away to earn a living and children are on their own for several hours at home because they don't always have open grounds to play in. So, devices like television, laptop, smartphone are accessed by children at home while parents are away. This also leads to a communication gap between children and parents. This switch from the joint to nuclear family happens in most cities and also because children have access to friends in the virtual world as they can't find spaces like playgrounds, gardens, etc. to be with friends.

Manju Sarma seconded that playgrounds and opportunities for play, exploration, and socialisation for children staying in urban spaces were diminishing. Hence, they used social media to 'meet-up' with friends and make connections online. Sometimes, children could get enamoured by the online world or use it as an escape from whatever was plaguing them in school or at home, further deepening gaps in communication.

Need for Digital and Media Literacy

School personnel accepted that technology is important in this day and age, but it needs to be used purposefully. Schools used social media like WhatsApp to broadcast notices or for emergencies, and laid down rules regarding digital and social media use in school, e.g., no mobile phones were allowed in the premises, parents could not message teachers after school hours, etc.

However, most school personnel agreed that the social media world is moving at a very fast pace which school boards or specialised centres might not always be able to keep up with and they do believe that digital and social media literacy is needed. For instance, for older students, it is necessary to know how to use the internet for research. Teachers are usually responsible to show how online search works, give a list of sites to go to, and demonstrate the range of information and scope of the project to ensure students stay on point without getting distracted by the plethora of information available online, said Raji Rao and added, “Our teachers are very mindful of how you give research ideas to children, and even educate students to see what is fake news how to verify authentic information online pertaining to their project.”

Manju Sarma agreed that there was access to a lot of information sometimes leading to overload and children had certain tendencies which needed guidance. She shared:

> I still feel that my six-year-old son knows how to work my phone much better than me because exploring and learning is something that little ones are very good at. They get excited by the new and try to go more in-depth and explore.

This is why it is important to have critical thinking and analytical skills. Trishna Joshi said:

> It’s important to make children and even adults aware that not everything you see online is true and that you need to be thinking critically and carefully about information online. Knowing what technology you’re living with and being able to use it wisely, I think is something that can be taught. We also need to encourage

regular conversations between parents with their children about their thoughts on social media, the duration they use apps for, what kind of apps they use, age restrictions and their importance, etc.

Interviewees concurred that moderation was key and that parents needed to practice what they preached. Keeping open communication with children was also important so that they feel connected and safe to share whatever was going on in their lives. Some rules and tips like no phones in class and during food and/ or family time, discussing something positive you saw online, and learning something new together on social media were shared.

Instances of bullying on social media were not frequent, but they have happened. Students usually confided about these issues with teachers or parents and, in some extreme cases, with mental health professionals they felt connected to and comfortable with. Interviewees also felt the need to be constantly updated about current affairs because children sometimes brought queries about fake news or to confirm if something was true.

Many school personnel gave importance to the need for digital and media literacy because of privacy and safety issues. They felt that children did not always understand how they were being datafied and how to access authentic information, and/ or assess the reliability of information and its sources. They also get swayed by the glitz and glamour of social media and follow celebrities for their success without realising the hard work that goes behind those achievements. Sometimes, they also try to mimic their peers online or try to play around with their presentation and expression online. Trishna Joshi explained:

> There was one instance of cyberbullying I dealt with recently where the student used TikTok to upload their pictures and videos from their mother's phone without her knowledge. Someone posted some mean comments and that led the student to completely shut down and medical help was administered. This was an extreme case where their appetite and sleep were affected and they were given medication and therapy to help with their anxiety and depression. When they resumed school, I started talking to them again and they also wanted to share their experience in class. The principal and I thought it was important to have a session in class on cyberbullying and how to stay safe online because children are born in a digital age these days.

Instances like these – remarked Joshi – forced us to acknowledge that these platforms and their affordances are part of our everyday lives now and we needed to learn how to manage them and our response to them as well as guide children about their uses, harms, and benefits so that they can make informed choices.

Summary

This chapter gave details about my interviewees – stakeholders and school personnel – who worked directly or indirectly with children and what they thought about digital and social media. I described the experts interviewed who worked in research and advocacy, were part of civil society, were professionals like cyberlawyers, social media experts, and school personnel working in administration, teaching, and counselling. They shared their observations about the local context, their thoughts on children and social media, as well as their understanding of local education systems, and gaps within them. Some of them also offered solutions and

shared practices they were already undertaking to solve problems like online safety and bullying on social media.

The local stakeholders i.e., experts working as professionals, and in civil society, and research and advocacy shared that there were indeed issues of technopanics, digital divides, and hypocrisy surrounding children and social media in Ahmedabad, specifically, and India, generally. Given the pace and breadth with which digital and social media were expanding, there was also navigation confusion. Technology was not child-centred and most of it was built in a non-Indian context, which also raised questions of regulation and policymaking. Given that children were considered digital natives and were more digitally engaged, aspects of social connectedness and citizenship were fast moving online. Parents needed to be more involved, practice what they preached about social media, and be more open in their communication with children.

School personnel recommended a holistic school environment with a culture of learning and balance between technology and personal connection for students' wellbeing. They took it upon themselves to guide students and parents, as needed, to navigate this social media world. They acknowledged gaps in knowledge and resources across school boards, in curriculum, and in information and communication and highlighted some possible solutions. They weighed in on the need for digital and media literacy for students had access to a lot of information and needed critical thinking and analytical skills to assess the authenticity. They also believed students and parents needed to be made aware of issues like privacy and safety.

Based on these interviews and my observations including field notes, the average middle income family school-going urban-based young person with access to

social media would have a full day's routine with school, extracurricular, and other activities in a media rich and dense environment as follows:

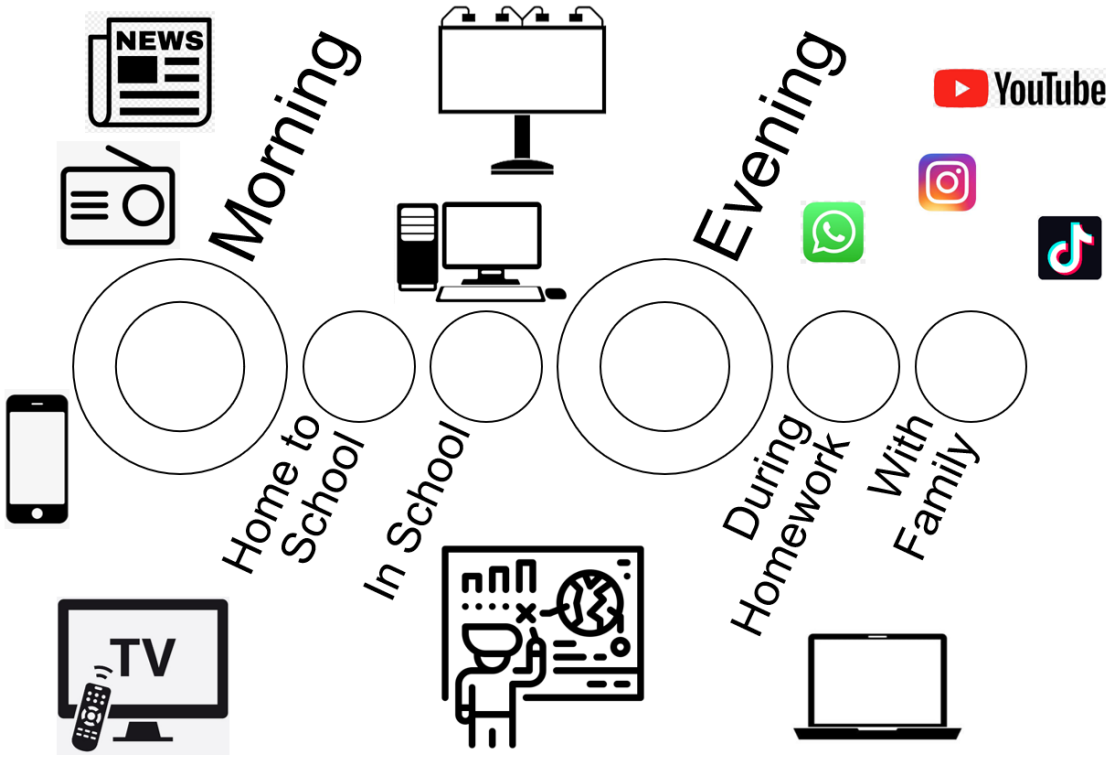

Figure 6 The media rich environment of young people today

Source: Author

Waking up in the morning as the radio is playing, tinkering with the smartphone (usually mom's) and television, getting to school while passing by hoardings and billboards, studying in a class with a smartboard/ projector/ computer, talking about latest on YouTube/ TikTok/ Snapchat/ Instagram/ PUBG with peers, sharing memes, assignments, tuition timings, banter on WhatsApp, FaceTiming/ Video Calling family and friends, and using laptop/ computer/ internet-enabled television/ voice assistant for education and entertainment. For young people, this is just the way things are.

Parents oscillated between how much access should be given to young people in this social media world and were occasionally swayed by media discourse on technopanics to limit usage leading to tensions in relationships with their wards. This gets further complicated when parents can't/ don't/ won't practice what they preach and young people call them out on these contradictions. Parents tend to perceive computer/ laptop use as productive behaviour while television/ smartphone use as unproductive behaviour leading to disagreements and disharmony, sometimes leading to breakdown of trust and communication between the parent and child.

These experts gave me a lay of the land, but the stars of my show are young people who are usually relegated to being in the background even when it is their stories that are being told. The following chapter foregrounds their voices regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices on social media.

Participant Voices

A quick refresher: What, How, and Why this study

With the argument that children are social actors who can bear witness to their experiences and perspectives about issues that concern them, especially if these are their lived experiences on digital and social media, this study aims to tap into the tacit and experiential knowledge possessed by young users of digital tools – those who have grown up connected – and the ways in which they apply and enhance this understanding.

To foreground children's voices and have their experiences and narratives provide the evidence to understand their social media lives, multimodal data were collected through in-depth interviews, guided social media tours, and ethnographic observations of participants' social media profiles for unpacking young people's social media cultures, their everyday practices, and social media lives.

Roadmap to the Results: What Participants have to say

After getting necessary approvals, I first conducted a pilot study followed by full data collection in the 2019-2020 period before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Participants were young people (10-18 years) with access to social media from Ahmedabad, a metropolitan city in West India. These were children and adolescents who had been using social media including websites and applications to create and share content and participate in social networking online, e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Musical.ly/ TikTok, WhatsApp, etc. for two years or more. Participants were asked about their access, uses, practices, skills, problem solving, safety, privacy, mediation, as well as presentation and curation of their selves online. Care was taken

to include both male and female participants as well as those from across socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure inclusion of different kinds of experiences in this work. Details of participants are in the table at the end of this chapter.

The 51 participants came from higher income (18), middle income (20), and lower income (13) families. There were 30 female and 21 male participants with different levels of access from no smartphone or social media account of their own – they used their family member's device and/ or account – to multiple devices and unlimited internet access.

Table 5 Participants across age groups

Source: Author

Age group (in years)	Number of Participants
10-12	15
13-15	24
16-18	12
Total	51

They also had different levels of usage from having multiple accounts on the same or different social media for content creation to simply viewing content and interacting online with friends from in-person networks for school or fun. Their most preferred social media platforms were Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Most participants (35) shared phones with the parents or siblings and 16 children and adolescents – all teenagers – had their own phones, either new ones or hand-me-downs from parents or older siblings. Detailed findings are below.[5]

Children's Experiences

In order to understand how children experienced social media, they were asked during in-depth interviews about their online access, uses, skills, and problem

solving. Questions on access related to devices as well as the internet and also covered aspects like time spent on social media on a daily basis and details about their activities online. Uses covered the nature of content they viewed, engaged with, and made online, as well as how they used different platforms for their different affordances; e.g., WhatsApp was popular as a messaging platform for homework and project coordination with school and tuition mates; Instagram was used to view content and chat with friends; TikTok was used to follow and create trending short-videos; Snapchat was loved for its filters and streaks. Skills and problem solving was about the learning they derived with long-term access and use of social media, smartphones, and, sometimes, computer and allied software used for photo and video shooting and editing as well as other tools.

Access and Uses

Although access is distinct from uses, they are intimately linked. Young people with more access usually used more social media. Interestingly, participants with more restrictive access, whether it was due to a lack of resources or restrictive parental mediation, often came up with creative solutions to be able to use social media more often or for longer duration. Nonetheless, due to the interlaced nature of access and uses, and how children experienced social media because of it, I chose to collapse these themes together.

Negotiating access to smartphones and social media largely depended on age in this particular participant pool. Parents rationalised to children in the age group of 10-12 years that they were too young to have their own smartphones and they could always use their elder siblings', parents', or grandparents' devices. As participants became teenagers, though, devices were demanded as almost a rite of passage into the

teen years, even as their school or extracurricular activities demanded more time away from home, which was also one of the reasons why parents too felt the need to give children their own smartphones. Andy, a teenage footballer who regularly uses ride-hailing services like Uber and Ola shared: “Sometimes, my matches are scheduled at the other end of the city and my parents can’t come to drop or pick me up, so I just Uber/ Ola now.”

However, for participants who did not have their own devices, this meant relying on older family members’ schedules for availability of devices, which also implied limited access in terms of time spent on their favourite activities on the phone. Cari, an aspiring TikToker, voiced her struggle:

> I use my grandma or mumma’s phone to check trending TikToks. I want to try making my own TikToks too, but that takes a lot of time and I only get the phone for like 15 minutes a day. It is a little frustrating, sometimes.

For even older participants in the age-group of 16-18 years, access to devices and social media was a remarkably significant part of their lives and aspirations for the future. Their access to devices was not just about spending time online browsing for information, scrolling through social media feeds or hanging out with friends, but about careful crafting and management of identities and building their profile for business/ professional aspirations, as was the case with one of the participants, Diya, who was an avid Instagram user and aspired to become a social media influencer and coach explained:

> …[need access to] a good smartphone with a great camera plus perfect lighting, perfect background, so I have to look for that… you need to create something so

> attractive because you have to get views. I mostly use the high-speed Wi-Fi we have at home, but if I am outside, I have a good data plan too.

While age was important, access also depended on participants' socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants who came from lower income families had to struggle to get access to devices and the internet – whether it was through Wi-Fi or using mobile data – due to lack of resources. Most participants from lower income families shared smartphones and mobile data packs with their parents and siblings, with fathers getting preference for work or other social engagements. Children shared in their interviews that if they had a common phone between siblings or cousins, it was usually a hand-me-down or a second-hand phone with smaller data pack recharges that helped them keep in touch with family and friends as well as the latest on social media. They also regarded WhatsApp as the most important social media for them not just for messaging family and friends but also to follow school work. Taimur and Uday insisted that they definitely need WhatsApp. Uday elaborated:

> WhatsApp is the go-to app for important work things. There's this one feature, a learning robot account, on which if you ask questions or scan something and share about studies, it gives you the answers and explanations. I use it for my homework.

