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# Families and New Media Comparative Perspectives on Digital Transformations in Law and Society: Book Review

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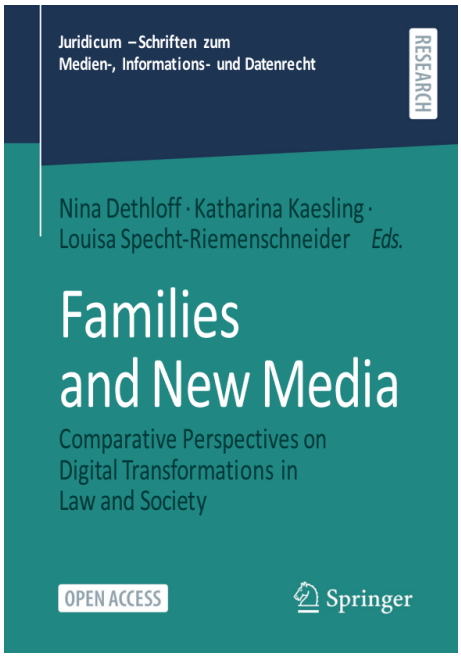
**Families and New Media Comparative Perspectives on Digital Transformations in Law and Society, *By* Louisa, Nina Dethloff, *2023, 277, ISBN*. 978-3-658-39664-0, *book link:*** https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-39664-0

## INTRODUCTION




The book Families and New Media: Comparative Perspectives on Digital Transformations in Law and Society, edited by Dethloff et al. (2023), explores the multifaceted relationship between families and digital media from legal, social, and comparative perspectives. Through contributions from various scholars, the book examines how digital technologies influence family dynamics, children's participation in online environments, parental practices such as sharenting, and the evolving legal frameworks designed to protect children in the digital age. The volume provides a comprehensive analysis of both the opportunities and risks associated with digital transformation, emphasizing the need to balance children's rights to participation with their right to protection.

This book is particularly relevant in contemporary society, where digital technologies increasingly shape childhood experiences and family interactions. By combining theoretical discussions, empirical research, and legal analysis from different jurisdictions, the book offers valuable insights into the challenges of regulating digital environments while respecting family autonomy and children's evolving capacities. Furthermore, it highlights the growing importance of digital literacy, responsible parenting practices, and rights-based approaches in addressing issues such as privacy, surveillance, data commercialization, and online safety. Therefore, this book serves as an important resource for students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in understanding the implications of digitalization for families and children in modern society. As a book review, this paper aims to critically examine the main arguments, themes, and contributions presented in Families and New Media. It will analyze how the authors address the intersection between family life, digital technology, and legal regulation, while also evaluating the strengths and limitations of the book. Through this review, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges that digital transformation presents for families and the broader legal and social structures that seek to govern it.

Chapter 1 provides a thorough and relevant introduction to the impact of digitalization on contemporary family life. One of the chapter's greatest strengths is its ability

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to demonstrate how digital technologies have fundamentally altered the ways parents and children communicate, interact, and construct their identities. The discussion of concepts such as *sharenting*, social media participation, and children's growing presence in digital spaces effectively reflects current societal realities. Furthermore, the chapter successfully emphasizes that children are not merely passive recipients of digital content but active participants who use technology for learning, entertainment, and social engagement. By addressing issues such as privacy, cyberbullying, surveillance, and commercialization, the chapter offers a broad perspective on the opportunities and challenges associated with digital participation. Despite these strengths, the chapter tends to adopt a predominantly risk-oriented perspective toward digital media. Although it acknowledges the benefits of technology, including enhanced communication, educational opportunities, and creative expression, these positive aspects are not explored in the same depth as the potential dangers. As a result, the discussion may leave readers with the impression that digital technologies are primarily sources of harm rather than tools that can also empower children and strengthen family relationships. In addition, the treatment of *sharenting* focuses heavily on concerns about privacy and exploitation without sufficiently examining the social, emotional, and relational reasons that motivate parents to share information about their children online. A more balanced analysis that considers both the advantages and disadvantages of digital engagement, as well as the diversity of family experiences across different social and cultural contexts, would have provided a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Chapter 2 offers a valuable discussion on how digital transformation has redefined family relationships by reshaping communication patterns, social interactions, and the boundaries between private and public life. The chapter successfully highlights the concept of "doing family" in the digital age, showing how social media and messaging applications have become essential tools for maintaining relationships and constructing family identities. Its examination of digital parenting and *sharenting* is particularly relevant, as it raises important concerns regarding children's privacy, consent, and data protection. By emphasizing the need to balance parental responsibilities with children's rights, the chapter contributes significantly to contemporary debates surrounding family life in increasingly digitalized societies. However, the chapter tends to frame digitalization primarily as a source of tension and risk, which limits the depth of its analysis. Although it acknowledges the benefits of digital communication, such as strengthening family connections and providing social support, these advantages are discussed less extensively than issues of surveillance, privacy violations, and parental control. Consequently, the chapter risks presenting an overly cautious perspective that underestimates the positive role of digital media in fostering children's autonomy, digital literacy, and meaningful social participation. Furthermore, the discussion of *sharenting* focuses heavily on potential harms while giving insufficient attention to the diverse motivations behind parents' online behavior, including emotional expression, community building, and family networking. The chapter also pays limited attention to differences in cultural, social, and economic contexts that shape digital parenting practices, leading to conclusions that may not fully reflect the complexity and diversity of family experiences across different societies. A more balanced and context-sensitive approach would have strengthened the chapter's argument and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital technology and family life.

