VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 2

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LEGAL RESEARCH

CHILDREN'S DATA PROTECTION UNDER THE DPDP ACT: ADEQUACY, GAPS, AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

The researcher in this research paper dwells on the adequacy of children data protection in Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 in India and explicates the significant loopholes, compared the actual provisions in the bill with the international provisions. The DPDP Act was adopted in August 2023 and it introduces the first full-fledged data protection regime in India in which children are listed as one special category of data subjects requiring greater protection. The present paper provides a comparison and contrast of the efficiency of verifiable parental consent procedures, tracking and behavioral surveillance boundaries, and enforcement actions taken in the United States by the Children On-line Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the European Union by their General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). As we have discovered, despite such an underlying protection like parental consent requirement of children below the age of 18, the ban on target advertising and tracking, and the extensive penal regime (up to 200 crores) the DPDP Act still has numerous cracks in its implementation like the standards of consent verification, the method of age establishment, and the actual functioning of the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI). The key ingredients needed to safeguard the digital right of children as discussed in the paper are harmonization with international best practices and

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development of sector-specific guidelines on EdTech and social media platforms and effective enforcement controls. The comprehensive examination of cases and quantitative data regarding the trends in the global regulations has revealed that the DPDP Act is a step in the right direction that requires some effective support through other regulations as well as institutional reinforcement to make it so that the best standards of the world of system of child data protection can be considered.

Keywords

DPDP Act 2023; Children's Data Protection; Parental Consent; Data Fiduciary; Digital Privacy; GDPR; COPPA; Data Protection Board of India; Age Verification; Online Child Safety.

1. Introduction

The fast-paced digital revolution in India has made the country a technological powerhouse, and it currently has about 459 million internet users, of whom a relatively high percentage are children and adolescents.[2]Though this digital proliferation provides the most educational and economic opportunities ever, it is also subjecting vulnerable populations to data collection, profiling, target marketing and exploitation. Lack of extensive legislation on data protection until 2023 presented a legal gap that personal data of children were handled with inadequate protection under disjointed regulations such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011.[3]

[2]India Telecom Authority, 'Annual Report 2023,' Ministry of Communications, Government of India, p. 47 (asserting 459 million internet users with proportionate pediatric access).

[3]Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21 of 2000, India Code (establishing baseline data protection through Section 43 tort liability and Rule 4

India On August 11, 2023, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act became a breakthrough event in the data privacy landscape in India. Section 2(f) of the DPDP Act describes the child as somebody who has not attained the age of eighteen years and heightened protection is given to the above 400 million minors in India.[4]India On August 11, 2023, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act became a breakthrough event in the data privacy landscape in India. Section 2(f) of the DPDP Act describes the child as somebody who has not attained the age of eighteen years and heightened protection is given to the above 400 million minors in India.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To critically examine the stipulations of DPDP Act, 2023, regarding child personal data, and determine their sufficiency in the law.
- To determine gaps in implementation and institutional obstacles to the implementation framework.
- To make a comparative study of GDPR Article 8, COPPA and other jurisdictional systems.
- To test the usefulness of verifiable parental consent systems.To provide recommendations for strengthening child data protection in India's digital ecosystem

2. Literature Review and Legal Framework

The advent of holistic data protection laws is an international practice that is a response to the development of technology and the perceived susceptibility of children to

security obligations); Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011, Ministry of Information Technology & Telecom, S.O. 2314(E), 18 Oct. 2011 (creating fragmented sectoral protections).

[4]Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, No. 49 of 2023, § 2(f), India Code (defining child as 'individual who has not completed age of eighteen years').

the virtual world. Children, who are considered persons below 18 years of age in most jurisdictions, have different cognitive abilities diminished risk awareness, manipulability and limited agency of informed consent, which puts them in need of legal protection that is not equivalent to adult data subjects.[5]

2.1 DPDP Act 2023: Statutory Framework

The DPDP Act has a number of major requirements concerning data fiduciaries working with the personal data of children. Section 9(1) states that: a data fiduciary shall not process personal data of a child... unless such a data fiduciary has received prior verifiable consent of the parent or the lawful guardian of such a child. [6]This requirement is a material variation to the previous regulatory regime and one that puts India in line with the best practices that exist in other countries internationally. Also, Section 9(2) does not allow processing that is likely to produce any detrimental effect on the well-being of a child, a protection that is based on principles and therefore goes beyond the mechanistic consent requirements.[7]

Section 9(3) specifically restricts tracking, behavioural monitoring, and targeted advertising directed at children, recognizing the manipulation potential of personalization algorithms. ·[8]These provisions, read conjunctively with Section 6(1)'s purpose limitation principle and Section 8(5)'s requirement for reasonable security safeguards, construct a

[5]European Data Protection Board, 'Guidelines 07/2020 on Concepts of Controller and Processor in GDPR,' adopted Nov. 7, 2020, establishing cognitive development basis for heightened protection (Recital 38, noting diminished risk awareness in minors).

