Children of internet era: A critical analysis of vulnerability of children in the darker sides of social media and WhatsApp

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Abstract:

Information communication technology has been made an essential part of school curriculums in India today. As per the guidelines of the, National Policy on Information and Communication technology (ICT) in school education, children must be taught the positive usage of the internet, the computer technology and digital communication technology. But internet is a double edged weapon: if it is used positively, it may yield positive results, if it is used negatively, it can create large scale devastation. It has been seen that children are often misusing the information communication technology. In the present age, children are growing up seeing their parents always armed with improved communication gadgets. It has become a regular ritual in families to provide young children with new mobile phones on their birthdays or on special occasions. Children also access social networking sites defying minimum age limit rules that have been set up by the internet companies. In some families, modern age children may be the first generation internet users as their parents may not be computer literates, but had allowed the children either knowingly or unknowingly to have access to internet and own mobile phones which may or may not be smart phones. The biggest problem the children may face in this situation is unwanted exposure to the dark world of internet and digital communication technology. Children may be groomed to consume and contribute to cyber crimes like child pornography or even graver crimes like phishing activities, they may pick up dangerous habits of cyber bullying and hacking as well. In this article I aim to analyse such types of cyber crimes targeting children as well as adults (teachers), where perpetrators may be children themselves or adults who may use the children for their own selfish gains. The article will analyse the reasons for the occurrence of such crimes from socio-legal perspectives and offers functional solutions. This article also offers a model policy guild line that can be adopted by the schools in India for
directing students for positive usage of internet and digital communication mechanisms like WhatsApp.

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Introduction:

Today’s school curriculum in India includes compulsory study of computer sciences and various usages of information and communication technology. Majority of the families in urban as well as rural India now posses information communication technology by way of high profile digital gadgets to even simple mobile phones which are armed with 2G or 3G capabilities or even simple SMS and MMS facilities. Children are therefore well connected with their friends, peers and relatives through mobile phones, internet based communication systems including social networking sites and the very new ‘fad’, the WhatsApp. Keeping in pace with the such rapid growth of digital connectivity, National Policy on Information and Communication technology(ICT) in school education, in their 2012 policy guidelines, defined the term Information and communication technology as “as all devices, tools, content, resources, forums, and services, digital and those that can be converted into or delivered through digital forms, which can be deployed for realising the goals of teaching learning, enhancing access to and reach of resources, building of capacities, as well as management of the educational system. These will not only include hardware devices connected to computers, and software applications, but also interactive digital content, internet and other satellite communication devices, radio and television services, web based content repositories, interactive forums, learning management systems, and management information systems. These will also include processes for digitisation, deployment and management of content, development and deployment of platforms and processes for capacity development, and creation of forums for interaction and exchange.”

Gaining such positive recognition, ICT has become every student’s most dependable ‘friend’. Gadgets armed with ICT are now being used by school and college students for accessing study materials, preparing projects, taking group

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photos and selfies, getting introduced to new friends and new environments and also for learning various negative coping behaviours. Bullying teachers and other children\(^2\), creating "fake avatars"\(^3\) of teachers who would have thrashed the child due to his/her unsatisfactory performance in the class, revenge porn targeting classmates as well as schoolmates\(^4\), spreading defamatory contents about the schools, teachers or other fellow children through social media are now rampant in India. Similarly, children still claim to be the biggest group of victims of cyber crimes meted out by adults; such crimes may include paedophilia, grooming etc. There are huge numbers of media reports of teachers abusing students by showing them obscene sexual clippings. It needs to be noted that such incidences are no more trapped in metro cities or urban areas only; reports do come from remote villages in India as well. It needs to be understood that Facebook had been the most chosen social networking site for majority of children in India; but with the advent of WhatsApp, children especially younger children are preferring to shift to WhatsApp for a cosy communication with their friends and groups.\(^5\) Interesting both Facebook and WhatsApp had been proved to be excellent mediums for students especially for discussing about their studies, gaining more knowledge on chosen subjects and interacting with seniors and other likeminded people.\(^6\) But the negative aspect of social networking and information communication technology cannot be ignored when the above mentioned issues surface. In my earlier article titled "Patterns of Sexual Victimization of Children and Women in the Multipurpose Social Networking Sites (2014),\(^7\) it was shown that there can be five groups of interactive social networking sites depending upon their purpose and targeted population: these may include (i) Professional social networking sites (PSW) like the LinkedIn, (ii) Adult dating and matrimonial sites (AD&MS) such as Bharat Matrimony.com, (iii) Interactive communication sites for sharing frustration,


\(^5\) From the personal experiences of the author.