Taimur also agreed with Uday about WhatsApp and added that he likes chatting with friends and viewing stories on Instagram. They also like watching videos and funny memes on TikTok and Instagram.

Those from middle income families were often given access as reward for good academic attendance and performance, including participation in extracurriculars. Earl, a 12-year-old informed me happily, "Oh, you know what

happened today! Mummy said I studied very well and offered her phone to me for use. I was so happy! I got to use social media for half-an-hour."

However, for even children as young as 10-12 years, participants reported on the gendered nature of access. Many girls from lower and middle income families got cautionary restrictions from their parents – usually mothers – on their social media usage. Bani shared that she had accounts on Instagram and WhatsApp but her current access was suspended as exams were around the corner and she needed to concentrate on revisions and doing well in academics. Isla's mother regularly monitored and expressed her displeasure about her TikTok usage. Xyla declared, "Mom says that TikTok and phones spoil children."

For higher income families, the general trend was no restrictions on devices or the internet, although parents did like to monitor (mostly lightly) their children's social media. Cam, a 14-year-old avid Instagram user, said that he used his phone a lot and, by his own admission, he was kind of addicted to it, but that his parents could also review his usage:

> I got my own phone in the sixth standard. It was my birthday and my parents gifted it to me; I'm so thankful. Initially, I thought I won't use the phone too much, but that clearly didn't happen. I use it for chatting and games, so most of the time I'm on my phone… My phone is open and my parents are free to check my phone whenever they want.

Categorising uses of participants was based on these unequal access points that sometimes led to different patterns of use among the group of young people described here; these fell into three distinct categories:

- Participants who had their own social media profiles/ handles; e.g., Diya, the Instagram blogger who said:

I have two Instagram accounts now: one is my personal account and the other one I'm still developing as my 'blog' there because I want to be an influencer and coach. I am passionate about mental health and fitness and my friends keep asking me for advice, so I'm going to do it professionally now.

- Participants who used their parents/ siblings/ grandparents i.e., others' social media profiles/ handles; e.g., Balu, a PUBG gamer shared:

I'll tell you something funny! My PUBG account has my mother's profile picture and some people are so stumped by it… Sometimes they ask me in chat how I play so well despite being so old, because they think it's my mom playing. It's my account and mom doesn't play at all, but I use my mother's picture to stump others!

- Participants whose access and use were profile independent i.e., they surf Google and YouTube, etc. where, according to them, having a profile/ handle was not mandatory for access, but not much is done with the same as browsing is mainly for content purposes. Like Andy, the footballer explained,

See, this was my dad's old phone and number and I am using that only as my phone now. So, I haven't created my own profiles as such because all I need is to view some training videos on YouTube and that you can do by simply browsing.

Access and uses were also determined by platforms. Usually, participants – especially younger ones – reported their WhatsApp usage started with their parent's (mostly mother's) device and account. One of them shared gleefully that all of them

(classmates/ friends) contact each other on a WhatsApp group that has all the mothers and it is called the ‘Mummy’s group’ but it’s actually used by all the children to discuss homework or play schedules, memes, jokes, photos, and other media content. Participants also talked about this limited access and usage in terms of assigning responsibilities/ benefits like their mother can keep a check on their profile picture and status messages, but the children can put photos/ videos they like on there. This appears to be a way to negotiate self-presentation, identity and meaning-making, and relationships and connections for young people even as their uses are restricted, controlled, and monitored.

Some participants ‘turned in’ their older siblings for excessive usage of social media to get brownie points from their parents or to rationalise their own usage. Andy reported, “My sister is addicted to Instagram and she can spend even 10 hours a day just browsing. I don’t even spend one-fourth of that time!”

This strategy coupled with reasons that were considered ‘valid’ by parents like browsing the internet for information to complete their homework, to learn something new, or watch motivational videos/ content that would help them achieve their goals even while limiting their overall usage time to a mutually agreed duration per day helped young people in keeping their access and usage privileges. This level of control was no longer experienced by older teenagers (16-18 years), e.g., Diya, the Instagram blogger who was working towards building her own professional account.

Skills and Problem Solving

As participants got more access and their usage increased, they developed skills to navigate the social media apps and platforms they were using. They also

came across risks and opportunities and learned how to solve problems – whether technical or related to safety/ privacy – encountered online. This was also linked with their ages – they got better as they grew older – and mediation – parental monitoring reduced as participants became more independent.

The discernment of opportunities and risks was a skill that was based on participants' age as observed in interviews. Younger people (10-12 years) were more positive and hopeful of opportunities that social media provided them with. Participants between 13-15 years become more aware of the probable risks of the online world and were more careful about avoiding risky behaviour. Those between 16-18 years were most cautious in their approach with an anecdote by a participant reflecting a serious case of risk (more below).

Critical thinking and problem solving skills are necessary in any environment so as to minimise risks and take advantage of benefits. In the digital and social media world, younger participants with limited access and monitored usage did not come across as many risks. However, as participants got older and their access and usage became more independent, they encountered risks and became more cautious in their approach, with one anecdote by a participant reflecting a serious case of risk. This participant had their profile picture copied by a stranger who refused to take it down. A chain-link-intervention method of problem solving was observed as implemented by the participant to face this risk.

First, they confided in a friend who tried to sort it out. When this did not work, they enlisted the help of the mother who tried to solve the problem at her end, but eventually had to convince the father to take action. The father spoke to the impersonator and threatened legal action which worked as a deterrent and he took

down the participant's photograph from his profile display picture. Today, this participant has taken on the role of monitoring their friends' social media and, if needed, giving them a reality check. Thus, youngsters become social media savvy and gain the ability to deal with risks and opportunities competently and smartly.

They are also aware of which decisions and problems they could solve on their own – e.g., whether they would like to keep their account public or private and what kind of escalation they wanted against unwanted profiles on their accounts – and which might need help from a more tech savvy older sibling or friend. They pondered over if it was enough to block someone or should they also report them, and this was a question they would discuss with their peers. This approach to problem solving was from the safety/ privacy perspective for safeguarding themselves from online risks – suggesting that these young users have come to an organic understanding of the digital contexts and acknowledge their vulnerability.

Participants were also aware of issues like risky content and that they needed to stay away from such online accounts that shared "bad things" that upset them or they did not like. For instance, Cam described:

> Sometimes, I don't like how some accounts post on Instagram. Like there is this meme page I follow which posts recommendations to follow other accounts but those have things which are not always child-friendly, so I block and report those accounts. When I say not child-friendly, I mean there is abusive content like bad language and slang or swear words, and sometimes there is nudity, so yeah, I block and report them… sometimes other similar accounts try to send you direct messages and their content is not at all child-friendly, so that is some uncomfortable stuff I've come across.

Another aspect of problem solving was from the technical/ device perspective where children and adolescents had a similar chain-link-intervention method. They tried to troubleshoot for problem solving themselves, often resorting to solutions like turning everything off and then on again or going to search engines like Google for help. They occasionally turned to another young person, usually their more tech savvy classmate, friend, or sibling/ cousin. When asked if he looked for help within his circle of friends and what he did if he had problems in using social media, Andy said, "...not really, if there is a glitch, I shut everything down and restart [mostly] I solve problems on my own."

However, they often found older adults turned to them when facing these kinds of problems with using devices or accessing the internet. Suddenly, the tables would be turned and the usually contentious love for devices and the internet that would cause arguments between the children and the adults in the house, is now a cause for celebration because the young ones can help them forward an important video to their friends in the 'senior's club' or because a certain file can be easily converted to a PDF to be sent to parents' colleagues. While one may understand such experiences as incidental rather than strategic, they also point to the natural and continuous adaptation to the digital world and an internalised learning of how they make a space and a life within it.

Children's Perceptions

To understand children's perceptions of their social media lives and their experiences online, questions were asked about their navigation on social media and interactions on the different platforms. Pointed inquiries regarding their safety and privacy were asked ranging from technical questions like awareness about privacy

policy and protection plans to if they had encountered any harmful or upsetting content or interactions directly or indirectly. Questions were also asked about their own accounts – whether they were private or public, how they kept themselves safe online, and how they felt their online lives were mediated by the people around them.

Safety and Privacy

Safety and privacy were important for participants as they shared their thoughts and actions that helped them keep themselves safe online. Ava, a TikTok dancer explained,

> I follow a lot of people on TikTok because I like to study their dance videos and then follow those trends to make my own TikToks. But, I'm careful about which people I allow to follow me back. Mostly, my followers are my friends from school or tuition classes whom I know 'in real life'.

Another strategy they used to protect themselves online while also following people they wanted to get updates from but did not know personally, was regarding awareness about fan accounts and fake profiles. Andy stated, "...the real accounts have a blue tick against their profile, so I only follow those accounts."

The younger participants between 10-12 years and even some older ones in the 13-15 years age-group usually had supervised social media usage and preferred to keep their accounts private. Ava added in her interview:

> ...and I'm always supervised on these platforms, you know these things that I do, my mum is always checking my videos and checking the people that I follow and mostly on TikTok I have a private account so I get to manage who follows me and who I follow. Yeah, that's very important. Plus, I know if the platform is free,

we’re paying the price in some other way. That is the reason I keep a private account.

As they got older, received their own smartphones and independent social media access, their uses and practices also evolved beyond the platforms that their parents usually used. For example, Diya shared that her parents did not use Instagram at all and she was persuading her mother to join the platform. Initially, her Instagram feeds were about travel and beauty and that led her to discover other beauty influencers whom she followed and wanted her mother to follow as well.

One may posit that as young people’s access becomes more independent and their social media use gets more advanced, they gain experience and develop more comfort navigating aspects of presentation, identity, and relationships online. These experiences, coupled with facing opportunities and risks in a digital world, could lead them to develop certain social media literacies and critical thinking skills that turn them into discerning users and creators much as observed in literature (De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; Desimpelaere et al., 2020; Livingstone et al., 2021; Stoilova et al., 2021). This would include strategies to avoid trolling and stalking and, eventually, learning how to manage such issues and problem solve.

For instance, some of the female participants shared experiences of having received “weird DMs” (Direct Messages) and realised a quick fix is to ignore these accounts. They also mentioned that if someone was “DMing” them constantly or if their message(s) made them feel awkward or uncomfortable, they would simply block those accounts. They identified these accounts as “random dudes” or people who were messaging them after they had posted something online, but they did not consider it a major nuisance, risk, or harm.

Cam also spoke about ways in which you can keep yourself safe online. He uses Instagram to keep in touch with old friends and connect with new ones he has met and wants to keep interacting with. He knows there are online safety issues but that it is also a trade-off because he wants to be online with his friends. He shared:

> My Instagram account is in my own name, so people can search for me easily. But I use the privacy protection feature to safeguard my account... There are some apps that can help you secure yourself online, but they are third-party apps, so I don't know how reliable they are... It's not that we are safe online; there are hackers and all and I mean it's really not safe for us 13- or 14-year-olds to be online but everyone is there, so why not me? And I don't really post much private stuff online so I'm cool. Why would some hacker be interested in my boring profile?

Parents' concerns of social media like TikTok, however, often resonated among children themselves. David, a 13-year-old boy who was an active viewer and aspiring maker on TikTok, debated his cousin Isla during a joint interview over privacy concerns. They argued about David's account status; they were not sure if he had a public or private account. Isla explained that she always kept her account private because she felt this could safeguard her from online harms. Isla's other cousin Earl chipped in: "Most girls have private accounts, and most boys have public accounts."

The cousins declared that this was probably a gendered aspect of TikTok. Later, Isla provided additional context about her TikTok privacy concerns that spoke to wider issues surrounding gender norms and safety in India. Despite having her account set to private, Isla described an instance she found uncomfortable. An unknown male kept sending her follow requests and tagged her on a post despite her

refusal to engage with him. She blocked him and confided about this with her friend who reassured her that it was over now. She elaborated on the instance that made her uncomfortable:

> There was this guy, I have no idea who he was. He kept sending me follow requests and I kept declining them and this went on for a while. Then one day he posted something on TikTok and tagged me! I didn't even know him and it's not like he knew me. So, I immediately blocked him… I shared about this with a friend and she assured me that there is nothing else to do here. 'You've blocked him, so it's over'. I was concerned for a while, but then I think the blocking worked.

Isla added later, TikTok's functions that enable users to decline follow requests and block users gave her some sense of safety and agency to protect her privacy and security: "…these kinds of things keep happening on social media, so if I feel someone is not the right kind of person, I block them. TikTok is pretty safe."

However, participants shared that their parents might not always agree with this and believed that some restrictions were warranted, especially for younger children and for those from lower and middle income families.

Mediation: Parents and restrictions

Despite the nominal image of a wide-scale of demoticisation on TikTok (Abidin, 2020), it is crucial to note that actual access and use of TikTok and other social media like Instagram (also considered a more elite app by participants) were not available to many children in India. Demoticisation or the demotic turn refers to the increased visibility of the 'ordinary person' on social media as they insert themselves into media content (Turner, 2010). India has high digital inequality and

the Indian internet space is dominated by ‘the urban young male’ – most users are young men from urban India, with less than one-third of the urban female population and even lower levels of rural population getting to go online (UN Volunteers, 2019). Comparably, many participants noted that they did not have access to social media like TikTok and Instagram and thus, had to negotiate access to devices and the internet along with the app itself.

Before TikTok was permanently banned in India in June 2020 (PIB, 2020), participants’ access to TikTok was governed by two major aspects: resource availability and parental mediation. Firstly, children from lower class backgrounds who had poor access to digital devices and the internet said they managed to use TikTok whenever they got a chance. Wen, a 10-year-old girl from a lower income family, said that apps like TikTok are fun and easy to navigate, without needing much technological information and knowledge, but they take up a lot of mobile data. Without having her own phone, it became difficult to keep up with their favourite TikTok celebrities’ activities. Wen, then, managed to keep herself updated on TikTok by negotiating with her elder sister to share her viewing time and watch videos together. This worked for their mother as well, for the girls were using the same resource and the elder sister could monitor the younger one’s TikTok use. Wen’s practices were commonly found among participants as a way to negotiate access to social media with their parents and siblings. This shows how children in India are navigating digital inequalities to be part of social media cultures with flexibility and innovation.