Chapter 3 provides an insightful discussion on the growing integration of digital media into family life, particularly through the practice of *sharenting*. The chapter's strength lies in its emphasis on the tension between parental authority and children's rights,


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highlighting how children often have little control over the digital identities created for them by their parents. By drawing attention to issues such as privacy violations, data misuse, and the long-term consequences of online exposure, the chapter successfully demonstrates that children's digital footprints can be established long before they are capable of providing informed consent. Furthermore, the chapter effectively reveals the contradictions in parental behavior, showing how parents may simultaneously seek to protect their children while unintentionally compromising their privacy through excessive monitoring or online sharing. Despite these valuable contributions, the chapter tends to portray parents primarily as inadequately informed actors whose digital practices place children at risk, which may oversimplify the complexity of family decision-making in the digital age. The analysis focuses heavily on the dangers of *sharenting* and parental inconsistency while giving less attention to the social, emotional, and practical benefits that digital sharing can provide, such as strengthening family relationships, preserving memories, and creating support networks among parents. Moreover, although the chapter highlights children's desire for greater participation in decisions regarding their online representation, it offers limited discussion on how such participation can realistically be implemented across different ages and developmental stages. The absence of a broader consideration of cultural, social, and economic factors also limits the applicability of its conclusions, as parental attitudes toward privacy and digital media vary significantly across societies. As a result, while the chapter provides a strong critique of current parenting practices, a more balanced and context-sensitive analysis would have offered a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in reconciling parental responsibility with children's autonomy in digital environments.

Chapter 4 presents a strong and progressive argument that children should be viewed not only as individuals who require protection in digital environments but also as rights holders who deserve opportunities for participation and self-expression. The chapter effectively challenges the dominant narrative among parents and policymakers that often focuses exclusively on the dangers of internet use, such as addiction, privacy violations, and developmental concerns. By emphasizing the importance of a rights-based approach and the principle of the "best interests of the child," the chapter makes a valuable contribution to discussions about balancing protection and participation in the digital age. Furthermore, its analysis of emerging technologies, including smart toys and data-driven devices, highlights the growing complexity of safeguarding children's rights in increasingly interconnected digital ecosystems. Nevertheless, the chapter tends to idealize children's participatory rights without fully addressing the practical difficulties of implementing them in real-world contexts. While it criticizes existing regulations for prioritizing protection over participation, it provides limited discussion of the reasons why policymakers often adopt a more protective stance, particularly given children's varying levels of maturity, digital literacy, and capacity to understand long-term consequences. The chapter also assumes that greater participation will naturally lead to better outcomes, yet it pays insufficient attention to the risks associated with granting children broader autonomy in digital spaces, including exposure to harmful content, manipulation, and commercial exploitation. In addition, the analysis is heavily grounded in European legal frameworks, which may reduce its applicability to regions with different cultural values, legal traditions, and technological infrastructures. As a result, although the chapter successfully advocates for a more balanced approach to children's rights, its arguments would be stronger if they incorporated a more critical examination of the


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challenges and limitations involved in translating rights-based principles into effective digital governance and everyday family practices.