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like Ventyouranger.com, angryforum.com,(iv) Interactive vlogging sites (IVS)like the YouTube and (v) Multipurpose popular social networking sites (MPSNS) like Facebook. These social networking sites may well be used to reach the children for the purpose of victimisation as had been stated above.

In this article I aim to discuss about cyber crimes targeting children and teachers that may happen in these five groups of social networking sites as well as in WhatsApp by children as well as by adults, especially teachers. Given the fact that in India majority of school children may be more familiar with types (iv) and (v) of social networking sites and with WhatsApp, I would limit my discussions with crimes that may originate with the help of these sites and that may happen in these sites. This article would follow a hybrid methodology including qualitative research on the basis of secondary data from previous researches, statistics presented by different survey results and the author’s own observations. The key research questions that this article presents are as follows:

1. What are the sorts of internet crimes that may happen in the social networking sites (Interactive vlogging sites (IVS) like the YouTube, Multipurpose popular social networking sites (MPSNS) like Facebook and WhatsApp) targeting children and teachers by children as well as adults (teachers)?
2. Do the perpetrator children take up the offending behaviour in the internet as a means to practice irrational coping mechanism?
3. Can the Protection of children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 really help in curbing internet crimes against children by children as well as adults?

This article would be divided into four parts including the introduction. The second part would include the types of crimes and possible reasons behind committing such crimes, the third part would briefly discuss POCSO’s role in curbing the menace and the conclusion and suggestion part would offer some functional suggestions towards managing internet crimes by children as well as adults targeting children and adults (teachers).

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Major patterns of crimes targeting children by adults (strangers, teachers) and children

Paedophilia: MPSNSs and IVSs provide huge opportunity to express oneself without the fear of being monitored as it may happen in real life where a child is generally monitored when it comes to building up peer groups, throwing tantrums or fights by children, hurting other children or verbally or physically abusing elders including teachers. This is mainly because these sites do not have any policy to monitor content contribution by the users unless the content/s is reported as offensive by other users. It needs to be noted that even though some internet companies like Facebook, Twitter etc have developed mechanism to catch child porn materials and revenge porn materials \(^9\) by way of data mining by way of data mining from the meta data in the form of typical symbolic words or images, the test may fail due to expanding scope of the concept of free speech and paedophilia. Further these two sorts of sites provide children opportunities to create profiles to interact with other children as well as adults, contribute or consume contents as ‘children’ due to the lower age limit (generally 13). This opens wide prospects for the children as well as adults (strangers particularly) to interact anonymously with each other. In a way this further opens opportunities for paedophilia, \(^10\) the first step for which may include grooming of the children by paedophiles. Unmonitored communication and data exchange with strangers, especially adults may turn the older children into contributors of contents for child pornography \(^11\) by way of exchanging selfies, sexted images and even allowing the particular stranger to watch his/her personal album/ YouTube clippings etc. Grooming children for contribution of child porn materials and subsequently become the consumers themselves, may typically include the following cycle: \(^12\)


\(^12\) ibid

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As is mentioned above, even though social networking sites have strict policy guidelines for prohibiting child porn materials to be created or distributed, regulations or policy guidelines for creation of self pornography or sexted images in the social networking sites is still a controversial issue. The issue is controversial from legal point of view as well; to quote from my earlier article titled “Teen Sexting: A Critical Analysis on the Criminalization Vis-À-Vis Victimization Conundrums” (co-authored by K.Jaishankar),

“The EU convention on cyber crime was the first universal document to declare offences related to child pornography a penal act. Following the EU convention, many cyber savvy countries enacted their own domestic laws to prevent online child pornography suitting the needs of modern digital age. But “sexting”, (Roberts, 2005; Jaishankar, 2009; Reyns, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2011; Albury & Crawford, 2012; Agustina, & Gómez-Durán, 2012; Ahern & Mechling, 2013; Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2013; Chalfen, 2014, in press; Döring, 2014) the new generation pornography, defies major anti pornography initiatives started by world leaders.”