Most of children’s use of social media – especially younger children – was significantly monitored and limited by their parents. Parents’ strict control of social

media, especially apps like Instagram and TikTok, was commonly found among participants regardless of backgrounds. However, for children from lower income backgrounds, social media use was restricted for economic reasons (mobile data/ phone costs), whereas for children from middle income families, it was limited for educational reasons as they had access to devices and the internet only for 'productive' and 'educational' activities like homework. Some parents also viewed TikTok as a potential risk for children's safety and privacy following the dominant scepticism towards the app. In interviews, children shared experiences about how their parents characterised their social media, and specifically TikTok use. Yaz, an 11-year-old girl from a lower income family mentioned, "I love TikTok [but] I only watch videos. My mummy and elder sister ask me not to make any videos because good girls keep [their lives] private."

Cam used Instagram regularly and mentioned issues with some meme pages (as above) and that his mother was not very happy about this. Although she did not heavily monitor or restrict his social media access and uses, he did say that they had an understanding about this issue:

> My mother does not like me being on Instagram and sometimes she checks my account and the pages I follow. If some bad accounts show up, I show her that I'm reporting and blocking these accounts. Until they're popping up on their own and you're not doing something to seek them out, it's okay.

Ava shared her frustrations about her social media, internet, and smartphone usage perceptions that her family had:

> You know if I'm doing something on my smartphone, dad or my grandparents will instantly say, 'Oh, you're on the phone only all day!' I mean I could be reading a book on my phone for all you know! Why do they have to assume I'm wasting my time! Usually, mumma comes to my defence and tells them I use my phone for studies and learning also, not just time-pass. That's why I don't mind her monitoring my use. We do a lot of stuff together too.

Participants also felt that their parents believed that following celebrities and social media trends might lead their children to uncontrollable attitudes, like neglecting studies to follow trends and being exposed to 'immoral' behaviours, such as dancing, adult languages and activities around sexuality, and interactions with impostors or fake instead of real celebrities. Isla explained that parental concern was why she left TikTok. She recounted there were times when seemingly risqué/ adult content would pop up as notifications. Since she was using her mother's phone, those notifications made her mother worry about what her daughter was doing. Isla explained it was all a misunderstanding but eventually her mother made her delete the app out of safety concerns.

Isla's concern was echoed by many other participants. Parents would be worried about their children's access and use of social media apps like TikTok given that the general narrative was that it is an app that is a "waste of time" or has harmful and unsafe content like harassment and sexual abuse (Bose, 2020). This is a serious problem, at least for participants' parents since they believe if there are such videos available on these platforms, it's not long before their children will view them and be scarred by such content. There were other parents – especially mothers of girl children – like Isla's mother mentioned above who had concerns about TikTok. Participants

including Xyla and Yaz reported that their parents thought TikTok was unsafe. While they were allowed to view content and even make videos, they were forbidden from uploading those videos for safety and privacy.

However, children's TikTok use was more about following celebrities and trends that they could creatively engage and play with, while also participate meaningfully in the ongoing debates relevant for them (Sarwatay, 2020; Subramanian, 2021; Verma, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). For instance, Ava followed the latest dance trends, Wen and Xyla followed mehndi artists and celebrities like Riyaz. Similarly, participants used apps like Instagram to view latest content and chat with friends, and WhatsApp to coordinate school work.

For many children, TikTok has the image of being a fun place for vernacular cultures to blossom. For many parents, TikTok is a potential site of harmful content exposure for children. Participants shared that they tried to negotiate with parents to show their fun TikTok culture, but sometimes restrictions were still imposed, like Isla was made to delete TikTok and Yaz was not allowed to upload videos. They confided that some children used TikTok and Instagram in secret for fear of being revealed to and scolded by their parents. For instance, Pete said that his Instagram account is a secret from his parents because they do not want him to be on social media but he does not want to miss out on the latest happening online with his friends and he likes hanging out with them on Instagram. He also shared that his other friend who was a girl also had a secret Instagram account and her parents did not appreciate this fact. He elaborated:

> She was also like me, as in, she had a secret Instagram account, but her parents found out. They saw all her chats and there were some things like it was not about

> love or anything adult… it was something her parents did not want to see, so they got upset… Like sometimes I get those messages too where they tell you in your DMs, 'If you follow us, we will share adult female pictures with you', obviously I did not follow them. Once I shared a selfie with my friend and some random person commented in an adult way because the selfie was with a girl.

When avoiding parental monitoring and surveillance, the responsibility for dealing with online harassment and sexist messages then has to be borne by children themselves because of this surreptitious use. This can jeopardise children's safety and wellbeing which is something the stakeholders (chapter five) alluded to when mentioning the need for establishing social connection and communication between parents and young people.

Conversely, such technopanics – while not absent for apps like Instagram and WhatsApp – were much less in comparison to TikTok. This was also reflected to a certain extent in media discourse for apps like TikTok and PUBG (now banned by the Government of India) more than those like Instagram and WhatsApp. It is interesting to note that their parent company, Facebook (now Meta) regularly collaborates on government projects (Singh, 2020), (allegedly) favours the ruling party in India (Purohit, 2020), and floats initiatives for businesses (Alawadhi, 2021; Chaturvedi, 2020).

Concerns about privacy and security expressed by children were, unsurprisingly, also echoed to a greater extent by parents. Many participants explained that parents insisted children use social media less or delete it altogether. Participants often tried to negotiate with parents by informing them of activities and giving free monitoring rights, to convince their parents that social media can also be

educational, fun, and safe. Participants' narratives illustrate how children's access, use, and experiences with social media in India can influence their decisions to view and create content and agency to protect their digital rights, by negotiating with parental rules and norms regarding their social media lives.

Banaji (2017) explains that it is imperative to consider children's voices regarding their media practices and hold a dialogue about their experiences. Similarly, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) advocate that we need balance between children's digital needs and parents' concerns for their safety. In these and other works, it is clear that a dialogue needs to exist between parents and children so a mutually acceptable agreement regarding children's social media lives can be negotiated with more nuance (Sarwatay et al., 2021, 2022; Sarwatay & Raman, 2022).

Children's Practices

Young people's social media practices show features of presentation of the self, meaning-making, identity creation and re-creation as well as peer networking and friendship management features (boyd, 2007; Couldry, 2012; Deuze, 2012; Goffman, 1959; Hogan, 2010; Lenhart et al., 2015; Papacharissi, 2012). These aspects were found in their in-depth interviews as well as guided tours of their social media profiles, which led to long-term ethnographic observation and interaction on social media profiles of some participants. They mentioned that they found TikTok easy to access, use, experience, and create with TikTok celebrities compared to other platforms as they saw people trending while showcasing their everyday lives on the app. The platform's infrastructure was accessible, as was the content, for the music and language were from their own regional and vernacular cultures. This helped

participants feel a sense of equality with peers, as TikTok became an equaliser of sorts helping children escape the class system.

Participants also shared that TikTok favours personalisation and curation. This accessibility lends an ease to following trends and hashtags, curating content and generating new local/ regional content that appeals to specific audiences and engenders participation and interactivity. In consonance with many of the studies mentioned above, here too it was found that , this creates encouragement of playful engagement and the possibility of inserting oneself into ongoing discourse, reflecting the democratic potential afforded by the app and capitalised on by children and youth in India (Sarwatay, 2020; Subramanian, 2021; Verma, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). Participants also found Instagram to be "more stylish" compared to TikTok and children in this study from higher income families used this app to keep in touch with the latest in news and pop culture. WhatsApp was the home and school messaging app used to keep in touch with family and school mates.

Cam, who comes from a higher income family with multiple devices and free access to unlimited internet declared:

> If social media were to disappear tomorrow it would be a really big problem for me cause I'm kind of addicted to it and my friends are there. We use Instagram to reach out and make new friends and exchange numbers so we can WhatsApp later about school and all. I would lose touch with them and also all the new stuff that's happening, like I got to know about that Iran and USA thing on Instagram. Social media is useful in some ways like following trends for people who like those kinds of things, but that's not me. I follow accounts of things I'm interested in because

this opens new perspectives and a whole new world for me. Social media makes you creative.

Filo, another teenager from a higher income family, seemed to agree with Cam and also thought social media had potential for fame and money. He explained, “I have recently started posting on my interest in art and architecture around me. I take pictures of buildings to upload and also sketch them... Social media could make a normal person famous if they have some talent.”

Some participants were active makers and creators on social media and used their profiles professionally as discovered during in-depth interviews, guided social media tours and ethnographic observations.

Participants’ construction of social media profiles

This section details how participants construct their social media profiles. During the guided tours of social media, participants showed me their feeds and For You Pages (FYPs) as well as their profiles or handles on two platforms: Instagram and TikTok. We discussed about their profile display pictures, their profile name or handles, bios they wrote to describe themselves online and how they used that particular social media profile in their daily lives.

A glimpse into Diya’s professional Instagram blog reveals that it deals with mental health and fitness, among other things. In this social media profile, the participant has built her own professional coach account and uses several advanced features to make her presentation more appealing and business-like. Apart from being a regular and heavy social media user, her access is predicated by the need to include advanced features of the app and move beyond simply presenting herself, practicing

certain social media habits like scrolling, liking, and sharing content, or connecting with people. She aimed to find a specific audience for her account and engage in business transactions with them as a means to monetise her social media presence.

Becoming an influencer is increasingly perceived by young people to be a viable career option, and we can begin to observe what may be a marked shift in the way young people's digital labour is monetised and how they attempt to perhaps co-opt a system that usually commodifies them. For example, Diya, depends on social media like Instagram and YouTube to keep herself updated about the latest on skincare, makeup, health and beauty, and exercise which then she weaves into her content on her coach account.

This also works for another account which she categorises as her personal account and where she identifies herself as a model. Similarly, other participants who create content on TikTok like to follow trends and challenges. While creators and influencers are not necessarily a new category in India, it will be interesting to observe young people who have grown up in this social media landscape become second generation creators and influencers.

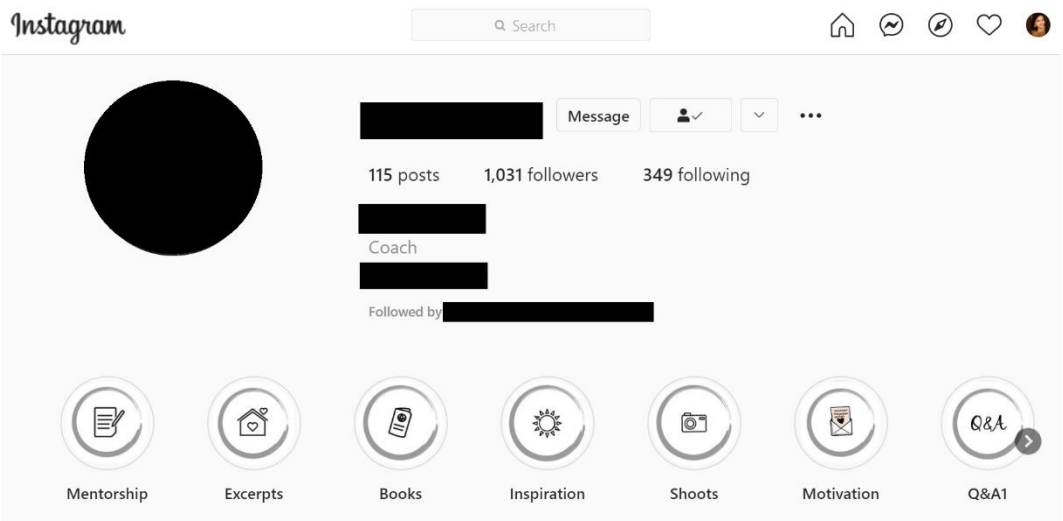

Figure 7 Participant's professional coach account on Instagram

Source: Author | Personal details redacted to protect identity

Participants had different ways of negotiating their identities and relationships on social media platforms. While some of them did not mind using their own names and photographs on their profiles, others adopted pseudonyms or monikers and their photos and videos appeared with props like caps to hide or filters to alter their appearance/ face. Some of them also used a parent's or grandparent's – usually their mother's – profiles to access and connect with people they already knew – as one of participants, Ava, said while using the air quotes gesture –, "in real life". When I asked her what it meant, she said that she had come to an understanding with her mother regarding only following her friends and classmates or others she had met in person or genuine celebrities and creators so as to safeguard her privacy and safety online.

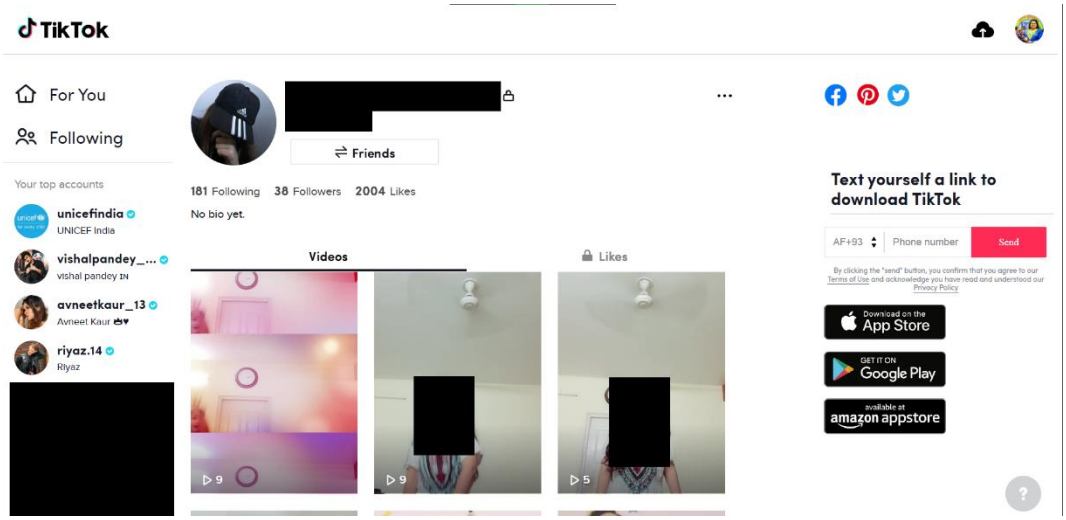

Figure 8 Strategies to protect identities on social media

Source: Author | Personal details redacted to protect identity

In this social media screen grab from TikTok (figure above), the participant has used a pseudonym (redacted to protect their identity) and a profile picture of their face, most of which is covered by a cap.

During social media tours, sisters Gia and Hana mentioned that looking good was important when choosing photos for profile pictures on digital platforms. This led to a discussion about how social media was used differently by young boys and girls in India (also mentioned above in the context of account privacy), as the sisters felt boys could post content freely, whereas girls had to be more careful and mindful of parents' rebuke. They explained that they needed to dress "decently", or present a more covered-up, traditional, Indian look in photos and videos they posted online. For this reason, they preferred taking selfies during festivals when everyone was dressed nicely, a sentiment echoed by other female participants.