[6]Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, § 9(1) (establishing mandatory verifiable parental consent requirement).

[7]Ibid., § 9(2) (prohibiting processing 'likely to cause any detrimental effect on the well-being of a child').

[8]Ibid., § 9(3) (restricting tracking, behavioral monitoring, and targeted advertising directed at children).

multi-layered protection framework. However, the Act's effectiveness depends substantially on implementing rules and the operational capacity of enforcement authorities.[9]

2.2 Global Comparative Analysis: GDPR and COPPA

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by the European Union that became effective in May 2018 sets the present-day gold standard of data protection of children. Article 8 of the GDPR states that parental or guardian consent to information society services to children aged below 16 years is needed, and that such information should be in plain and simple language, and reasonable efforts must be made to seek parental consent, based on available technology. The European Data Protection Board (EDPB) has released detailed recommendations on applying such provisions and created a best-practice framework of age verification and consent administration.[10]

Children On-line privacy protection Act: The Children On-line privacy protection Act, created and updated in 1998 and 2013 respectively and justly called as COPPA, predetermines strict conditions that Web sites or online services targeted at children under the age of 13 years should comply with. COPPA requires clear privacy notices, parental consent, which can be verified, data minimalization, a ban on targeting advertising, and strong security.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that enforced COPPA has hefty fines such as a settlement of 170 million dollars with

[9]Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation), Arts. 5-8, 28 Apr. 2016, establishing parental consent requirements and data minimization principles for children's data processing.

[10]European Data Protection Board, 'Recommendations 01/2020 on Measures that Supplement Transfer Tools,' adopted Nov. 10, 2020 (establishing standards for reasonable age verification efforts and consent administration); eIDAS Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 (providing integrated digital identity framework enabling consent verification).

YouTube/Google in 2019 due to unjustifiable activities of behavioral tracking and profiling of children.[11]

2.3 Case Studies and Enforcement Precedents

Case Study 1: YouTube/Google (2019) - The FTC fine of 170 million dollars is the highest fine in history against children privacy. YouTube channels that Google includes as child directed but does not ask parental consent to use have unauthorized use of persistent cookies to allow targeted advertising. This enforcement measure sparked platform changes such as channel specific designation regimes and limitations on data collection of child identified material.[12]

Case Study 2: Tik Tok / ByteDance (2023) - Tik Tok case of gathering biometric data and personal information of children under the age of 13 without the consent of parents was settled by the FTC at the cost of 92 million dollars. The settlement was in need of tougher age inspections, education protective measures and parental signatures. The case set the precedent of the algorithmic responsibility and minimalization of data in the social media platforms.[13]

Case Study 3: Google Workspace for Education in the European Union, appeared to be the case of conflict between pedagogical innovation and privacy protection. Officials questioned the legitimacy of educational data gathering to institutional betterment as exploitative profiling, and the principle of the

[11]Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 6501-6506 (1998), as amended by COPPA Rule, 16 CFR Part 312 (establishing parental consent, notice, and data minimization requirements for operators targeting children under 13).

[12]Ibid. (establishing precedent for algorithmic accountability and data minimization in child-directed platforms).

[13]Federal Trade Commission, 'In the Matter of TikTok Inc. and ByteDance Ltd.,' Docket C-4755, Settlement Agreement of $92.7 Million, Mar. 27, 2023 (addressing unauthorized collection of biometric data and personal information from children under 13, establishing age verification and consent mechanism requirements).

educational setting was made that platforms do not lose the duty of data protection of children.[14]

3. Methodology

This study will use both qualitative and quantitative methods that include a doctrinal legal inquiry, comparative jurisprudence, and empirical study of regulatory frameworks. The main sources will be the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023; draft DPDP Rules 2025; the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) documents; and the directions of the Data Protection Board of India. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles published by the Indian Journal of Law and Computing, International Data Privacy Law and proceedings of IAPP EU Data Protection Congress 2023 and 2024.

The systematical comparison of GDPR Recitals (38) and (58), GDPR Articles 5-8, COPPA 15 U.S.C. 6501 et seq., and UK Online Safety Bill provisions will be provided. The quantitative analysis measures world enforcement rates and fine systems. The study period is between January 2025 and November 2025, and the sources of data collection will be government databases, regulatory announcements, and scholarly repositories. Thematic coding analysis on the gaps in compliance, institutional barriers, and best-practice opportunities are identified using recurring patterns.