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13 See supra @ 5
15 Ibid

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Teen sexting along with less or nil awareness regarding (i) netiquettes especially in regard to criteria of contents which may be uploaded, (ii) about privacy and rules and regulations relating to photography in public places policies in India\textsuperscript{16} and (iii) what should be written in the personal walls or group chats etc,\textsuperscript{17} may push the older children (especially matured teens) to act as agents of these paedophiles. They may be allured to capture private images of children as well as women from picnic spots, public bathing spaces such as sea beaches, falls, rivers, community ponds etc and send such images to paedophiles or groups who create child/adult porn materials for a paltry sum.\textsuperscript{18}

The best example of issues such as these may be the Bazee.com case, which though did not occur in social networking sites as mentioned herein, but was spread in e-commerce sites. In this case a frustrated school boy had captured and sent a video of two of his schoolmates in compromising position to an undergraduate student who further made profit from this clipping by selling the same for Rs.125/- through Bazee.com, a website which was being used for online selling and buying of various items.\textsuperscript{19} It needs to be remembered that when this case was reported, social networking sites like Facebook was not in use in India. However, this case may provide an apt example as how children may be allured to contribute child porn materials, which may involve their own friends or peer groups through internet.

It further needs to be remembered that presently due to cloud computing mechanisms and inter-connectivity of social networking sites and message serving systems such as WhatsApp and traditional MMSs, distribution and exhibition of porn contents to individuals who may not be actually connected through internet has become easier. Consider circulations of viral videos through YouTube, then to Facebook and then to WhatsApp; the mechanism may allow adults as well as children to view offensive contents in mobile phones. In the recent survey conducted by Centre for Cyber Victim Counselling

\textsuperscript{16} In the research report by Centre for Cyber victim Counselling titled Baseline survey report on use and misuse of internet by in semi-urban and rural youth in India, it was seen that among 70 undergraduate and postgraduate students from rural and semi rural places, 12.9% stated that they upload anything in the YouTube, 25.7% stated that they share still/audio-visual images through SMSs, emails and social networking sites even though these contents are not owned by them and they had not taken permission from the original owners. For more see Halder, D., & Jaishankar, K. (2013). Use and Misuse of Internet by Semi-Urban and Rural Youth in India: A Baseline Survey Report (2013). Tirunelveli, India: Centre for Cyber Victim Counselling. URL: http://www.cybervictims.org/CCVCresearchreport2013.pdf

\textsuperscript{18} From personal observation of the author. Also see “Halder D. (2014), “Equality for women still a dream ?” Published on March 5,2014 in http://debaraticyberspace.blogspot.com/

\textsuperscript{19} See the details of the case @ Avinash Bajaj vs. the State, 2009, URL: http://indiankanoon.org/doc/309722/. Accessed on 25-01-2015.

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on WhatsApp harassments in India, it was seen that among 131 adult respondents, 11.5% had stated that they had received sexually explicit contents in their WhatsApp accounts.\footnote{The research report is in the file with the author and would be published shortly.} This may facilitate the receiver to store such contents in his/her own devices. The issue to be considered lies in the fact as how such stored images can be misused for abusing children. Consider the case of a teacher from Uttar Pradesh, who was convicted under the POCSO Act for allegedly showing sexually explicit images to students. He used the device of another female teacher.\footnote{See IANS(December 12,2014), UP teacher held for showing pornographic clip to students, published in India TV on December 12,2014. URL: http://www.indiatvnews.com/crime/news/up-teacher-held-for-showing-pornographic-clip-to-students-7265.html?ref=veng accessed on 25.01.15} While this report did not reveal as what sort of porn content was shown or how did the accused get the clipping in the mobile phone device, it may be presumed that porn clippings may be conveyed to the mobile devices through mechanisms in ways as stated above, which may be used to traumatisise children.