Cam seemed to second the idea of gendered use of social media as well as content consumption online when he said,

> There's a lot of difference between the way boys and girls use social media. I have a cousin sister, and she has a lot of make-up stuff going on. And, food they follow too but that's something everyone follows. Versus boys have memes, accounts which show bloody gory sports like UFC, WWE, GTA, game pages.

Previous research in India suggests children conform to societal norms and discrimination related to gender, caste, and class (Banaji, 2017). Participants in this study similarly acknowledged gender dynamics related to their own practices and in parental mediation.

Participants' interactions on social media

Children's uses and experiences on social media as observed in this study were influenced by their socioeconomic backgrounds and platform architecture. Participants from less privileged backgrounds felt TikTok was more accessible than other popular social media like Instagram or YouTube. In India where the caste/ class system fixes a person's position, TikTok's demotic turn attracted and inspired children to be on the platform, as seen in the increasing popularity of the Mahto siblings despite their lower class rural backgrounds. As traditional celebrities from upper class backgrounds like Avneet began to curate their TikTok personae around 'everyday cultures' and 'relatableness' (Firstpost, 2020) in response to the expanding demoticisation on the platform (Abidin, 2020), increasing teen TikTok celebrities encouraged children to join the platform and engage with the platform's culture via its technological features for creativity.

For example, many child celebrities in their teens invited children from similar age groups to consume and co-create TikTok videos. They suggested duets with them,

made videos responding to followers' comments, and asked for feedback. This spurred TikTok's uniquely engaging digital vernacular cultures among children, unlike other social media like Instagram. Children would sing-along or mimic celebrities in side-by-side duet videos and also follow latest trends like challenges where celebrities encouraged them to do something funny/ quirky with specific hashtags to spur playful engagement (Subramanian, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021) and make use of TikTok's algorithmic architecture (Abidin, 2020; Bhandari & Bimo, 2020; Zeng & Kaye, 2022).

These 'interactive' attitudes of TikTok celebrities made participants feel that they were part of a large TikTok community of children. As other work on TikTok in India illustrated (Sarwatay, 2020; Sarwatay et al., 2022; Sharma, 2021; Subramanian, 2021; Verma, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021), participants also shared their ordinary lives on the platform, including conflicts with parents and issues in peer cultures and created their own fun-centred playful vernacular cultures and used the platform to voice their opinions about the goings-on around them. In this manner, participants – regardless of their class backgrounds – found TikTok less circumscribed by class hierarchies and aspired to be like those teen TikTok celebrities who appeared as 'leaders' of the TikTok community and their peer cultures.

TikTok's unique algorithm FYP culture recommends content based on users' digital footprints and TikTok trends in the place and region of users' locations (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020; Kaye et al., 2021). This facilitates regional and local cultures by circulating local trends and allows child TikTok users to easily relocate and continue their peer-group cultures within the virtual space afforded by TikTok by generating interest in the same or similar cultural trends. TikTok allowed participants

to share their creativity and interests, such as make-up art, hair-styling, visual-art, music, or crafts, with an inexpensive, low-tech setup.

For example, Lena, a 15-year-old girl and a budding maker, said, “My friend group introduced me to TikTok trends. I love following regional trends because that is a popular activity in our group.” She was her friends’ guide about ‘what’s trending on TikTok now’. When she was introduced to TikTok, she tried out dance videos and skits to find her maker style. We define maker style as the unique manner in which each child who made short-videos on TikTok interacted with and participated in trends distinct to their local/ regional vernacular cultures. While most celebrities preferred dance videos, Lena caught on to trending skits which she replicated with her friends and family evolving her maker style and becoming popular among her friends living in her building and studying in her school.

By consuming and interacting with teenage TikTok celebrities’ content, Lena also realised that she could use the app to create content like them as the platform’s architecture gave her a sense of control over her presentation of the self online. She aspired to be famous like Riyaz or Avneet – one could say the demotic turn fuelled her aspirations.

In the strictly classed Indian society, Instagram’s norm of high tastes (Leaver et al., 2020) may cause a sense of disparity among young users and alienate a majority of people from the platform’s culture. This classed social media culture, ironically, led children to join TikTok for their own unique and authentic everyday vernacular cultures. This was also the reason some participants preferred Instagram over TikTok because they thought the latter was “cringe”.

Another reason was also differences in content and form that participants – especially from higher income families – liked to follow like meme pages and current affairs from around the world. This is not to say there were clear boundaries between participants' content consumption from different backgrounds even as preferences existed based on factors including access and content vernacularisation. But trends had a way of circumventing these differences and participants often followed trends which started globally and became localised or vice versa feeding into and reinforcing each other (Parameswaran, 2013; Sarwatay, 2020).

Content creation was a family activity for Lena who featured members of her family in music videos, dances, and short skits. She described the TikTok video creation interface as being easy and intuitive. Others did not find the interface so straightforward. Luv and Manu, private school students, found video creation difficult and cumbersome and declared, "… [like] to record videos for others rather than feature in them." Xyla, Yaz and Wen, NGO classmates, shared Luv and Manu's affinity for making videos of others as opposed to making videos of themselves. Wen said, "I can help my friends by holding the phone when they want to record TikToks but I don't want to be in them; I feel shy. I also like art-based [like mehndi and drawing] videos more than videos about people."

Among those who found video creation to be functionally easy, some still experienced frustration trying to participate in certain trends. Isla explained that she abandoned TikTok after unsuccessful attempts to join a viral outfit transition trend, where users appear in one outfit and transition to a new outfit with visual effects and editing. TikTok affords users a variety of internal editing tools, but Isla felt she was not skilled enough at video editing to create a perfect seamless transition. A group of

girls at the NGO made it their mission to explain to me how to make transition videos where you start as a plain-Jane and end with a glam-girl look, all in less than 15 seconds! They insisted that it was very simple, all you needed was a good tripod and some cool editing which was easily doable on TikTok.

In some cases, TikTok's interface was used by participants to become makers of offline or private creative content. Wen and Xyla spoke about Indian henna art (mehndi) videos, "We watch mehndi videos on TikTok and practice what we saw in our drawing books." This is so that they could re-recreate henna art on their hands when they get a chance to dress-up. Others created short-video content using TikTok's video creation features, but kept it offline for personal comfort or due to adult restrictions. Even when they did not post the videos online, they were very excited by the fact that they could follow trends and replicate them.

Summary

There were several ways in which children used, experienced, negotiated access to view and make content on social media. To simply watch, some had to justify their use of social media to parents by explaining how they would keep themselves safe or allowing parents to monitor while they scrolled the Feeds/ Home Page or the FYP. Others had to barter access by keeping up with school work and learning l with restricted access during exams. Those without devices had to request access from parents or borrow other family members' smartphones to use social media. Those that transitioned from viewers to makers enjoyed new avenues for creative expression even when they did not post their creations online.

As observed previously in India (Banaji, 2017; Verma, 2021), social class affected agency and practices on TikTok, creating cultural distinctions along caste/ class lines. Socioeconomic background largely determined access, practices of use, and parental concerns. While this did reflect somewhat in maker styles and TikTok cultures, the platform's architecture and affordances acted as a sort of leveller which is why makers like the Mahto siblings were nearly as popular (Sharma, 2021) as some urban, high income celebrities. However, others in the study preferred Instagram for content consumption and production.

Participants found that social media like TikTok and Instagram had some in-built protections like the private profile feature and function to block users. While these features were helpful, social media may leave children vulnerable and feeling unsafe, especially from online harassment and stalking, as in when Diya had an impersonator on WhatsApp or when Ava was being stalked on TikTok. This is true for women who might be more susceptible to trolling and bullying online (Weimann & Masri, 2020), which may be intensified in the patriarchal and sexist culture of India like the sexual abuse and harassment videos already existing on Indian TikTok (Bose, 2020) and similar issues on Indian Instagram.

WhatsApp has also been misused to spread misinformation and hate speech (Banaji et al., 2019; Neyazi et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2021). Misogyny and sexual harassment online have been serious global problems (Marwick, 2021). Without robust protective measures, these problems can become dangerous for children on social media. Notwithstanding parents' sceptical view towards TikTok (more than other apps), the Government of India has not put in place relevant policies and laws to

protect the safety and wellbeing of minorities, including children and women, until TikTok was decided to be banned citing these harms.

Children's vernacular TikTok cultures and practices dealing with digital inequalities, however, have not persisted. The Indian government banned TikTok and many people, including TikTok influencers and some study participants, moved to other apps like Instagram Reels, Share Chat, Likee, and YouTube Shorts. As some of the technological features of these platforms were adopted from TikTok's features, such as short-video functions and algorithmic recommendation system, children were able to accommodate alternatives to some extent. However, unique vernaculars on TikTok, such as direct interactions with various types of influencers and upper classed (or smaller) celebrities via duets, were difficult to be sustained on alternative platforms, which led many children to discontinue engagement with children's online cultures within such environments.

Details about participants

Table 6 Details about participants

Source: Author

Sr. No.	Pseud-onym	Age*	Gender	Family	Preferred Social Media	Device Access
1	Ava	11	female	middle income	TikTok^	Mother's smartphone
2	Andy	13	Male	middle income	YouTube	Own smartphone, hand-me-down from father
3	Balu	12	Male	middle income	PUBG	Mother's smartphone
4	Bani	13	female	middle income	Instagram	Mother's old smartphone, currently without internet access
5	Cari	11	female	middle income	TikTok & Instagram	Mother's smartphone
6	Diya	18	female	higher income	Instagram (2 a/cs)	Own smartphone
7	Cam	14	Male	higher income	Instagram, YouTube & Snapchat	Own smartphone

8	Ela	17	female	higher income	Instagram	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
9	Flora	14	female	higher income	Instagram	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
10	Gia	14	female	higher income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Mother's smartphone
11	Hana	12	female	higher income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Mother's smartphone
12	David	13	Male	higher income	TikTok & YouTube	Mother's smartphone
13	Isla	14	female	higher income	TikTok	Mother's smartphone
14	Earl	12	male	higher income	TikTok	Mother's smartphone
15	Filo	17	male	higher income	Hike & YouTube	Sibling's smartphone
16	Jayu	13	female	higher income	Instagram, WhatsApp & Snapchat	Own smartphone
17	Kira	17	female	middle income	TikTok & YouTube	Own smartphone
18	Lena	14	female	middle income	TikTok	Own smartphone
19	Grant	16	male	middle income	TikTok & Instagram	Own smartphone
20	Hari	16	male	higher income	Instagram (2 a/cs)	Own smartphone
21	Ian	16	male	higher income	Instagram (2 a/cs)	Own smartphone
22	Jed	16	male	higher income	Instagram	Own smartphone
23	Kunal	16	male	higher income	Instagram	Own smartphone
24	Mina	17	female	higher income	Instagram	Own smartphone
25	Nora	16	female	higher income	Instagram	Own smartphone
26	Oona	16	female	higher income	YouTube	Own smartphone
27	Pia	13	female	middle income	Instagram & YouTube	Mother's smartphone
28	Quincy	13	female	middle income	WhatsApp & YouTube	Hand-me-down phone used by siblings
29	Raina	13	female	middle income	WhatsApp & YouTube	Mother's smartphone
30	Saira	13	female	middle income	Instagram & YouTube	Mother's smartphone
31	Luv	13	male	middle income	Instagram & TikTok	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
32	Manu	13	male	middle income	YouTube & TikTok	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
33	Nabil	11	male	middle income	YouTube	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
34	Oscar	12	male	middle income	YouTube	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
35	Pete	14	male	middle income	Instagram	Own smartphone

36	Qasim	13	male	middle income	Instagram (2 a/cs)	Own smartphone
37	Rian	12	male	middle income	YouTube	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
38	Sunny	14	male	middle income	TikTok & Instagram	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
39	Taimur	13	male	lower income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
40	Uday	13	male	lower income	Instagram & WhatsApp	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
41	Tina	14	female	lower income	TikTok	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
42	Una	14	female	lower income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
43	Vera	14	female	lower income	TikTok	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
44	Wila	13	female	lower income	TikTok	Parent/ Sibling's smartphone
45	Xena	11	female	lower income	TikTok	Very limited access on family smartphone
46	Yuti	12	female	lower income	TikTok & YouTube	Very limited access on family smartphone
47	Zara	11	female	lower income	YouTube & Likee	Very limited access on family smartphone
48	Vala	12	female	lower income	YouTube	Very limited access on family smartphone
49	Wen	10	female	lower income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Very limited access on family smartphone
50	Xyla	10	female	lower income	TikTok, WhatsApp & Likee	Very limited access on family smartphone
51	Yaz	11	female	lower income	TikTok & WhatsApp	Very limited access on family smartphone

*as on interview date (in years) ^TikTok was banned in India on 29th June 2020

Growing up on Social Media

In this doctoral project, my thesis was that young people need to be consulted about their experiences, perceptions, and practices on social media. I argue that they are social actors who can bear witness to their lived experiences online such that we can gain a nuanced understanding of their digitally connected everyday realities and cultures.

In most conceptions of society, children are considered a group that is vulnerable and in need of protection. This responsibility to protect and care is placed by society largely on the shoulders of parents and other adults like teachers, caregivers, etc. and more broadly, on the institutions that play a role in children's growth and development. Children have from their very inception been treated as a special group by law, academia and the market, and in this regard, media studies is no exception.

As my review (detailed in chapter two) indicated, scholarship has been equivocal and often polarised regarding children's media (especially digital/ social media) access, usage and its moderating role in identity formation and social interactions, and, more recently, on how children develop civic, cultural, and political ideas and notions of citizenship (Nolas et al., 2016). Concerns articulated in research and policy circles about children's literacies, rights, and parental cautions about appropriate and productive media use/ participation have also been reflected in mainstream media discourse.

Western academia has largely led research on young people and social media. Discourse in academic and mainstream media around this topic has been about how

children's and adolescents' access, uses, experiences, and perceptions of technology and the opportunities and risks as well as consequences and solutions of the same (Banaji, 2016; Dunne et al., 2010; Green et al., 2011; Holmes, 2009; Livingstone, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2017, 2021; Rodríguez-de-Dios et al., 2018; Tripp, 2011). Globally, research is now moving to a more rights-based approach to ensure children's rights in a digital world (CRC, 2021; Livingstone & Bulger, 2014; Radesky & Hiniker, 2022; Staksrud & Milosevic, 2017; Third et al., 2019).