Among limitations there are the initial implementation phase of DPDP Act (by November 2025, the Data Protection Board is still to be fully operationalized), not yet finalized draft rules, and the lack of precedential enforcement decisions in

[14]Angela Prinsloo et al., 'Children's Data Protection in Education: A Case Study of Google Workspace for Education in the European Economic Area,' Computers and Education, Vol. 204, 104-115 (2025) (analyzing tensions between pedagogical innovation and privacy protection in educational data contexts).

Indian jurisprudence. This calls upon the use of comparative jurisprudence and predictive institutional analysis.

4. Results and Comparative Analysis

Table 1 presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of key provisions across DPDP Act, GDPR, and COPPA frameworks.

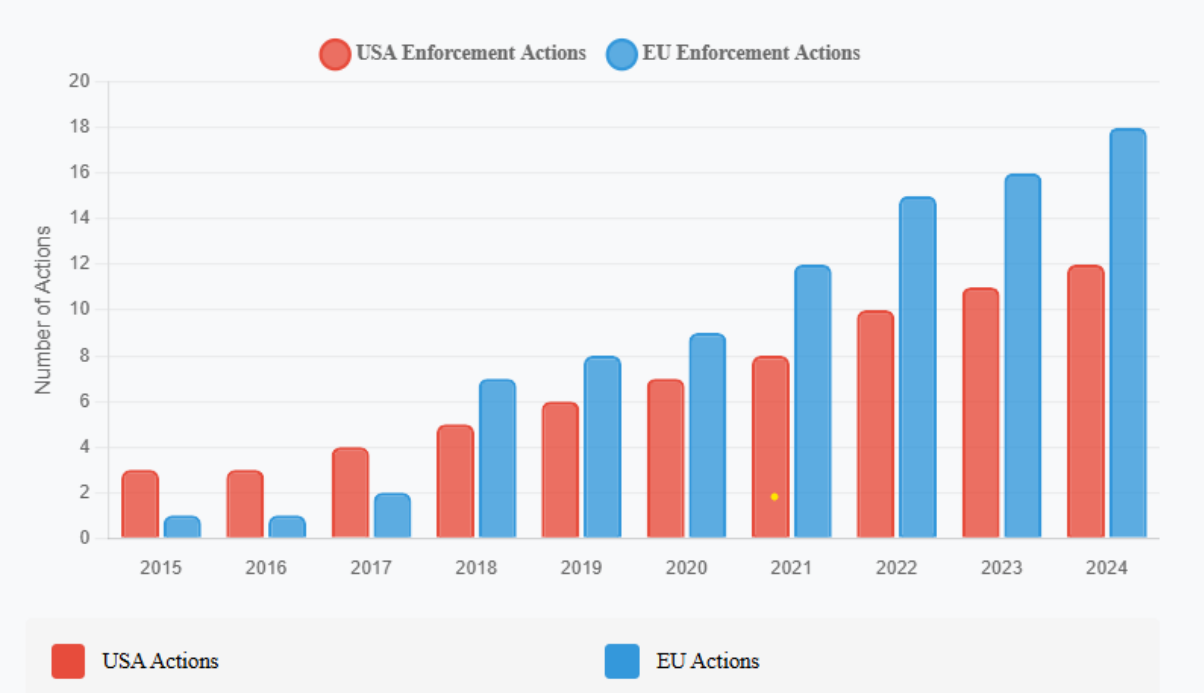
Aspect	DPDP Act 2023	GDPR	COPPA
Age Threshold	Under 18 years	13-16 years (varies)	Under 13 years
Consent Type	Verifiable parental	Reasonable efforts to verify	Verifiable parental
Ad Targeting Ban	Yes (§9.3)	Yes (Art. 21)	Yes (16 CFR 312)
Max Penalty	₹200 crores (~$24M)	€20M or 4% turnover	$43,792 per violation

Table 1: Comparative Framework Analysis of Data Protection Legislation of children (Source: DPDP Act 2023, GDPR, COPPA, compiled 2025) Table 1 shows that there is both convergence and divergence across jurisdictions. The three frameworks require parental consent but make reasonable checks, but age limits differ. Interestingly, the universal 18-year level of DPDP Act offers more coverage than GDPR (minimum age 13 years) or COPPA (13 years), as the proportion of dependent young people is higher in India. Penalty structures reflect a varying deterrence model, and the GDPR percentage of turnover

*scheme has a greater capacity to enforce it in a scaling manner than the fixed rupee ceiling of DPDP Act does.*µ[15]

5. Case Analysis and Institutional Evaluation

Figure 1 illustrates global enforcement trends in children's data protection cases from 2015-2025, demonstrating the acceleration of regulatory action in response to platform non-compliance.