**Cyber bullying:** One of the most researched online deviant behaviour of children in recent years is cyber bullying.\footnote{See K. Jaishankar (2009). Cyber Bullying: Profile and Policy Guidelines. Tirunelveli: Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. ISBN 978-81-906687-1-2, Truths and Myths of Cyber-bullying: International Perspectives on Stakeholder Responsibility and Children's SafetyVolume 38 of New literacies and digital epistemologies, ISSN 1523-9543 Editors Shaheen Shariff, Andrew H. Churchill, Peter Lang, 2010} Social networking sites had provided an excellent platform for children to vent out their anger and frustration since such sites allow unmonitored contribution of hate speech, images depicting violence and anonymity. In India social networking sites such as Orkut( a Google hosted social networking site which is no longer functional since 2014) and Facebook had been used by students for cyber bullying purposes in many occasions. There are Facebook confession pages maintained by older teens,\footnote{See the author’s interview in this regard in Arora.K(2013), School's the new stomping ground for cyberbullies, published in Times of India, New Delhi on October15,2013. URL: http://epaper.timesofindia.com/Default/Scripting/ArticleWin.asp?From=Archive&Source=Page&Skin=TOIENEW&BaseHref=CAP/2013/09/22&PageLabel=11&EntityId=Ar01100&ViewMode=HTML, Accessed on 26.01.2015} personal accounts, fake accounts and school pages created and maintained by older school children ( and such pages may also have ex students who may fuel the bullying conversations),\footnote{From the personal experiences of the author} which are used for bullying other children as well as teachers. Cyber bullying may include various other issues including hate speech, publishing defamatory content about the victim (child or the adult), graphical cartoons depicting the target victim in visually offensive
manner or teasing the victim, publishing private information of the victim in public forums and inviting more harassment by way of group-bullying and trolling etc. In India the present trend may include targeting victim on his/her religious belief, class or community, skin colour, etc along with sexual orientation. This had been observed in the definition prepared by Jaishankar (2008), which defines cyber bullying as “abuse/ harassment by teasing or insulting, victims’ body shape, intellect, family background, dress sense, mother tongue, place of origin, attitude, race, caste, class, name calling, using modern telecommunication networks such as mobile phones (SMS/MMS) and Internet (Chat rooms, emails, notice boards and groups).” Very interestingly we don’t have any case similar to that of Megan Meir’s in the US which prompted the US Senate to pass a Bill for prevention of victimising children by way of cyber bullying. Megan committed suicide due to severe bullying by her schoolmate’s mother who posed as a teenage boy in the social networking site to take revenge for her daughter. This is mainly because rarely any parent or child or even the schools prefer to report cases involving children. However, the recent case of cyber bullying in Mumbai among the daughters of two famous film industry personalities stands apart in this regard. As the news media reported, the two 17 year old girls had a history of bullying and hating each other and the real life hatred finally got into cyber space when one was targeted by the other and her group of her friends through SMSs and social networking sites. To save the daughters (as the news media reported), the mothers intervened and apparently both the mothers complained against each other for threatening, abusing, intimidating and bullying their daughters to the police. This resulted in police slapping case on the mothers with specific provisions from POCSO Act. As the media reported, one mother was charged under provisions including S.11 of the POCSO Act which expands the concept of sexual harassment of child by including various offensive behaviours including uttering any word, gesture etc, or showing of any body part with the intention that such sounds should be heard or such things should be seen by the child, making the child exhibiting his body parts to be seen by him/her or others, showing the child contents of pornography, enticing the child for pornographic purposes, stalking (physically or through cyber way) etc, and s.12 which prescribes punishment for the same and S.500 (punishment for defamation), 506 (criminal intimidation), and 509 (words, gesture etc uttered to insult the


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modesty of women) of the Indian penal Code. This case is a perfect example as how children can be bullied and bully others in the cyber space and adults can fan the bullying by either posing as their children and fighting for them or by joining the group bullying and how the social structure and the moral character of women can be the subject of bullying for the children.