There have been studies in this regard from the Global South too, e.g., countries like Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Vietnam (AlNajjar, 2019; Alwagait et al., 2015; Arora, 2019; Lim, 2019; Willnat & Aw, 2013; Yue et al., 2019) but literature from India has been relatively slower to catch up, even as mainstream media in India tend to foster technopanics regarding children's social media uses (Banaji, 2017; Bhatia & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Deshbandhu, 2020; Dutta & Das, 2016; IANS, 2015; Kumar & Rangaswamy, 2013; PTI, 2014; Rangaswamy et al., 2013; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016; Sarwatay, 2020; Sarwatay et al., 2022; Sarwatay & Raman, 2022; Singh & Bishnoi, 2016; Suri, 2021). There is also the question of how Anglo-Eurocentric approaches might not always translate to the different Global South local realities, including in a large and diverse country like India (Sarwatay et al., 2021). This comes at a time when India is being flooded by cheap smartphones and mobile internet plans, and – although the data for this study was collected before the pandemic – at a time when the world is largely going digital by default even in a deeply digitally divided reality.

Young people are enthusiastic about new technologies and their lives are inextricably linked to the digital as they were born into a world that is more connected

on more levels than ever before. Especially since the pandemic, a lot of their education, engagement, and entertainment is online – even as we deal in digital divides, many young people live in a social media world – this truly is a 'born digital' generation. While there is some work regarding children and media (Banaji, 2017), media literacy education and online political participation (Bhatia & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Raman & Verghese, 2014), digital leisure, connection, and privacy (Arora, 2019; Arora & Scheiber, 2017; Deshbandhu, 2020; Kumar & Rangaswamy, 2013; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016), most mainstream discourse focuses on adult perspectives on young people's social media lives.

This doctoral thesis aims to foreground young people's voices regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices on social media for it recognises them as social actors who can bear witness to their everyday social media lives and share their testimonies about them. It joins previous efforts to engage with children about their social media lives and prioritise their voices to contribute to these rights-based movements. If decisions are being made about children and social media – whether at the level of their access and uses, risks and rights, parental mediation or in the realm of platform and internet governance – it is important to contextualise and centre children's social media experiences in their everyday lives. These perspectives add valuable first-hand context regarding digital youth cultures in India and expand global scholarship in this area.

With this in mind, I set out to map stakeholder, school, and young people's voices regarding the latter's social media lives in India with a large, urban, metropolitan city in the western part of the country as my field site. I interviewed nine stakeholders and seven school personnel for the first set of findings covered in chapter

five. I also recruited 51 participants and conducted in-depth interviews, guided tours of social media, and ethnographic observations and interactions with them. These young people were in the age group of 10-18 years coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds who had been active on social media by way of viewing, interacting, and creating on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook, etc. covered in chapter six.

Analysis to unpack key themes revealed a range of issues regarding the architecture and design of social media; digital and social media literacies; young people's social media cultures, negotiations, agency and resistance; parental mediation; among others. The sections below delve deeper into drawing linkages between existing literature and discourse with findings covered in the last two chapters (five and six).

Deliberations

Stakeholders and Schools

A range of issues such as technopanics, digital divide, a lack of child-centred-design in social media platforms and technology, dearth of knowledge about opportunities and risks of social media, and confusion about navigating this social media world emerged from a thematic analysis of stakeholder interviews. From school voices, the main ideas were the need for a holistic school environment for children's wellbeing, gaps in knowledge and resources, and the need for digital and media literacy. Based on these insights, I offer ways to think about children's wellbeing, how adult caregivers can maximise children's wellbeing, the possibility of and problems with regulation, and recommendations for parents to foster trust and

meaningful connection with young people to frame their engagement with technology, while pointing to research gaps and directions for future scholarship in India.

With regards to identifying research priorities specific to the Indian context, these conversations with stakeholders and schools offer some direction that research could take to inform developing digital media literacy programmes that address the fears, anxieties, hopes, and everyday realities of Indian families. As some of the informants in this study have suggested, this has led to a multi-pronged yet somewhat uncoordinated response to managing anxieties and promises of digital media in relation to children in the Indian context. Across all the themes that emerged, a well-conceived media literacy effort was seen as pivotal to mitigating risks and facilitating a positive relationship with media for young people. It is interesting that parents too are seen as important participants in such literacy efforts: both as targets of critical media literacy programs and as facilitators. This may be particularly important in the Indian context, as parents' experiences with media (both digital and pre-digital) vary widely depending on socioeconomic and cultural milieu.

This brings us to the question: how can such media literacy programmers address the nuanced needs of local cultures while working with existing [often civic] literacy gaps? There is also an important – but in these conversations a less perceptible – shift from the language of risk and responsibility to that of rights and participation. In such a framework in the context of India, communication rights are realised through media literacy – where children discover or are sensitised to issues of representation and participation in digital and other media through deliberately

thought out literacy programmes designed bearing in mind the very diverse contexts that Indian children occupy.

Shakuntala Banaji's work, for instance, brings into conversation historical ideas about children and childhood in India with everyday lived experiences of children from the margins – drawing from this the understanding that intervention for and about children must involve children's voices and recognition of their agency (Banaji, 2017). This perhaps is one way to respond to concerns expressed by some of the stakeholders around the top-down approach to technology design as well as the relatively little effort put into actually involving children in conversations around their mediated/ media lives. Such conversations of course cannot ignore the fundamental truth about India – that (as is the case in other diverse cultures) there is no one group of children that represents the whole, and that even as we think about policy broadly, there must be room for multiple local variations in application.

Maybe, policy can offer a flexible framework as to getting feedback from the field to also include young people, eventually leading to a more participatory approach to framing regulatory policies at the macro level and parental advisories at the micro level. We could possibly draw from other areas as well that could inform how we can provide a safe digital environment for young people like the 5Rights Foundation. For instance, their latest offering – Education Data Futures – has an essay on how fintech could offer solutions to safeguarding young people's data in edtech avenues (Fawzi, 2022) among other critical, regulatory, and practical reflections.

Participants

There is no doubt that young people's lives are inextricably tied in with the digital. From education to socialisation, creative self-expression and leisure practices to preparing for the world of work and developing political and civic consciousness, social media become both a training ground and an arena of engagement. The insights gained from my intensive interactions with this group of young people in an Indian city suggest that there is much to learn from the way young people make their lives online and integrate it with their offline worlds. As is clear from their negotiations with parents and other adults in authority roles, these young people see technology as an integral part of their lives; there is no question of doing without it and they find different ways to gain access to and a degree of control over devices even as parental mediation tends to be restrictive at worst and heavily monitored at best.

Participants described in this thesis come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds representing a reasonably diverse range of experiences with digitality. They have evolved particular practices that enable them to work with/ in social media in effective ways. Far from seeing themselves as vulnerable and in need of protection, they demonstrate a high degree of understanding of the politics of social media, from an awareness of privacy risks to conduct "becoming" of netizens. As Couldry & Hepp (2016) emphasise, our reality today is mediated, built in and through the sociality on the net, and for young people, their social worlds are a seamless integration of the online and offline. In marking their presence in forums such as TikTok or Instagram, to fashioning a persona on gaming forums, to negotiating access when there is resource unavailability or parental restrictions, they are learning not just how the

technology works, but how sociality is expressed within it as well as how they can exercise agency and resistance.

Studies in Western contexts have looked at how adolescents experiment with intimacy practices (such as sharing photographs on Snapchat) in ways that push the boundaries of risk while experiencing the pleasures of disruptive behaviours (Kofoed & Larsen, 2016). The socio-cultural context in India perhaps restricts this form of intimacy experimentation and while none of the participants shared such experiences, there have been media reports that point to the fact that this does exist among Indian adolescents too. The younger participants in our study were more mindful of gaining parental permission and seemed to not resent supervision and occasional surveillance from their parents.

However, the young people profiled in this study also exhibited a fair degree of digital savvy in terms of handling the technicalities of the platforms they engaged with, often offering support to adults in the household, knowing when to ask for support, and ostensibly recognising (though not always acting on this recognition) that technical savvy needed to be balanced with the kind of social understanding that comes with age and experience. For example, participants knew basics like setting up an account, profile picture, short bio, etc. but also how to navigate through the interface to create content online, report problems, block suspicious accounts, among other things to have an enjoyable and safe social media life.

As Marwick & boyd (2014) have noted in their observation of teenagers in the United States, young people do care about privacy, and quickly develop context-specific ways to manage it in social media networks. Here too I found that these young people had arrived at different ways to manage their social media use,

including questions of privacy and risks, based on home context and their dynamic family and peer group relationships.

Young people in India, as elsewhere, need to be understood within the complexities of their socio-cultural and even political contexts, living in households with very different levels of technology adoption, and varying family cultures (with different degrees of general media use and access), as well as individual motivations of peer sociality, leisure pursuits, self-making and self-presentation, and exploration of a range of life opportunities. The multigenerational structure of many Indian families creates a layer of possibility in terms of young people's roles as agents of cross-generational literacies (as evidenced in their approach to problem solving and risk mitigation described in the previous chapter) with older members of the family turning to the younger ones for technological understanding while emotional wisdom and civic awareness flows in the opposite direction. While the younger participants in this study turned to adults for both permission and guidance when facing challenges in online spaces, the older children played a supportive role to grandparents, helping them manage their online lives. Even as I acknowledge the participant pool comes from only one metro in West India, it is safe to assume that these are patterns and insights that may be found, in varying degrees, across urban Indian families.

Young people's experiences on social media covered aspects of access, uses, skills, and problem solving. They negotiated access in innovative and creative ways even as they were faced with lack of resource availability and/ or restrictive parental mediation. They had figured out risks and opportunities online as well as strategies to deal with them which utilised a range a of skills like troubleshooting, forming a chain-

link-intervention method, and taking on the role of advising friends as needed for problem solving.

Children's perceptions on social media were about safety, privacy, and mediation. They shared several ways in which they kept themselves safe online right from the creation of their account and choosing to keep a private or public account to how they chose to make friends, accept followers, and follow others' accounts whether they were those of their friends or celebrities. They confessed that being on social media had its learning curve and led to them cultivating certain social media literacies about how to be, interact, and engage on social media. This included the awareness as well as avoidance and – if necessary – management of bad experiences like stalking and trolling. Young people were acutely aware of and described how boys and girls access, use, and experience social media differently and that girls were perhaps more susceptible to direct risks like being stalked or trolled online compared to boys in this particular participant pool. Socioeconomic backgrounds also factored in when resource availability and parental mediation were considered. Many lower income families had to restrict children's 'wasteful' and potentially 'harmful' social media practices, whereas most middle income families were worried that social media would negatively impact their children's academic performance. Younger children (10-12 years) were heavily monitored and as they grew older, this monitoring reduced significantly. This could also be due to the fact that most social media have minimum age requirements to be able to have accounts which might be being ignored because, "everyone is on social media and I don't want to miss out," as per my participants. There was also a sense of some platforms (read: TikTok) are more harmful than others among parents as per the participants.

With regards to the *adolescents' practices on social media*, most participants preferred TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Snapchat. They found TikTok was the easiest to access content and connection (especially with celebrities), Instagram was a cool place for pictures (now also reels, but some people do not like them), WhatsApp was a necessary tool for school work, YouTube had the best videos (sports, games, make-up, beauty, motivational), and Snapchat was popular for filters. Some participants were using social media for viewing content and interacting with friends but some also indulged in making content like memes and videos, and posting photos and stories. There were some who aspired to use social media professionally as well. A lot of thought was put into how their social media lives would appear and unfold online. Participants were mindful of the kind of photos, videos, bios, captions, stories, etc. would go up and whether they would have public or private profiles, their own names and profile pictures displayed openly or the use of nicknames or made-up-names or pseudonyms and if they wanted to display a 'hidden face' or creative profile pictures. They also loved platforms that helped them curate their online selves in their own everyday vernacular cultures. They also used online content in offline contexts and online interfaces to create content that would remain offline for privacy and other reasons.

These different platforms, their architectures and affordances, and the different kinds of media content that young people engaged with presented several opportunities and challenges for research, literacy, regulation, and design. Social media is changing and evolving at a rapid pace and research often tries to keep pace with how users interact with newer platforms and their content. As we move from a networked self (Papacharissi, 2012) to an algorithmised self (Bhandari & Bimo,

2020), digital and social media literacy skills become more important as well as complex to impart and apply. Regulatory policies specifically regarding young people's social media lives in India are insubstantial and design largely stems from work by technology professionals that are neither based in India nor centring young people in their choices.

Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices online indeed show that they are growing up on social media. They are living a *social media life* for they consider it to be indivisible from their 'real life' – as characterised by their parents but somewhat disputed by them, for they do not necessarily see life in binaries like the adults around them – because they live their everyday mediated, shaped, and connected with social media (Deuze, 2012). They use *social media as practice* for they are constantly searching, showing, presencing, archiving, keeping up with the latest, commenting, and living their everyday lives online (Couldry, 2012). They have an acute understanding of what goes at the back-end in terms of context, thought, ideation, creation, and curation of *the presentation of self in everyday social media life* presented at the front-end of their social media profiles as well as how they manage their impression during engagement, interaction, and conflict encountered online (Goffman, 1959; Hogan, 2010). They also know the *importance of their social media lives and digital rights* which is why they act with a sense of agency and resistance (Livingstone, 2021), and negotiate with creative and innovative strategies under resource under availability and restrictive parental mediation (Sarwatay et al., 2022; Sarwatay & Raman, 2022).

My findings resonate with existing research regarding young people and social media. This doctoral work extends scholarship regarding young people's social media

lives from the Indian context and adds to the slowly growing literature from the Global South regarding young people's digital cultures. Notably, I amplify their excitement to explore social media, skill in navigating issues of safety and privacy, and creativity in negotiating access under restrictive parental mediation. Very little work from India focusses on children and adolescents and how they consider social media for their presentation of self online, meaning-making, and creative expression. My work also brings out their aspirations regarding social media as a possible career and how they engage with creation of content and interactions with peers and other influencers and celebrities online.

Reflections

Technopanics

Mainstream media discourse highlighting technopanics regarding children's social media lives had managed to percolate at the household level. Many of the participants' parents and caregivers felt social media was a complete waste of time, would lead to poor performance in school, or would put their children at risk, although this line of thought was largely seen in the middle and lower income families more than in higher income ones. Prior to the ban, TikTok was at the centre of technopanics in India. Participants highlighted several adult misconceptions about TikTok in specific and social media in general that stoked fears and restrictions. Previous studies consider platform technopanics in India, such as Facebook (Arora & Scheiber, 2017), but hardly any have considered how technopanics manifest on a platform that was being actively vilified in mainstream Indian media in months leading up to its ban (Bose, 2020). While there were other apps like PUBG which also received negative media coverage and ban threats, TikTok was constantly blamed in

India media for distracting and harming children, degrading culture, and causing law and order issues (Yadav, 2019). This is not to say that there were no issues with the app itself, but there was more focus on this particular platform. Despite the TikTok ban (PIB, 2020), content strategies, editing skills, and safe use practices developed on TikTok may apply to other short-video and social media platforms in India. The technopanics approach, quite frankly, does more harm than good, especially when young people want to assuage adult concerns and encourage dialogue and negotiation to continue their growth online. Adults must understand that children will always have to be ready to face risks and capitalise on opportunities – whether online or offline – and this readiness can come from literacy and safe spaces for dialogue, all of which is only hindered by technopanics.