Chapter 5 offers a refreshing perspective on the phenomenon of *sharenting* by challenging the common assumption that parents who share photos of their children online are inherently irresponsible. One of the chapter's key strengths is its recognition of the social and emotional dimensions of digital sharing, demonstrating that parents often use social media to maintain family relationships, document important life events, seek emotional support, and strengthen social connections. By drawing on interview-based research, the chapter successfully presents parents as active decision-makers who are generally aware of privacy risks and who employ various strategies to minimize potential harm. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of *sharenting* and highlights the complexity of balancing parental communication needs with concerns about children's privacy and well-being. Despite its valuable contribution, the chapter may be criticized for placing considerable emphasis on understanding and justifying parental motivations while giving less attention to the long-term consequences that children may experience as a result of having a digital identity created without their full consent. Although the chapter acknowledges privacy risks, it tends to rely heavily on parents' perceptions of risk management, potentially overlooking the fact that parents may underestimate future harms related to data permanence, algorithmic profiling, or the unintended circulation of children's images. Furthermore, the argument that *sharenting* should be viewed as a context-dependent practice may inadvertently weaken discussions about children's rights by prioritizing parental intentions over children's autonomy and future preferences. The chapter also pays limited attention to the perspectives of children themselves, making it difficult to assess whether parental protective measures truly reflect children's interests. Consequently, while the chapter succeeds in presenting a more balanced view of *sharenting*, its analysis would be stronger if it more critically examined the unequal power relationship between parents and children and the long-term implications of parental decision-making in digital environments.

Chapter 6 provides a compelling legal analysis of the growing conflict between parental authority, family autonomy, and the protection of children's rights in digital environments. One of the chapter's strengths is its examination of how legal frameworks have evolved from prioritizing freedom of expression toward recognizing children as independent rights holders entitled to privacy and dignity. By discussing landmark cases such as the 2015 Évora Court of Appeal decision and the influence of international instruments like the UNCRC and GDPR, the chapter effectively demonstrates how courts increasingly intervene to safeguard children from potential harm arising from the online disclosure of personal information. The chapter also highlights an important shift in legal thinking, emphasizing that parental consent alone may not always justify actions that could negatively affect a child's future interests, reputation, or personal development. Despite its valuable contribution, the chapter tends to favor a highly interventionist approach that may underestimate the complexity of family decision-making and parental responsibility. While the strengthening of children's rights is presented as a positive legal development, the discussion pays relatively little attention to the potential risks of excessive state involvement in private family matters. The assumption that courts and regulatory authorities are better positioned than parents to determine a child's best interests can be questioned, particularly given the subjective and context-dependent nature of family relationships. Furthermore, the chapter focuses primarily on legal protections and judicial solutions without sufficiently addressing the role of digital literacy, parental education, and shared decision-making as alternative mechanisms for


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protecting children online. Its strong reliance on European legal perspectives also limits the broader applicability of its conclusions, as cultural attitudes toward privacy, parental authority, and children's autonomy differ significantly across societies. Consequently, while the chapter successfully highlights the need for stronger protection of children's digital rights, a more balanced consideration of family autonomy and non-legal approaches would have produced a richer and more nuanced analysis.

Chapter 7 offers an insightful examination of the legal challenges arising from the increasing integration of the Internet into family life, particularly through its analysis of copyright liability, child influencers, and state measures for online child protection. One of the chapter's main strengths is its recognition that courts must continuously balance competing interests, including family autonomy, parental responsibility, children's rights, and the protection of intellectual property. The discussion effectively illustrates how legal institutions contribute to shaping an implicit model of the modern family, one that acknowledges children's growing autonomy while still emphasizing the important role of parental guidance. Moreover, the chapter successfully demonstrates that legal systems are struggling to keep pace with rapid technological developments, making it a valuable contribution to contemporary debates on digital governance and family law. However, the chapter's analysis is heavily centered on judicial and legal perspectives, which may oversimplify the broader social and technological factors influencing family behavior online. While the chapter criticizes certain lower-court decisions as overly rigid, it does not sufficiently explore the underlying uncertainties faced by judges when attempting to apply traditional legal principles to rapidly evolving digital environments. Furthermore, the assumption that legal intervention can effectively resolve tensions between child protection and family privacy may be overly optimistic, as many online risks stem from technological platforms, commercial incentives, and digital cultures that extend beyond the reach of family law. The chapter also relies predominantly on the German legal context, limiting the generalizability of its conclusions to societies with different legal traditions and cultural understandings of parental authority. As a result, although the chapter provides a strong legal analysis of Internet-related family issues, it would benefit from a more interdisciplinary approach that incorporates social, educational, and technological perspectives to better explain the complexities of regulating family life in the digital age.