While the issue of cyber bullying among children targeting children could grasp the interest of the researchers, incidences of cyber bullying teachers by the children are rapidly growing in the social networking sites in India. This is evident from various media reports in recent past. It needs to be noted that while in the West, especially in the US there are online mechanisms to rate the teachers’ performances through online portals like http://www.ratemyteachers.com/, in India such concepts are still not popular. The students often take to Facebook or Google hangout or to Twitter or WhatsApp to bully the teachers or attract trolls for victimising the teachers.

Victimisation through Fake Avatars and revenge porn: the two most concerning issue in the internet in India in regard to crime against women are creation of “fake avatars” and revenge porn. Fake Avatars are “a false representation of the victim which is created by the perpetrator through digital technology with or without the visual images of the victim and which carry verbal information about the victim which may or may not be fully true and it is created and floated in the internet to intentionally malign the character of the victim and to mislead the viewers about the victim’s original identity.” In my earlier publication (co-authored by K.Jaishankar), we had made the following observation on creation of fake avatars and purpose of the same:

“Fake avatars can be created either by verbal description of the characteristics of the victim in group discussions in the MPSNSs, or by creating a different

profile of the fake avatar with the images and information to malign the character of the victim. Halder (2013) had shown that trolling can be one of the best possible ways to create fake avatar of the victim through verbal description. In trolling, the perpetrator/s may post extremely abusive words about the victim, which may also include description of the victim as slut. As the trolling posts continue, the offending comments may increase painting the victim in darker shade The perpetrators may encourage new participants to engage in further discussion which may even infringe the privacy of the victim.”

Creation of fake avatars and trolling targeting children as well teachers can be an integral part of bullying, or can be results of anger, frustration and revenge taking mentality. Revenge taking mentality of the child can motivate him or her to create fake avatar and revenge porn in the social networking site. This can be caused either due to his anger and frustration for broken emotional relationship or due to jealousy or due to anger against teachers for scolding him/her for class performance. Revenge porn is “an act whereby the perpetrator satisfies his anger and frustration for a broken relationship through publicizing false, sexually provocative portrayal of his/her victim, by misusing the information that he may have known naturally and that he may have stored in his personal computer, or may have been conveyed to his electronic device by the victim herself; or may have been stored in the device with the consent of the victim herself; and which may have been done to publicly defame the victim essentially.” It has become immensely necessary to note the rapid growth of revenge porn and creation of fake avatars by children to victimise teachers because such activities may not only target women, but also male teachers. Consider the case of a male school teacher whose fake profile was created in the

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29 See supra @6

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Facebook and obscene remarks were posted using the profile of another woman teacher.\textsuperscript{31} The perpetrators were students who were not happy with the teacher and who decided to take revenge through social networking sites.

**Probable reasons for victimising teachers and fellow students through social networking sites:** It needs to be understood that in India the cultural setup commands obedience and “guru pujan” (worshipping the teacher) from the students from ancient period. The ancient proverbs have placed teachers immediately after mother and father when it comes to respecting and shouldering responsibility for the elders. Similarly, children are taught to see fellow students as fellow sisters or brothers (guru-bhrata/bhagini). Such sorts of strict setups may create anger and frustration in children especially when they get to see other children getting special attention from the teachers or others due to their parent’s position in the society. Anger and frustration may also erupt due to teacher’s humiliation of the children because of the child’s inability to satisfy the teacher’s expectation which may make the teacher feel hopeless for the child. Incidences of bullying among children or physically hurting fellow students or aspiring students is evident in our great epics such Mahabharat as well, where young Karna gets bullied by the Pandavas and Guru Dronacharya.\textsuperscript{32}

In the present days, a child is often armed with digital devices, an anonymous profile and hi-tech knowledge to express his retaliation. Unable to accept rejection or criticism, children may take up irrational coping mechanisms which may include online bullying, creation of fake avatars or revenge porn. I call such mechanism as “irrational” as there is no rational reasoning behind taking up such mechanisms. The child may feel that such activities may give instant gratification to him, but may not be aware that such activities may bring more

\textsuperscript{31} See TNN(2011), “Three students reprimanded for creating fake profile of teacher”. Published in Times of India on August 6, 2011

\textsuperscript{32} See pgs 23-24 @ supra @ 20

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problems for him or her later. Added with it, children of internet era in India often feel that they may remain almost untouched by law and justice machinery since neither the parents, nor the victimised children or teachers, nor the schools prefer reporting of cyber crimes such as bullying or creation of fake avatars or revenge porn to the police unless such contents become viral. This is especially because the victims as well as the schools may feel that reporting may reveal the identity of the victim and thereby may destroy the reputation of the schools.