Technopanics (and moral panics) have existed throughout our history with technology and media. For instance, for a long time, it was posited that children become aggressive and/ or are negatively impacted due to their consumption of specific kinds of content on television or music or video games, and now computers, the internet and social media (Cassell & Cramer, 2008; Collier, 2009; Lawson & Comber, 2000; Marwick, 2008; Radesky & Hiniker, 2022; Thierer, 2009, 2012; Wartella & Jennings, 2000). This can hinder our attempts at providing young people with a safe digital environment as it distracts parents and other adults from engaging with these issues by prompting the need to ban these technologies instead of teaching about and learning from them. We can also suffer from misguided legislation and regulation that fails to differentiate between opportunities versus risks, and more importantly, harms which truly negatively impact children. Media coverage in India also fuels technopanics for sensationalism and we need a more nuanced and

considered take on technology and society and what it means to live in a digitally connected world.

Parenting

Many parents and caregivers acted on misconceptions and fears rather than focus on educational and creative opportunities the platforms afforded children. This is not to say the adults' fears are wholly unfounded, however a stronger working understanding of social media would help adults make better informed decisions about children's safety (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Digital media literacy education programs aimed at both children and adults could reduce fears, mitigate harms, and permit children to participate safely in cultural experiences online. Further media literacy and platform governance research in India is needed to assist parents in creating safer spaces for children's creative expression. Restrictive parental mediation of other popular trending platforms, short-video or otherwise, may encourage children to circumvent 'rules' which might lead to new privacy, safety, health, and wellbeing issues. This is something that the stakeholder and school voices were also mindful of and suggested that parents need to be more open about children's social media aspirations and aim for healthy dialogue and even co-use, if possible. Future research and literacy efforts that incorporate perspectives from children and adults can help both become more well-informed digital citizens.

Anticipations

Children's Digital Futures

Children are often considered vulnerable on social media and in need of protection from malicious internet content (Livingstone et al., 2017). Discourse

regarding children's online safety has progressed globally from perspectives of restrictive protection including increased legislation/ regulation (Marwick, 2008) to a more participatory approach that recognises children's rights in a digital age and encourages them to participate in framing an environment that is safer for their creative expression (CRC, 2021; Livingstone & Bulger, 2014; Third et al., 2019) for children are social actors who can voice their experiences (James, 2007) which can be used for dialogue and decision-making.

Internet access in India is expanding to wider socioeconomic groups and age demographics through increasingly affordable mobile devices and data packs (Kumar & Rangaswamy, 2013; Rangaswamy et al., 2013; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016; Rangaswamy & Cutrell, 2013). Social media platforms are primed to capitalise on children and young people's creative labours (Collie & Wilson-Barnao, 2020). Researchers outside India are interrogating the impacts of commodification and surveillance on children's personal lives, social experiences, and digital futures (Barassi, 2020; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2020). While there are some initiatives to counter harms and foster benefits (Livingstone, 2014), governance bodies and corporate structures are only beginning to understand how best to safeguard children's digital rights (CRC, 2021). Future research should delve more into the motivations, risks, and opportunities for children on social media. This would help curb the technopanics discourse that calls on "policymakers to step in" (Suri, 2021) while taking steps to safeguard children's interests and rights online.

In recent years, some multilateral agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO have attempted to define and advocate for children's rights drawing on research-based inputs from activists and academics, taking forward – to some extent – a media

literacy movement that emerged in the wake of the spread of television. In most of these projects there has been recognition that children occupy complex worlds and a shared understanding of these diverse realities based on rigorous research must inform policy and programmatic interventions. These have engendered partnerships between development agencies and academics, with a slowly increasing representation from the Global South. The Global Kids Online (Byrne et al., 2016) project initiated by UNICEF, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and others for instance, while starting off with a Eurocentric focus, has now broadened to include a network of researchers from 15 countries, India among them. The interdisciplinary and international nature of such networks holds promise for a widening of the lens that informs policy in areas such as education and technology development, both key to realising any media literacy agenda that upholds children's rights in the digital age. However, what seems to be missing is the link with the state institutions that allow for interventional ideas to be supported at scale in sustainable ways.

No matter where one looks, it is difficult to escape the ambivalence that pervades thinking in the area of children and media, and the usefulness of media literacy efforts in the face of a rapidly changing, increasingly interconnected world where children – and the adults in their lives – seem to have to continually recalibrate their ways of being, learning and relating. While some hail social media developments as opportunities for children to learn and grow, others fear risks of exposure to a world we do not fully know and understand (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). There is also the fear of the older generation (parents, teachers, etc.) of being left behind due to their lack of understanding and ability of manoeuvring these media, as compared to the younger generation which is identified as 'digital natives' (Burn et al., 2010).

Some also question the skills of these natives in navigating the complicated world of social media. Hence, the emergence of literature around literacy – ranging from information literacy to media literacy and digital literacy to social media literacy – to enable children and parents to skilfully and safely engage with this virtual environment (Bennett et al., 2008; Buckingham, 2006; Livingstone, 2014). All these questions acquire different nuances and meanings in different cultures, and in India, as perhaps in other transitional societies, they must be considered against a range of social, political, and economic issues. In the deeply paternalistic and patriarchal family structures, for instance, how might children's autonomy and parental engagement operate? How might social media use, or device ownership and control vary across demographic categories? What in fact might social connectedness or digital citizenship for children mean in a context where even adults find themselves disadvantaged and disenfranchised? How does media literacy then work alongside other urgently required literacies to empower children and facilitate their growth? How do children access, use, and experience social media despite and within a digitally (and otherwise) divided India that is rapidly moving online?

There is no doubt that there is a rich and rapidly growing body of scholarship on children's engagement with digital technologies, and many convincing arguments for robust media literacy programs. While opinions will always range and often fall into sharply divided buckets, together they open up questions for future research, some of which are alluded to above. As noted earlier, much of the work that is currently drawn upon by researchers, educators and policy makers and cited here originates from the USA and UK, to a lesser extent Europe and Australia, with some work coming from the Middle East, and Southeast and South Asia. In the Indian

context, I could only find limited industry research on this topic (from organisations like ASSOCHAM, TCS, etc.), some academic research done by students which came to the foreground because of local/ regional newspaper coverage and a spot of mainstream media work circling around sensational stories, like underage use, social media crises (such as the Blue Whale game and the more recent #BoisLockerRoom incident) and tips to parents. While issues related to digital media use and practice comes into public attention during such incidents, there has been little sustained scholarly engagement that spans the spectrum from educators to media scholars to policy makers to program implementers – the full complement of perspectives and disciplinary knowledge that may be required to make media literacy in the country an evidence based project.

Policy formulation in this area, and more importantly implementation, needs to take a flexible approach that is sensitive to multiple lived realities of children across India. Certainly, contextual factors like age, gender, family background, education, income, and rural/ urban location feed into these differences. But this is both the challenge and value of qualitative research – that while drawing out broad themes likely to resonate across situations, there is acknowledgment of variations therein.

Summary

This thesis drew on deep interactions with young people from a large Indian metro to gain insights into social media practices and modes of engagement with particular reference to management of access, privacy, safety and negotiating challenges or problem solving. Findings suggest that young people's framing of their digital lives resists to some extent the stereotype of a vulnerable group requiring adult

supervision and protection. While it is undeniable that these vulnerabilities do exist, particularly in relation to such extreme harms as sexual grooming and identity manipulation, the mitigation of harms must take into account the ways in which young people understand, negotiate, and manage their presence in social media forums.

In several instances, participants' views on uses, opportunities, and harms of social media contrasted with the ways their adult caregivers understood or characterised therm. This study provided cases of how age, gender, social awareness, and media literacy shape interactions with social media in India. Participants used social media to view content, follow trends, participate in challenges, and interact with friends and celebrities, as well as make content themselves. Some sought to replicate popular content themselves, create artwork, and connect with communities. They also balanced creative expressions with parents' expectations and needed to be savvy about protecting themselves from risks online. Participants were always curious about new experiences on social media interacting as viewers or, where possible, makers. Parents and teachers needed to be mindful of that curiosity along with principles and rules about how to improve safe access to social media.

Contextual nuances become an important aspect to consider when framing regulatory policies, parental advisories, and critical digital literacy and media education programs. This study suggests that it is never too early to begin talking about digital platforms, particularly social media spaces, in relation to children's everyday life practices. Critical digital literacy must recognise the agency of young people, their naturalised interactions with the digital world, as well as the complexities of family and school life that moderate such interactions. In this way,

this thesis adds to the slowly growing literature from the Global South that enhances and diversifies our understanding of how the 'born digital' generation lives with/ in social media.

Children in India used social media to make-meaning, construct identity, explore creative expression online. Adults have a responsibility to recognise children's digital rights and help provide a safe environment encouraging their creative pursuits. Governing bodies and advocacy organisations should incorporate views from children alongside adults and local resource personnel to protect and expand children's rights in digital spaces in India. This thesis is one step towards encouraging a dialogue about children's everyday social media lives that parents, carers, and larger bodies might have opinions about without necessarily registering the children's experiences in-depth and with nuance, something that needs to be changed, especially if we want to foreground children's voices to safeguard their digital rights.

Parental anxieties regarding children's media practices – especially digital and social media practices – are a common phenomenon across the world. While Indian contexts are diverse, key takeaways about children's vernacular cultures emerging from meaning-making and self-presentation on social media, deliberations on issues of safety and wellbeing, as well as demonstrating agency and resistance while negotiating restrictive parental mediation are important contributions to existing literature that find resonance across cultures. Research regarding children's media practices and parental mediation of these practices has evolved over the years. We now acknowledge children as empirical experts of their experiences online. Foregrounding children's voices about their social media practices even as their

parents restrict their access due to technopanics reflect an important aspect that has been overlooked so far: centring children in a discourse about children so that decisions made by adults in the future incorporate nuances of their media experiences in everyday lives. As this study suggests, children's voices are important, taking these first-hand, nuanced experiences to parents and other decisionmakers is important, and encouraging a dialogue about children's social media everyday lives to safeguard their digital rights is important.

Indian Adolescents Online

A primer on Children and Social Media in India

I conclude in this chapter by summarising key research findings and contributions in relation to the research questions raised in this doctoral thesis.

In India, media discourse around children and social media is dominated by technopanics and, at the same time, more people are going online due to a proliferation of cheap smartphones and mobile internet (Arora, 2019; HT Correspondent, 2017b; Kumar, 2015; Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016). For many young people, this means navigating access and uses of social media under restrictive parental mediation.

Thus, it is also important to foreground the voices of specific groups of children about their experiences, perceptions, and practices so that an intimate understanding of their social media lives can become the basis of dialogue with adults around them and eventually insights for policymakers and educators such that we can offer them a safe and healthy digital and social media world (De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; James, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2014).

Foundations

This study aimed to centre children's voices about their social media lives such that we can enhance our understanding of how they experience, perceive, and practice their digitally connected lives. To gain this understanding, in-depth interviews, guided social media tours, and ethnographic interactions and observations of their social media profiles were used.

I also went to select stakeholders and school personnel to understand their conception of young people and social media in the city that was my field site. Interviews with these experts helped understand issues and challenges in the current environment as well as possible solutions to them. Below is a snapshot of findings from interactions with stakeholders and school personnel as well as participants based on the research questions that framed this doctoral thesis.

Findings

I asked stakeholders and school personnel about their framing and perceptions regarding issues related to young people's media literacy, social connectedness, and digital citizenship. Key takeaways were:

- Social media is full of risks and opportunities which are sometimes difficult to discern due to navigation confusion
- Given that most platforms and technology are not child-centred, it is easy to hold on to issues of technopanics, digital divide, and navigation confusion to restrict and/ or deny young people access
- Experts suggested that digital and social media literacy were possible solutions to issues
- Stakeholders and schools pointed that there were gaps between on-ground issues and policy advocacy and making of legislation around young people and social media as well as literacies needed and some experts wondered if there was regulation required to keep children safe online

- There was a need to foster social connectedness between adults and their children to engage with technology and platforms safely and productively
- Schools should ideally have a holistic learning environment for students' wellbeing that has a culture of learning along with balance between technology and connection such that students and parents can be guided about digital and social media
- There were many gaps between knowledge and resources across different school boards, in curricula, and in communication between teachers, parents, and students as well as other administrative and decision making bodies which needed to be addressed
- We live in a world of information access and overload that has issues of privacy and safety and this can be resolved through critical thinking and analysis i.e., there is a need for digital and social media literacy

I also asked them to share expert insights gained through working with parents and children:

- Technopanics around young people and social media is an issue that leads to parents implementing a blanket ban, heavy monitoring, or restrictive mediation
- There was a digital divide between adults and young people which led to further call into technopanics
- Experts pointed out parents were often hypocritical when it came to using devices, the internet, and technologies; time limits and other rules were enforceable on their children but not them

- Parents and teachers including other adults should practice the same digital and social media etiquette they expect young people to follow

My enquiry focussed on how young people who have access in India experienced social media. Key findings were:

- Age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds played a role in how participants accessed and used social media
- Participants from lower and middle income families mostly agreed that technopanics led to bans, monitoring, and restrictive parental mediation
- Participants took safety and privacy seriously but also understood that there was a trade-off when using social media
- Participants declared and gave examples of how boys and girls use social media differently in terms of content consumption, privacy, presentation and curation of the self, and other social media practices
- While young people thought of creative ways to deal with restrictive parental mediation, they also expressed frustrations with excessive control exerted over their access and uses including time spent online as well as how devices led to judgements of either productive work or waste of time
- Participants categorised different apps per their usage, so Facebook was a gateway app for making an account on Instagram easily because “Facebook is for old people”, Instagram is for memes and keeping up with friends, Snapchat is for filters and to keep their conversations fun, TikTok was to watch cool videos and try making their own as well as interacting with celebrities and

others, YouTube was to watch different kinds of videos to learn something about their favourite sport, hobby, or topic, and WhatsApp was for school work and engaging with groups.