Chapter 8 presents an ambitious and thought-provoking analysis of how digitalization is transforming family relationships and reshaping traditional structures of authority between parents and children. One of the chapter's major strengths is its integration of sociological theory, particularly Norbert Elias's concept of the "civilizing process," to explain how technological developments contribute to increasing equality, autonomy, and informality within family life. The chapter effectively highlights the paradoxical nature of the Internet, portraying it as both a source of empowerment and a source of risk. By emphasizing children's growing technological competence and their ability to access information and social networks independently, the chapter offers a valuable perspective on how digital media can alter traditional power dynamics and encourage more collaborative forms of parenting. Nevertheless, the chapter may be criticized for presenting an overly optimistic interpretation of the Internet as a "civilizing force" that naturally promotes equality and autonomy within families. While digital technologies can indeed empower children, the analysis tends to underestimate the persistence of structural inequalities, parental authority, and the influence of digital platforms that continue to shape and constrain children's online experiences. The


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chapter also assumes that increased autonomy necessarily leads to healthier family relationships, without sufficiently examining the risks associated with diminished parental oversight, such as exposure to misinformation, harmful online communities, and commercial exploitation. Furthermore, its reliance on broad theoretical arguments sometimes comes at the expense of empirical evidence demonstrating how these changing power dynamics operate across different social, cultural, and economic contexts. As a result, while the chapter offers an innovative framework for understanding digital family life, its conclusions would be more convincing if they incorporated a more critical assessment of the limitations of digital empowerment and the enduring complexities of parent–child dependency in the digital age.

Chapter 9 provides a strong and timely critique of the contemporary digital economy by highlighting how personal data has become a central commodity in the business models of major technology companies. One of the chapter's key strengths is its detailed examination of the imbalance between corporate data collection practices and users' limited understanding of how their information is processed and monetized. The discussion is particularly valuable in emphasizing the vulnerability of children, whose personal data can be gathered from multiple digital sources and used in ways that may affect their future privacy, security, and autonomy. Furthermore, the chapter effectively questions the adequacy of existing legal frameworks such as the GDPR and CCPA, arguing that traditional consent-based mechanisms often fail to provide meaningful protection in a digital environment characterized by complex and opaque data-processing systems. Despite these strengths, the chapter tends to portray technology companies primarily as agents of surveillance and exploitation, which may oversimplify the complex relationship between data collection, innovation, and digital services. While the risks associated with data commercialization are significant, the analysis gives relatively little attention to the benefits that data-driven technologies can provide, such as personalized services, improved digital experiences, and technological innovation. Moreover, the chapter's strong emphasis on stricter regulation of data collection may underestimate the practical difficulties of enforcing such measures in a global digital ecosystem where data flows easily across jurisdictions. The discussion also focuses heavily on legal and regulatory solutions while paying less attention to the role of digital literacy, parental awareness, and user empowerment as complementary strategies for protecting children online. Consequently, although the chapter successfully exposes the shortcomings of current data protection frameworks, a more balanced evaluation of both the opportunities and challenges of data-driven technologies would have strengthened its overall argument and provided a more comprehensive perspective on children's rights in the digital economy.

Chapter 10 provides a valuable and forward-looking analysis of children's passive interaction with digital technologies, drawing attention to an often-overlooked aspect of the digital environment. Rather than focusing solely on visible online activities such as social media use and gaming, the chapter broadens the discussion to include smart toys, digital assistants, IoT devices, and institutional digital services that continuously collect data without users' full awareness. This perspective is particularly important because it demonstrates how children can become subjects of data collection even when they are not actively engaging with digital platforms. The chapter also effectively introduces the concept of the "algorithmic child," highlighting how automated profiling and data-driven decision-making may influence children's opportunities, identities, and future life outcomes. By emphasizing the limitations of existing legal frameworks, the chapter successfully raises awareness of the growing gap between technological innovation and regulatory protection. However, the chapter tends to emphasize the risks associated with emerging technologies while providing


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relatively limited discussion of the practical benefits these technologies can offer for children's education, safety, accessibility, and development. The concept of the "algorithmic child" is presented as a significant concern, yet the chapter does not sufficiently explore the varying degrees of risk across different technological contexts or the potential for ethical and transparent uses of data-driven systems. Furthermore, the discussion relies heavily on legal and regulatory solutions, particularly through stronger corporate accountability, while giving less attention to the roles of parents, educators, and digital literacy initiatives in mitigating risks. The chapter also assumes that increased regulation will necessarily result in better protection, without fully addressing the challenges of enforcing such regulations across global technology markets and rapidly evolving digital ecosystems. Consequently, while the chapter offers an important critique of passive data collection and algorithmic governance, its argument would be more persuasive if it incorporated a more balanced assessment of both the opportunities and limitations of emerging digital technologies in children's lives.