However, such ‘myths’ among the children as well as the adults are broken with the introduction of Protection of Children from Sexual offences Act, 2012. In the following paragraph I will test the capacity of the POCSO Act in the background of cyber crimes committed by children as well as adults and its power towards prevention of the same.

Role of POCSO in curbing the crimes committed in social networking sites:

In India s.67B of the Information Technology Act was the only provision which dealt with crimes targeting children in the internet. The provision prescribes punishment for not only producing, creating or distributing child pornographic materials, but also for grooming, inducing, abusing children for the purpose of creating or producing child porn materials. This provision also punishes for recording own abuse or the abuse of others pertaining to sexually explicit act with children. In the first occurrence, it prescribes punishment for 5 years with fine and in the second occurrence of conviction it extends the jail term to 7 years with fine. POCSO Act, 2012 broadened the scopes of the law when it comes to sexual offences against children. In cases of sexual offence targeting children in the internet, Section 11(ii) of the POCSO Act takes a serious step by prohibiting exhibiting of private body parts through digital communication devices, grooming or any attempt to groom the children for the purpose of

33 This observation is drawn from the author’s personal experiences and from my presentation presentation “Cyber Crime and Victim turned Offenders: An analysis of impact of victimisation and coping mechanisms of women victims” (with K. Jaishankar), at the Stockholm Criminology Symposium, organized by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet - Brå), held during June 11-13, 2012 at Stockholm, Sweden. (Invited Presentation)
creation or distribution of child porn materials or sending sexually harassing comments to children. The POCSO Act also prohibits threatening of children of depicting any image which may show the child’s own body part or his/her involvement in sexually explicit act with others through internet and digital communication technology.\(^{34}\) S.13 of the POCSO Act further prohibits usage of children for creation of pornographic contents. S.14 while prescribing punishment provides categories of sentences depending upon the process or modus operandi of usage of child towards creating the child porn materials.\(^{35}\) As it may be seen, both 67B and the POCSO Act prohibit abuse of children or creation, production, distribution of child porn materials in the internet in different contexts with the same motive: i.e., protecting the children from not only the adults, but also other deviant children who may knowingly or unknowingly harass the victim children through internet. But neither POCSO Act, nor S.67B of the Information Technology Act particularly focuses on bullying, even though bullying, creation of fake avatars or revenge porn is broadly touched upon. S.66A of the Information Technology Act, which prescribes punishment for sending offensive messages through ITC or DCT, It is unfortunate fact Sec.66A has been struck off in totality by the Supreme Court on 24-03-2015,\(^{36}\) but in my opinion if the provision was amended and each word of the provision was cleared defined and explained by the court, it may have provided a wonderful opportunity to regulate hate speech in the cyber space as well as cyber bullying.\(^{37}\) However, both POCSO Act and s.67B of the Information Technology Act recognises several types of offences that can be done through internet and thereby extends their power on issues which were not recognised as offences earlier. Further, the POCSO Act has an over-emphasising effect on other laws when the offences involve physical and sexual harm to children. But both POCSO and Information Technology Act must be taken together to cover the legal issues and creating positive policy guidelines for using social networking sites by children. As stated above, the recent Mumbai case on cyber bullying may be the first of its type where police had used the POCSO Act. However, the media reports have not revealed whether

34 See S.11 of the POCSO Act,
35 See s.14 of the POCSO Act.

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S.66A of the Information Technology was also used or not, since in India we still do not have any anti-cyber bullying law.