- Children loved using TikTok, but most parents were scared of harms on the app. While other apps did not have spotless reputations, TikTok was the most feared by parents
- Under heavy restrictive parental mediation, children might face other risks and not have a safe space to deal with those risks which can be harmful for them

I also asked children and adolescents about their social media practices. Some significant takeaways were:

- Young people recognised that adults around them did not always use social media like them and came up with innovative strategies to assert their agency and resistance towards digital divide
- Children and adolescents were clever to use adult or sibling hypocrisy around social media to their advantage in negotiating access to use social media
- While young people acknowledged that they were using social media despite it not being designed for them and sometimes also confessed to underage use, they did not necessarily have any issues with these platforms for they knew that using social media for free meant there was some trade-off happening and in case of trouble, they felt they could rely on the apps for blocking and reporting accounts that were potentially risky and/ or harmful

- Some participants involved their families in their social media lives to engage and connect with them online as a strategy used to negotiate access to social media
- Some participants accepted that their parents might not be able to practice what they preach and would also not be able to grant them as much access, so they toed the line and found creative solutions to keep up with their social media lives like watching videos online but keeping the content they make offline
- They often became resources to help their parents, grandparents, and other adults when they had difficulty accomplishing something online
- Participants loved to personalise and curate their social media lives and selves and were aspirational about its uses to either meet and connect with people they liked (celebrities and friends) or to become famous and monetise their social media presence
- They knew the different ways of impression management and how to navigate online presence if they favoured to keep their privacy and safety at the centre of their experiences and practices online
- Young people enjoyed how the everyday could be their social media lives and how they could craft their online presence to interact and engage with friends and celebrities online
- Some participants crafted their own maker styles to create content on social media

- Participants shared that they enjoyed talking about their social media lives and some wished they could have similar conversations with their parents, because for them the online and offline and integral and integrated into one social media life for them
- Young people exercise agency and resistance to negotiate access and uses of social media to practice a social media life and presenting their everyday selves online

My questions also covered how they perceived risks and opportunities on social media and how they dealt with them. I asked them about their social media competencies, i.e., skills developed online over time. Key takeaways from young people were:

- Young people developed key problem solving and other skills and became digital and social media literate as they spent more time online
- Participants created a chain-link-intervention method of problem solving when facing risky situations
- They often depended on each other and their siblings or other tech savvy peers for problem solving
- Children shared how they had learned to navigate risks and avoid harms on social media
- They cultivated their own skills and literacies to identify celebrities vs. fake accounts, need to keep their account private, and strategies to avoid stalking, trolling, etc. on social media

Contributions

I have created the following research outputs (solo as well as lead author with other researchers) as a result of this doctoral thesis: Stakeholder mapping (Sarwatay et al., 2021); pilot study leading to an understanding of everyday negotiations (Sarwatay & Raman, 2022); Indian children's TikTok cultures (Sarwatay et al., 2022), about methods used in this study (Sarwatay, 2022a) and a blog highlighting a part of my doctoral thesis work (Sarwatay, 2021b). I also presented discourse on, and research approaches to children and social media (Sarwatay, 2017, 2018) and reviewed two books that helped me in my thesis (Sarwatay, 2021a, 2022b).

This thesis highlights the importance of having conversations about young people's social media lives such that we can understand their experiences, perceptions, and practices online. This understanding with the foregrounding of young people's voices is an important step in the direction that fosters dialogue with parents, teachers, and other adults around children and adolescents who might be facing restrictive parental mediation due to technopanics and also towards the attempt to creating a safe, healthy digital environment. Recognising young people's agency also helps us in eventually logging their testimonies as empirical narratives on deliberations on privacy, safety, problem solving, wellbeing, and literacies.

This thesis adds that a culture-centred approach to these inquiries is important given the diversities in India and the Global South and especially because these technologies – while not built for these contexts – are heavily used in them by young people who are also sometimes underage users. Giving their voices importance will lead to the start of a dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of living in a digitally connected world.

This work can be directly applied to establishing communication between young people and the adults around them, especially in a technopanics environment, such that restrictive parental mediation can be eventually transformed into dialogue for a balanced use of social media that can be monitored and/ or co-used for younger children and discussed and troubleshooted for older adolescents. Eventually, work like this can be taken to a broader, policy level to contribute towards talks about privacy, safety, literacy, and wellbeing. A more elaborate discussion around these findings is in chapter seven where I explore participants' growing up on social media and what it entails.

Conversations about digital platforms, particularly social media spaces, in relation to children's everyday life practices need to begin early, at the point when children begin interacting with these technologies. Critical digital literacy must recognise the agency of young people, their naturalised interactions with the digital world, as well as the complexities of family and school life that moderate such interactions. At least, I can take this work back to my participants, their parents, and schools to offer the testimonies that have emerged and hope that this exercise enables some dialogue.

Limitations and Opportunities

This work is a starting point for more dialogue and support first, for developing a culture-centred approach to understanding core issues, developing argumentation taking into account multiple socioeconomic realities, and ultimately, for using approaches like media literacy for active engagement and participation by youth in a pluralistic, non-Western, democratic context. We acknowledge that a major limitation of this study is its dependence on a narrow range of stakeholders and school

personnel, which gives us only a slight flavour of the range of opinions and experiences that could inform further research. Although there were 51 young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, due to limited resources, only some aspects of their social media lives for a limited duration were studied. While efforts were made to foreground their voices, due to several constraints, I could not co-theorise or co-write with them which would have been an additional layer uncovered to further unpack their online experiences, perceptions, and practices. Nevertheless, while stakeholders, school personnel, and participants were privileged and/ or limited in some ways, their work and participation spread across the socioeconomic spectrum which means that their views are certainly informed by sensitivity to larger Indian contexts.

Another limitation is digital learning and social connectedness have been greatly affected in the pandemic-related lockdown. While this study was conducted pre-COVID-19, future research must consider how these relationships affect young people and media literacy in India in the context of virtual learning, working from home, and greater social isolation during the pandemic. Further research using culture-centred approaches to media literacy and digital citizenship are needed within the Global South, including in India. Additionally, as this study reveals, beyond youth and parents, conducting research on other stakeholders who shape media and educational policies are important to consider within media literacy scholarship in order to fully understand the various systems, values, and priorities that shape digital media use by young people.

In terms of methodology, this work has been informed by largely Western frameworks – including the Global Kids Online project, which of course offers room

for cultural contextualisation. Deeper ethnographic engagements that allow for a contextualised understanding of children's media practices, and qualitative interviews with teachers and parents, would help build a more robust evidence base that can inform policy. It may be worthwhile to think back on efforts such as Newspapers in Education programs that were led by the media industry (recognising their need to build a consumer base among younger readers) and understand how they also served as media literacy efforts, so as to gain some sense of what might work today, and with what kinds of partners: industry, the state, educational institutions, and parents. After all, digital media are here to stay, and whether we like it or not, we need to make productive use of them, as tools, as environments, or as interfaces.

Despite the considerable technopanics generated around the negative aspects of social media like violence, bullying, hate, addiction, and privacy there are also positives, including the possibility of agentic self representation, productive interactions and rich relational experiences, increased access to education and learning opportunities, and even employment. We need more research that looks at the differential ways in which media penetration and access might affect children's opportunities in this regard, and how media literacy could be a way to mitigate some of these issues. There is also a need to consider such issues as young people's understanding of ethics in the digital world, their adoption of and thoughts about technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality and artificial intelligence and how they use their networked, and now, algorithmised self to cross over into adulthood – again, all within the cultural contexts of India. For instance, how might we understand ethical decision-making within the framework of a religious community? What forms does bullying take online where students of diverse backgrounds might be interacting

– and can the lessons from race-based discrimination stand in for caste-based discrimination in India? How can children activate their agency through and with digital media? The example of UNICEF's Children as Media Producers (CAMP, 2014) suggests that children even in resource poor contexts can engage with media technology when given a chance, and when equipped with the right tools of critical literacy. But to build such media literacy programmers one requires the understanding gained from robust research, using methods that are appropriate to a particular context and the participants who occupy it.

All these issues have gained a new salience in the global experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its wide-ranging impact on social life, particularly on children's education. As briefly alluded to earlier, this has brought in a new urgency to the issue of digital and social media literacy for both children and caregivers. It also forces us to recognise and address in literacy programs, the complexities introduced when children and youth need to learn online (Raman & Sarwatay, 2022), where parental involvement takes on a completely new texture, and the granularities of lived context (access, connectivity, space, familial structures, and responsibilities) determine the ways in which young people relate not only to the digital but also to life in general.

Stakeholders and school personnel interviewed in this study offered media literacy as a broad umbrella approach that could address most of the issues that they themselves identified as problematic in relation to children's engagement with digital media. But they could point to almost no locally generated knowledge that could undergird a culture-centred approach to media literacy. This then becomes an area that is ripe for exploration by young scholars in not only media and communication

but also education, child development, sociology and social policy studies. In other contexts, scholars have called out the need to decolonise digital culture studies (Arora, 2019; Risam, 2018); it is important that we begin this process in relation to media literacy studies as well. Given that media literacy is a "second order" research area, dependent on diverse bodies of knowledge including those mentioned previously, this would mean that we need to develop creative collaborations across disciplines and engage not only in extensive primary research but also actively dialogue across subject borders.

Given the limited resources as well as the need to be able to establish rapport with my participants in multiple languages and shared contexts, this study was localised to a large, urban, metropolitan city in West India. Although a qualitative study does not entail the need for generalisability, I have tried to account for gender and other socioeconomic differences in my participant pool of 51 young people in the age group of 10-18 years and their experiences, perceptions, and practices in their social media lives do share similarities with comparable cities in the country. Of course, a large population of India lives in semi-urban and rural areas in a deep digital divide but this was beyond the scope of this study.

This thesis is but an addition to the slowly growing literature about young people's social media lives in India. Given how the digital became the default during the pandemic despite deep digital divides, it is key that we keep inquiring into ways to foreground young people's voices and uphold their rights in a digital environment (Dutta & Das, 2016; Green, 2021; Lemish et al., 2018; Livingstone, 2020; Sarkar, 2016). While the Global North has already started looking into datafication, commodification, surveillance, digital labour, and other areas stemming from blurred

boundaries as entertainment and leisure as well as engagement and education have gone online for many young people (Barassi, 2020; Dudek et al., 2021; Hjorth, 2018; Leaver, 2020a; Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Selwyn et al., 2020; Simone et al., 2019), we are still figuring out how to let go of technopanics and create socially connected and literate communities of young people and adults around them. Future research can study the ways in which the above mentioned aspects come into play in a country that is not just culturally diverse but also a massive and growing market that is using technologies and platforms not exactly built for them.

We should also take this work forward and see how communication can be built between young people and their parents, teachers, and other adults at the family level, but also how we can start having broader conversations at the level of policy and governance. Global research is already creating collaborations between academia, international organisations, and corporations along with including children and adolescents as not just participants and empirical experts about their social media lives but also as partners in policymaking (Byrne et al., 2016; CRC, 2021; De Wolf & Vanden Abeele, 2020; Livingstone et al., 2021; Livingstone & Pothong, 2022; Stoilova et al., 2021). It is my sincere hope that we can bring this spirit of collaboration to India as well.

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Appendices

Recruitment Flyers

Call for Volunteers!

If you are between **10-18** years old and **use Social Media regularly**, you could **participate** in an **exciting research project**!

Growing up on Social Media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions and practices

I am Devina and I want to know more about **how young people**, like you, **use social media**. I will be **chatting** with **you and your friends** to understand how social media fits into your lives.

Participants will receive:

- A chance to share their experience &
- Refreshments

Location

- Your comfortable home!

Are you eligible?

- Are you between **10 to 18** years old?
- Do you **use Social Media** (e.g. Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp) **regularly**?
- Would you like to **chat about your experiences**?
- Have you answered **YES** to the questions above? Then, you are eligible! Yay! ☺

Reach me at…

9429670050

(Call/ SMS/ WhatsApp)

devinaphdresearch

@gmail.com

(Email)

I'm a PhD student at the Department of Communication ('Best University Department' - Outlook-MDRA), University of Hyderabad (NIRF Rank #4).

Sources:
https://www.cbs.uff.edu/research/participant-recruitment/recruitment-flyers/best-practices-for-recruitment-flyers/
https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001335709/it-s-time-to-uphold-professionalism-in-era-of-social-media

Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad

Social Media વિષયેના Research માં ભાગ લેવાની તક!

જો તમારી ઉંમર **10-18** વર્ષ ની વચ્ચે છે,
જો તમે **Social Media** નો **નિયમિત ઉપયોગ** કરો છો
તો તમે એક આકર્ષક **research project** માં ભાગ લઈ શકો છો!

Growing up on Social Media: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions and practices

હું દેવિના છું અને હું તમારા જેવા **યુવાનો સોશિયલ મીડિયાનો ઉપયોગ** કેવી રીતે કરે છે તે વિશે વધુ જાણવા માંગુ છું. સોશિયલ મીડિયા **તમારા જીવનમાં કેવી રીતે બંધ બેસે છે** તે સમજવા માટે હું તમારી અને તમારા મિત્રો સાથે વાત કરીશ.

સહભાગીઓને પ્રાપ્ત થશે:

- તેમના અનુભવો કહેવાનો તક અને
- મુલાકાત વખતે નાસ્તો આપવામાં આવશે

સ્થળ

- તમારું આરામદાયક ઘર

શું તમે ભાગ લઈ શકો છો?

- શું તમારી ઉંમર **10 થી 18** વર્ષની વચ્ચે છે?
- શું તમે **નિયમિતપણે સોશિયલ મીડિયા** (દા.ત. ઇન્સ્ટાગ્રામ, ટિકટોક, વ્હોટ્સએપ) નો **ઉપયોગ** કરો છો?
- શું તમે તમારા **અનુભવો વિશે વાતો** કરવા માંગો છો?
- શું તમે ઉપરના પ્રશ્નોના હા માં જવાબ આપ્યા છે? તો, તમે ભાગ લઈ શકો છો! હા! ☺

મારો સંપર્ક કરો...

9429670050

(Call/ SMS/ WhatsApp)

devinaphdresearch @gmail.com

(Email)

I'm a PhD student at the Department of Communication ('Best University Department' - Outlook-MDRA), University of Hyderabad (NIRF Rank #4).

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https://www.cdu.ufl.edu/research/participant-recruitment/recruitment-flyers/best-practices-for-recruitment-flyers/
https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001335701/it-s-time-to-uphold-professionalism-in-era-of-social-media

Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad

Assent and Consent Forms

Assent Form for Participants of the Ph.D. research project of Devina Sarwatay

Hello, **thank you** so much for hearing me out. I'm Devina and I'm studying in the University of Hyderabad. I have a **research project** to do on how young people, like you, are using social media. The study is exploratory in nature and I will be asking open ended questions that help me understand how social media fits into your lives. I will be speaking to nearly **50-60 children** and adolescents like you and some parents and caregivers like yours. Ideally, I would like to **interact** with you **at least twice**. The conversation will be recorded to help me with my analysis. I will keep these records safe, change names and destroy everything after five years of the end of the project. You can reach me anytime at devinaphdresearch@gmail.com and 9429670050 regarding any questions or doubts or even to strike up a conversation about the latest thing on social media.