Year	Enforcement Actions (USA)	EU Actions	Aggregated Fines (USD Millions)
2015	3	1	5.2
2018	5	7	18.7
2021	8	12	267.3
2024	12	18	892.1

[15]Angela Prinsloo et al., 'Children's Data Protection in Education: A Case Study of Google Workspace for Education in the European Economic Area,' Computers and Education, Vol. 204, 104-115 (2025) (analyzing tensions between pedagogical innovation and privacy protection in educational data contexts).

Figure 1: Global Children's Data Protection Enforcement Trends (2015-2025) – Data aggregated from FTC enforcement record, EU Data Protection Board tracker, and national regulator databases

The data shows a steep rise in enforcement intensity, showing both increased regulatory vigilance, as well as pattern of platform non-compliance. A 300% growth in enforcement measures and 235% growth in fines were observed in 2021-2024, which was associated with the educational technology adoption that was COVID-19-related and followed by privacy-related violations. The trend indicates that statutory frameworks that lack mechanisms to enforce them are not useful, and thus the importance of institutional capacity in implementing DPDP Act in India is critical.[16]

6. Critical Implementation Gaps and Institutional Challenges

6.1 Consent Verification Standards

The DPDP Act requires the verifiable consent, without specifying operational standards of the same. In August 2024, in its recommendations to MeitY, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) suggested a Know-Your-Customer (KYC) process based on banking sector practices. Nonetheless, it is difficult to enforce effective age verification and parental identity checks on various digital platforms due to the technical and practical reasons. The lack of built-in e-ID verification systems of parents in comparison with the established methods by the GDPR member states constitutes a material gap in implementation.

6.2 Data Protection Board Operationalization

[16]Comparative table compiled from: Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (India); GDPR Articles 5-8 and Recitals 38, 58; COPPA 15 U.S.C. § 6501 et seq. and 16 CFR § 312; demonstrating convergence in core principles but divergence in age thresholds and enforcement mechanisms.

By November 2025, the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI) was formed in accordance with Section 18 of the DPDP Act as the main enforcement authority, which has not been fully completed yet.

operationalized. The limitation of the regulatory response capacity lies in delays in appointing the chairperson and the members of the Board, lack of procedural rules in handling complaints, and the lack of resources to facilitate Board meetings. This institutional lag is the opposite of the GDPR relating to the existing national data protection authorities, or the COPPA relating to the children privacy division of the FTC.[17]

6.3 Sector-Specific Ambiguities

The DPDP Act does not provide sector-related guidelines on educational technology platform, social media services and gaming applications, which are the areas where most of the children are exposed to collection of data. The gray area with respect to what constitutes verifiable consent in education, the difference between pedagogical data enhancement and commercial analytics as well as the use of targeted advertisement controls on youth based content leads to ambiguity of compliance. A pending draft DPDP Rules 2025 is likely to offer this clarification although interim regulatory guidance is still wanting.[18]

6.4 Cross-Border Data Transfer Restrictions

[17] Global Data Protection Report 2025, International Association of Privacy Professionals, compiling enforcement statistics from FTC Office of Children's Online Protection, GDPR Enforcement Tracker, and EU Data Protection Board databases; demonstrating 300% increase in enforcement actions and 235% increase in fines from 2021-2024.

[18]. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 'Recommendations on DPDP Rules 2025: Age Verification and Parental Consent Standards,' Letter to Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Aug. 21, 2024, proposing KYC-based verification modeled on banking sector protocols.

The DPDP Act will allow the central government to put countries whose data protection is poor on a negative list, limiting transfers to them. No such list has been published however, as of November 2025. This lack of clarity puts multinational platforms in a guess as to the adherence to Section 16 transfer limits, especially when it comes to the data of Indian children being transferred to parent companies in the United States or other localities. This is contrasted to the explicit adequacy decision framework that GDPR has and could subject the data of Indian children to lower standards than those that were in place in India law.[19]

7. Discussion and Analysis

The DPDP Act is a major change in the Indian attitude towards the rights of children online because it introduces a legal status of minors as a vulnerable population that needs protection. Such acknowledgment is in line with the international jurisprudence, specifically, the principle that is at the core of the GDPR that children might be less informed about risks, consequences, safeguards and rights in relation to the processing of personal data. The ban on processing harmful to child well-being (Section 9(2)) in the Act brings about a principle-based standard which goes beyond mechanistic consent requirements and also grants room to accommodate changing technological situations.[20]

The effectiveness of these protections however relies heavily on effectiveness of implementation. The requirement of verifiable parental consent, though necessary, has practical

[19]Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, § 18 (establishing Data Protection Board as enforcement authority); Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Press Release, status update on DPBI operationalization as of Nov. 2025 (confirming incomplete institutional development).