The Information Technology Act through various provisions such as S.69A (power to issue direction for blocking etc), 69B (power to authorise to monitor, collect traffic data etc), may exercise control over the intermediary irrespective of the mother –regulating authority which may regulate the social networking sites in regard to privacy guidelines or hosting or publishing of contents. However, this does not present an all flowery picture when it comes to crimes done through social networking sites which are hosted in places outside India. The issue becomes critical when the offender is located outside the country or the intermediary refuses to cooperate with the laws and regulations of India. Even though Information Technology Act has cross jurisdictional scope, in practice, many a times the prosecution has to suffer due to these reasons. Further, the question whether children can enter into an ‘agreement’ with the social-networking sites is still to be decided by the courts in India. However, in my opinion, since such agreements are quasi-agreements and use of internet and social networking sites has become quaint-essential even for school studies, instead of denying permission to children for entering social networking sites due to under age as per the Indian contract laws, the courts must take more lenient views as what can be done to prevent the children from falling victims of cyber crimes in the social networking sites.

**Conclusion:** In India rarely any school or any government body regulating the school system had made any policy guidelines for positive usage of social media by children. Deviant online behaviour of children is here to stay. But if the schools or the government agencies can provide guidelines for positive usage of social media and internet for children, the rate of misuse of internet may reduce in India. The laws created so far, may regulate the deviant behaviour of adults and children, but educating children through school systems may prove more effective. I provide here a model policy guideline which may be taken up by schools to create their own policy guidelines for directing children for positive usage of internet and digital communication media:

**Model policy guidelines for directing students for positive use of internet including social networking sites and WhatsApp**

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Objectives & missions of the policy guidelines: To protect children from adversities of internet and educating them for a positive use of internet and social-networking sites.

Scope of the policy guidelines: It may be used to educate children from 1st Standard to plus 2. It may also be used to provide guidance for teachers and counsellors to help children for positive usage of internet and social networking sites.

The guidelines:

1. Every school must encourage children to participate in debates or discussions on internet rights, positive and negative effects of the same. This may be made as a part of the subject of computer science, or as a part of C.C.

2. Junior students (from the age group of 4-8) must be encouraged to take part in awareness building sessions. In such sessions, the students may be shown how to handle the devices properly and why not to switch on devices without parent’s supervision or permission. For this purpose the schools can consider making small skits with the help of older children and the teachers, or use movie clippings or other audio-visual learning materials.

3. Students from the age group of 8-13 must be encouraged to attend awareness sessions where they may be taught how to use the internet for positive gain. Given the fact that many study materials and books provide internet links or pages on specific subjects, the students may be encouraged to open such sites in the presence of the teachers. Parent-teacher-student sessions must be made to sensitise parents about the positive use of internet and digital communication technology. Students may be introduced to issues including grooming by paedophiles, values of good talk and bad talk in the internet etc. Students may be slowly introduced to social networking sites. It is not necessary to direct the students to open their accounts. But the students may be asked to take part in discussions on the policy guidelines or terms and conditions that are offered by social networking sites, email service providers etc, and then create their own accounts in the social networking sites.

4. Students from the age group of 14-17 may be encouraged to open accounts in the social networking sites and add their parents and teachers in their friend circles. They may be encouraged to create their own safety
rules and privacy rules and discuss about them with younger students in class debates or awareness sessions. Students may also be encouraged to access informative pages in the social networking sites for gaining more knowledge.

5. It is important to teach students about rational coping mechanisms if and when they accidentally fall victims of cyber crimes. They must be taught how to use the safety tools to protect themselves, when and how to contact the principals, teachers and parents.

6. Schools must arrange for workshops on guiding students for positive usage of internet, which may include sessions on copyright violations as well. In such workshops, students may be encouraged to express their thoughts. Such workshops may be conducted with the police personnel, cyber crime experts, and NGOs as resource persons.

7. Senior students (from the age group of 16-18) may be encouraged to create their own blogs or vlogging sites either on their own or as group effort to show case positive usage of internet.

However, it must be noted that this policy guideline should not be used if the schools wish to use it as the sole guideline for separate types of offences. The author offers to cooperate with the schools to build up unique policy guidelines on the basis of this model policy guideline depending upon the need of every organisation. It is hoped that if the above guidelines are adopted, crimes targeting children by children and adults may be curbed.