Could you please **participate** in this project with me? _____ **Yes | No**

Would you be willing to **answer** some questions? _____ **Yes | No**

Is it **okay to record** what we speak and **make notes** about it? _____ **Yes | No**

Do you want to **ask me** anything before we start?

Could you please confirm your participation by filling up the details below?

Name & Date of Birth:	
Home Address:	
Mobile no. & Email:	
Signature & Today's Date:	

Consent Form for Parents of Participants of the Ph.D. research project of Devina Sarwatay

Hello, **thank you** so much for hearing me out. I'm Devina and I'm studying in the University of Hyderabad. I have a **research project** to do on how children and adolescents are using social media. The study is exploratory in nature and I will be asking open ended questions that help me understand how social media fits into their lives. I will be speaking to nearly **50-60 children** and adolescents like your child and some parents and caregivers like you. Ideally, I would like to **interact** with them **at least twice**. The conversation will be recorded to help me with my analysis. I will keep these records safe, change names and destroy everything after five years of the end of the project. You can reach me anytime at devinaphdresearch@gmail.com and 9429670050 regarding any questions or doubts or even to strike up a conversation about the latest thing on social media.

Could your child please **participate** in this project with me? _____ **Yes | No**

Would you be willing to **answer** some questions if needed? _____ **Yes | No**

Is it **okay to record** what we speak and **make notes** about it? _____ **Yes | No**

Do you want to **ask me** anything before we start?

Could you please confirm your participation by filling up the details below?

Your Name & Date of Birth:	
Child's Name & DoB:	
Child's School & Class:	
Home Address:	
Mobile no. & Email:	
Signature & Today's Date:	

Consent Form for Experts of the Ph.D. research project of Devina Sarwatay

Devina is a Ph.D. student with University of Hyderabad. Her research work focuses on how children and adolescents are using social media. Experts interviewed for the project are from the fields of research and advocacy, civil society, practice, and policy. They are helping map the ecosystem of children and media, specifically digital and social media in India and Ahmedabad. The conversation will be recorded to help with analysis. These records will be kept safe, and destroyed after five years of the end of the project. You can reach her anytime at devinaphdresearch@gmail.com and 9429670050 regarding any questions or doubts. Please go through the following and sign below.

My participation in this project is voluntary. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview. Participation involves being interviewed for approximately 30-45 minutes. I have read and understood the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and be given a soft copy of this signed consent form.

Could you please confirm your participation by filling up the details below?

Your Name:	
Designation:	
Institution:	
Address:	
Mobile no. & Email:	
Signature:	
Today's Date:	

Interview Guides

Question Guide - Devina Sarwatay

Access

1. Please tell me something about yourself.
2. How old are you and since when are you on social media?
3. How do you access social media? Do you have your own or mom/ dad's computer/ mobile phone/ tablet?
4. Do you share these devices and/ or social media profiles with others?
5. How often do you go online? How much time in one day do you usually spend on social media?
6. Which social media do you use? (e.g. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, etc.)
7. Do you have a favourite social media platform? Why?
8. Is there something you like/ dislike about these social media?
9. Where are you usually when you are using social media?
10. Do you use social media in school? How? What do you do?
11. What is the best way for you to get online?
12. When was the last time you went online?
13. How did you spend your time then? (Who were you with, What did you do, Was it fun or boring?)
14. Can you show me your social media profiles? I can show you my profile, if you're interested. We can add each other on social media, if you like.
15. Do you use your real name and age on social media apps/ sites? Why?
16. How did you decide on your profile picture and cover photo?
17. Why did you write this as your bio?

Uses and Practices

1. Tell me more about what you usually do on social media (prompts: profile, scrolling, reading, reacting, commenting, sharing, posting, photos, chatting, messaging, music, videos, memes, games, looking for information/ news, discussing current events, getting involved in events, uploading/ downloading things, etc.).
2. Do you share things with others online? What? With whom? What are they about? What do you like about doing this? How do others react?
3. What do you and your friends usually do on social media?
4. Do you think boys and girls use social media differently? How? Why?
5. Do you find social media useful? What about them? Why?
6. Is there something you feel you can only get from social media? Could you give examples/ details?
7. What would you miss most if social media disappeared tomorrow? Why?
8. Apart from the things you shared in the group discussion, can you think of anything else you do on social media?
9. Do you use social media to learn new things? Could you give examples/ details?

Skills and Problem Solving

1. How skilful do you think you are in using social media? Who taught you these skills? (prompts: making the profile, adding/ removing friends, following/ unfollowing people, saving/ downloading things like photos, posting/ uploading/ sharing things like memes, videos, finding news/ information, installing apps, creating content, etc.)
2. Have you found anything difficult to do on social media? Why? How do you solve such problems? Can you give examples/ details?
3. Do you know about privacy settings? Have you ever tweaked them? How? Why?
4. Have you read the terms and conditions of social media apps/ sites? Why?
5. Which social media activities are the easiest for you? Why?
6. Is there something you find difficult to do?
7. How do you solve problems you face on social media? Whose help do you take?

Safety

1. Do you think you are safe on social media? Why? Have you done anything for your safety online? (prompts: passwords, blocking people, blocking content, deactivating location/ profile, changing share settings)
2. Do you have to be careful about anything on social media? (prompts: sharing location, friending people you might not know, chatting with strangers, etc.)
3. Are there things on social media that young people like you might find worrying or upsetting or not okay? Can you give examples/ details?
4. Have you ever had someone being mean to you on social media? Could you tell me more about what happened and how you dealt with it? Have you ever been mean to someone? Why?
5. Have you seen this happening to a friend or someone you know? What did you do then?
6. Do you think there is anything you want to change in terms of safety on your social media?
7. Are you aware of any safety precautions you can take online? Any person or organisation that can help you?
8. What do you think is digital literacy? Is it relevant/ applicable here?
9. Have you ever been online and ignored other things like homework, eating, sleeping? Why?
10. Do you think it would be okay if you had limited access to social media? Why? How many days do you think you can go without being online? Why?
11. Have you discussed with anyone about safety on social media? With whom and what? If something is not okay online, do you discuss with them? Why and how?

Parents, teachers and siblings

1. Do you talk to someone about what you do on social media? Parents/ teachers/ older siblings? Why? What do you discuss?
2. Who do you think uses more social media? You or your parents and/ or siblings?
3. Are there any rules for using social media in the home and school? What are they? Who makes them? Why? Do you always follow these rules? Why? Do they monitor what you do on social media?

4. Do you ask them questions about social media? Do they ask you too? Do you think they know less than, as much or more than you about social media? Why?
5. Do you prefer to be alone or with someone when you are online?

Wrapping up

1. How do you think social media affects your life? What is the best thing about social media? What is the worst?
2. Do you think young people like you need to have some protection on social media? Can you tell me more about what can be done?
3. Is there something you would like to change about social media? What? Why?
4. Is there anything that we have missed out on?
5. Do you think you could teach me something about social media? Do you think I can share something with you?
6. Did you like taking me on a tour of your social media experiences? How did I do as a tourist?
7. Do you have any questions/ doubts for me?

I will use this interview and many others like these for my homework project to see how young people like you are using social media today. Are there any tips for me for future interviews?

I am looking for volunteers for interviews on the same topic. Could you please give me your name and details if you're interested?

Schedule for Expert Interviews for the PhD research of Devina Sarwatay

1. What do you think of new media forms in general, and the Internet and social media in particular?
2. Your interest and work in children and media in India and Ahmedabad/ Gujarat, especially in the digital and social media space
3. Understanding of the existing systems (parenting, education, advocacy, policy, academia and research etc.) in place surrounding children and media in India and Ahmedabad/ Gujarat
4. Take on the media discourse surrounding children and media in India and Ahmedabad/ Gujarat (especially technopanics and/ or the advice culture)
5. Gaps in research, advocacy, policy and academia and if/ how your work is planned to fill them
6. Any advice for PhD students like me? Who must I absolutely meet/ interview/ take help from for my research?

Originality Report

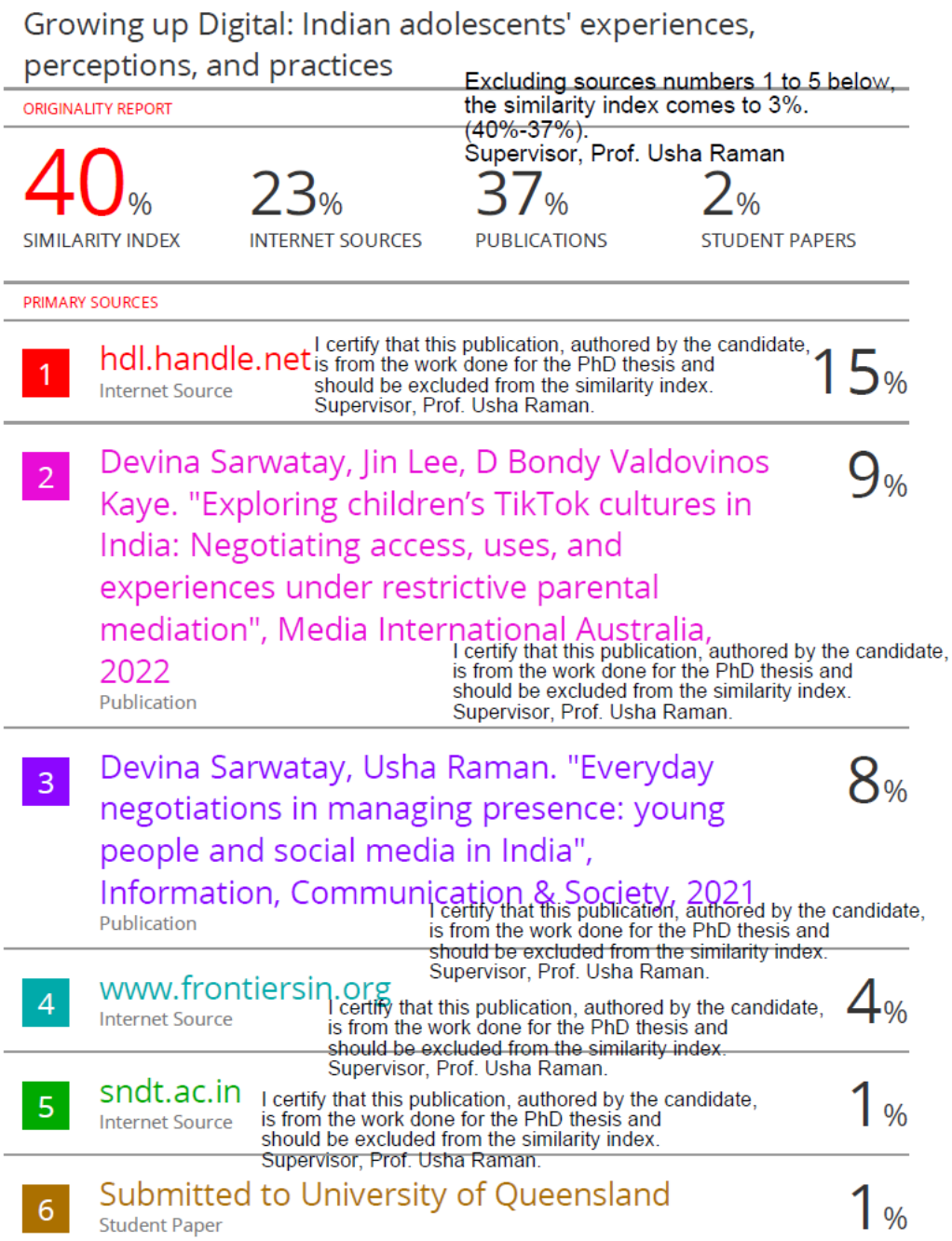
I certify this correction in title as authored by the candidate.
Supervisor, Prof. Usha Raman

on social media

Growing up ~~Digital~~: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices

by Devina Sarwatay

Submission date: 26-Dec-2022 03:18PM (UTC+0530)
Submission ID: 1986677136
File name: I_Indian_adolescents_experiences,_perceptions,_and_practices.pdf (1.77M)
Word count: 46287
Character count: 251975



Growing up Digital: Indian adolescents' experiences, perceptions, and practices

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Supervisor, Prof. Usha Raman

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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2	Devina Sarwatay, Jin Lee, D Bondy Valdovinos Kaye. "Exploring children's TikTok cultures in India: Negotiating access, uses, and experiences under restrictive parental mediation", Media International Australia, 2022 Publication I certify that this publication, authored by the candidate, is from the work done for the PhD thesis and should be excluded from the similarity index. Supervisor, Prof. Usha Raman.	9%
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6	Submitted to University of Queensland Student Paper	1%

[1] Chapter two draws from my presentation made at an international conference from the doctoral background work undertaken during my PhD tenure, details:

Sarwatay, D. (2018). *Approaches to Research on Children and Social Media* [Conference Presentation]. International Conference on Digitality and Communication, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India.

[2] Chapter three draws from my essay published in an edited volume from the doctoral background work undertaken during my PhD tenure, details:

Sarwatay, D. (2022). In their voices: Foregrounding young people's social media practices and experiences. In S. Kotilainen (Ed.), *Methods in practice: Studying children and youth online* (pp. 41–44). Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI). https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.83031

[3] Chapter four draws from my presentation made at an international conference from the doctoral background work undertaken during my PhD tenure, details:

Sarwatay, D. (2017). *What's the story here? Children in the digital media landscape* [Conference Presentation]. International Communication Association Asia Regional Conference, Mumbai, India. https://www.sndt.ac.in/upcoming-event/2017/ica-asia-regional/default.htm

[4] Chapter five draws from my lead-authored journal article published from the doctoral fieldwork undertaken during my PhD tenure, details:

Sarwatay, D., Raman, U., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2021). Media Literacy, Social Connectedness, and Digital Citizenship in India: Mapping Stakeholders on How Parents and Young People Navigate a Social World. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics, 3*, 601239. https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.601239

[5] Chapter six draws from my two lead-authored journal articles published from the doctoral fieldwork undertaken during my PhD tenure, details:

Sarwatay, D., & Raman, U. (2022). Everyday negotiations in managing presence: Young people and social media in India. *Information, Communication & Society, 25*(4), 536–551. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1988129

Sarwatay, D., Lee, J., & Kaye, D. B. V. (2022). Exploring children's TikTok cultures in India: Negotiating access, uses, and experiences under restrictive parental mediation. *Media International Australia*, 1329878X221127037. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X221127037