Chapter 11 provides a comprehensive examination of the legal and regulatory challenges involved in protecting minors on video-sharing platforms. One of the chapter's major strengths is its recognition that digital platforms have become central environments for children's socialization, entertainment, and information consumption, while simultaneously exposing them to harmful content, hate speech, misinformation, and other online risks. The discussion of the AVMSD and its implementation through German regulations such as the JMStV, JuSchG, and NetzDG effectively demonstrates how policymakers are attempting to adapt traditional media regulation to the realities of digital platforms. Furthermore, the concept of "child protection by design" represents an important shift toward preventive regulation by requiring platforms to incorporate child safety considerations into the structure and operation of their services rather than relying solely on parental supervision or post-hoc enforcement. Despite these strengths, the chapter tends to place considerable faith in legal regulation and platform accountability as primary solutions to online harms, while paying less attention to the practical limitations of these approaches. Measures such as age verification systems, content classification, and takedown procedures are presented as important safeguards, yet the chapter does not fully address their potential shortcomings, including privacy concerns, inconsistent enforcement, and the ease with which minors can circumvent technological restrictions. Moreover, the analysis focuses predominantly on regulatory mechanisms while giving limited consideration to the roles of digital literacy, parental guidance, and educational interventions in fostering safer online experiences. The chapter also assumes that greater platform responsibility will necessarily lead to improved child protection, overlooking the challenges posed by global digital platforms that operate across multiple jurisdictions and legal systems. Consequently, although the chapter provides a valuable overview of contemporary efforts to regulate online content and protect minors, its argument would be more convincing if it adopted a broader perspective that integrated legal, social, educational, and technological approaches to addressing the complexities of child safety in digital environments.

## CONCLUSION

Families and New Media: Comparative Perspectives on Digital Transformations in Law and Society provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary examination of how digital technologies have transformed family life, parenting practices, and children's experiences in contemporary society. Across its chapters, the book highlights the increasingly complex


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relationship between digital participation, family autonomy, children's rights, privacy protection, and legal regulation. The contributors successfully demonstrate that digital technologies create significant opportunities for communication, education, self-expression, and social participation, while simultaneously generating new challenges related to surveillance, data collection, online safety, sharenting, and algorithmic decision-making. By combining legal, sociological, and empirical perspectives, the book offers valuable insights into the evolving dynamics between parents, children, digital platforms, and regulatory institutions.

One of the book's greatest contributions is its consistent emphasis on children as both vulnerable individuals requiring protection and active rights holders entitled to participation in digital environments. The discussions on privacy, data protection, online platforms, and family relationships reveal that traditional legal and social frameworks often struggle to keep pace with rapid technological developments. The book effectively argues for a more balanced approach that protects children from digital harms while respecting their autonomy and evolving capacities. Furthermore, its comparative perspective enriches understanding of how different legal systems and policy frameworks attempt to address similar challenges in the digital age. Despite these strengths, several chapters tend to adopt a predominantly risk-oriented and regulatory perspective that occasionally underestimates the positive potential of digital technologies. Many discussions focus extensively on privacy threats, surveillance, and exploitation while providing less attention to the benefits of digital participation, innovation, and digital empowerment. In addition, the book's strong reliance on European legal frameworks may limit the applicability of some conclusions to societies with different cultural, social, and legal contexts. Several chapters also place considerable confidence in legal intervention as a solution, while giving less emphasis to alternative approaches such as digital literacy, education, parental engagement, and technological innovation.

Overall, this book is a significant and timely contribution to the study of digital families, children's rights, and technology governance. It successfully illuminates the opportunities and risks associated with digital transformation while encouraging critical reflection on how societies can balance protection, participation, and autonomy in an increasingly connected world. Although some arguments would benefit from a more balanced consideration of both the positive and negative dimensions of digitalization, the book remains an important resource for students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand the evolving relationship between family life, law, and digital technology in the twenty-first century.

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