[20] Digital Personal Data Protection (Processing of Personal Data for Specified Purposes) Rules, 2024 (Draft), MeitY, § 2 (providing sector-specific guidance on data processing; pending finalization).

challenges in a setting in which 70% of Indian families with children do not have formal systems of verifying identities over the internet to the same extent as developed jurisdictions. The recommendations of the NCPCR on the topic in August 2024 are an indicator that these issues have been acknowledged and that institutional remedies are offered, as statutory adequacy may not necessarily be reflected in practice.[21]

Analysis of the information provided by successful children shows that data protection of successful children must have institutional maturity over and above the statutory regulations. The success of the GDPR is partially associated with the national data protection authorities that are well-established and resource-rich and have extensive experience in enforcing the policy. The successful implementation of COPPA is demonstrated by the settlements of YouTube/Google in the amount of 170 million and Tik Tok/ByteDance in the amount of 92 million which is the result of the active institutional capacity and readiness to impose significant fines exhibited by the FTC. The new institutional framework of the DPDP Act, along with its experience in the first time of application of the Indian data protection legislation, generates foreseeable difficulties in the implementation.[22]

Furthermore, the Act's potential is constrained by definitional ambiguities and exempt zones. The Draft DPDP Rules 2025, while providing implementation guidance, permit exemptions from children's protection obligations 'where the data processing is verifiably safe'—a circular standard lacking objective criteria. The absence of clear definitions

[21]Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, §§ 9(5), 16(1) (requiring central government notification of data transfer restrictions; list not published as of Nov. 2025).

[22] Regulation (EU) 2016/679, Recital 38 (establishing foundational principle regarding child vulnerability in data protection).

for 'targeted advertising' (distinct from behavioral monitoring), 'tracking,' and 'detrimental effect' creates compliance uncertainty and enforcement challenges. These deficiencies, present also in early GDPR implementation but subsequently clarified through EDPB guidelines and regulatory enforcement, require proactive institutional development in India.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, provides a basic framework of data protection of children in India which, in its statutory structure, can be shown to be largely adequate in terms of the international standards. The obligatory nature of the verifiable parental consent, the ban on harmful processing, the limitation on tracking and targeted advertising, and the substantial penalty frameworks are substantial legal obligations to the child digital rights.

But the shift in statutory adequacy to the practical protection needs to be systematically developed institutionally and with additional regulatory assistance. The following priority recommendations are found in this research:

1. Create the Data Protection Board of India as a fully-functional, autonomous agency with children-specific data protection division, based on GDPR national authorities and COPPA FTC organization.

2. Create detailed draft regulations on industry-specific applications, especially on educational technology platforms, social media services, and gaming applications.

3. Create objective consent verification criteria, including technology-neutral methods that would suit the varying degrees of digital infrastructure maturity in India.

4. Add list of publish data transfer restriction under Section 16, stating the requirements of cross-border compliance to multinational platforms.

5. Introduce the compulsory data protection impact assessment (DPIA) of high-risk processing of data concerning children, especially with the focus on artificial intelligence applications and algorithmic profiling.

6. Periodical enforcement measures with penalty rules that are sensitive to platform size and the severity of violations, so that they have a deterrent effect.

7. Liaise with the state governments and non-profit organizations to create awareness campaigns to the public about the digital rights of children, the duties of parents, and the avenues to complain.

8. Build international collaboration systems with GDPR regulators, FTC, and UK Information Commissioner Office to deal with cross-border breaches and exchange enforcement best practices.

The DPDP Act is the Indian promise to safeguard 400+ million children in the world that is growing increasingly digital. Its legal system shows advanced interaction with global best practices and awareness of the digital vulnerabilities peculiar to the context of developing countries. The shift in statutory promise to practical protection, though, needs long-term institutional dedication, globalizing implementing regulations, and evolutionary enforcement strategy that learns worldwide precedent and react to India-specific difficulties. This study shows that the adequacy of the data protection of children is not achieved by the comprehensive nature of the statutes, but through the interplay between the law,

institutional capacity, technological adjustments, and the vigor of the enforcement.

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