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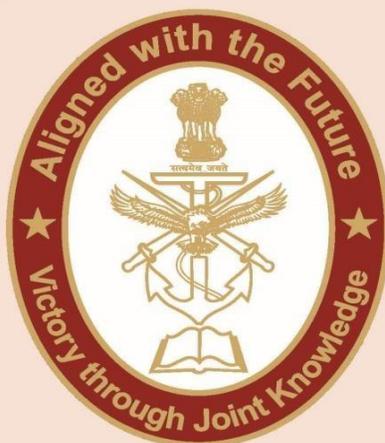
ISSUE BRIEF

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# A SAFER INTERNET FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: INDIA'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IN DIGITAL CHILD PROTECTION

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**A Safer Internet for the Next Generation: India's Global Leadership in Digital Child Protection**



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### **Introduction: The Unseen Danger in the Digital Playground**

In today's world, where children are getting their first smartphones before they even hit their teens, the internet has become a double-edged sword. It offers endless opportunities for learning and connection, but it also opens the door to a darker side that many parents and guardians are still coming to grips with. One of the most chilling examples of this danger was the Blue Whale Challenge—a so-called “suicide game” that first came into the spotlight in Russia<sup>i</sup>. It was said to lure vulnerable teenagers through a series of increasingly harmful tasks, ending in a final push toward suicide. This was not the only one as other disturbing trend like the Momo Challenge<sup>ii</sup>, the Jonathan Galindo Challenge<sup>iii</sup>, and similar tragic cases linked to cyberbullying have shown just how easy it is for harmful content to spread under the radar. These threats mostly found in hibernation

and largely thrive in private chats, hidden corners of the internet, and even on popular apps which remains unnoticed until it's too late. India having the largest pool of young people and a booming digital ecosystem, it stands right at the heart of this challenge. Although Indian government has issued advisories, bans, and warnings in the past, but it has largely remained a reactive measure which are not enough given the scenario. What's urgently needed is a long-term, proactive approach to ensure that India doesn't just protect its youth but sets a global example in digital child safety.

This issue brief takes a closer look at that challenge—and how we might begin to meet it in the following steps:

1. The origins and psychology behind these online suicide challenges.
2. How social media platforms amplify digital dangers through algorithms.
3. Why India's children are especially vulnerable to such threats.
4. The legal and policy gaps that hinder effective intervention.
5. Practical solutions—how India can take the lead in ensuring global digital child safety.

This is not just a fight against one particular game or challenge. It is a battle for the mental well-being of an entire generation, a fight to create a safe digital ecosystem where children can thrive without falling prey to psychological coercion and cyber exploitation.

### **Understanding the Digital Suicide Challenge Phenomenon**

Back in 2015, an unsettling story began making waves in Russia—a sinister online “game” that was allegedly guiding teenagers toward self-harm and even suicide. This became known as the Blue Whale Challenge. At the heart of it was a former psychology student, Philipp Budeikin<sup>iv</sup>, who claimed he was "cleansing" society by preying on vulnerable individuals he saw as having no purpose.

Whether or not the full scope of the challenge was as widespread as some reports suggested, the psychological tactics it employed were chillingly real. It wasn't just a game—it was a deeply manipulative process designed to exploit emotional fragility and social isolation.

**Here's how it typically unfolded:**

- Initial Contact: The challenge often began with targeting teens who posted about feeling depressed or lonely online. These individuals were invited into what were framed as “exclusive” groups—spaces where someone claimed to understand what they were going through.

- Building Trust: Once inside, these teens were groomed by so-called “curators” or group admins. These curators posed as mentors or friends, slowly gaining the teen's trust while subtly driving a wedge between them and their real-life support systems—family, friends, anyone who might intervene.

- The 50-Day Descent: Over the course of 50 days, participants were given daily tasks. It started off with things that seemed strange but harmless—like watching disturbing videos or waking up at odd hours. But gradually, the demands escalated. Self-harm became part of the tasks: carving symbols into skin, standing on building ledges, or engaging in other dangerous behavior. On the final day, the “challenge” instructed participants to end their lives.

The challenge is based on the foundation of secrecy and fear where its victims were often threatened of dire consequences like of potential harm to their families in case of noncompliance or leaving the challenge. With fear, guilt, and isolation mounting, many teens felt there was no way out and there are noted incidents to this challenge. A prominent being 15-year-old Isaiah Gonzalez from San Antonio, Texas who committed suicide where evidence pointed linkages to the Blue Whale Challenge<sup>v</sup>.

It served as a wake-up call: digital platforms can become breeding grounds for harm if we're not paying attention. For parents, teachers, and policymakers alike, it's a stark reminder of the urgent need for awareness, open conversations, and systems that protect our youth before it's too late.

## **1.1 The Blue Whale Challenge: Origins and Global Spread**

The digital landscape has become a double-edged sword for today's youth. While it offers unprecedented access to information and connectivity, it also harbors insidious threats that exploit the vulnerabilities of impressionable minds. Among these threats, certain online challenges have emerged as particularly perilous, leading unsuspecting participants down paths of self-harm and, in tragic instances, suicide. Understanding the origins, mechanisms, and impacts of these challenges is crucial in formulating effective strategies to protect our children.

### **The Genesis of the Blue Whale Challenge**

The **Blue Whale Challenge** reportedly originated in Russia around 2013, conceived by Philipp Budeikin, a psychology student who was later expelled from his university. Budeikin's purported intention was chilling: to "cleanse" society by targeting individuals he deemed as having no value. He utilized the Russian social media platform VKontakte (VK) to reach out to vulnerable teenagers, luring them into a sinister game that would ultimately lead to their demise<sup>vi</sup>.

The structure of the Blue Whale Challenge was meticulously designed to erode the participants' psychological defenses. Over 50 days, individuals were assigned daily tasks that escalated in intensity and harm. Initial tasks appeared benign—drawing a whale on a piece of paper or watching specific movies. However, as the days progressed, the tasks became increasingly macabre, involving acts of self-mutilation, sleep deprivation, and exposure to horror content during the early hours. The culmination of this harrowing journey was the final directive: to commit suicide.

## Global Impact and Notable Incidents

The ramifications of the Blue Whale Challenge were felt worldwide, with numerous countries reporting cases linked to the game:

- **Russia:** The challenge first gained notoriety here, with reports suggesting a significant number of teen suicides were connected to the game. Notable cases included teenagers like Angelina Davydova and Diana Kuznetsova<sup>vii</sup>, who were found to have engaged with online groups associated with the challenge before their untimely deaths.
- **India (2017):** The Indian subcontinent was not spared. In Mumbai, 14-year-old Manpreet Singh's suicide was linked to the Blue Whale Challenge, marking one of the first reported cases in the country<sup>viii</sup>. Similar incidents were reported in Kerala and West Bengal, prompting the Indian government to direct major tech platforms like Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp to remove all related content.
- **Brazil (2018):** Authorities uncovered interactions between young Brazilians and anonymous "curators" who guided them through the 50-day challenge, leading to tragic outcomes<sup>ix</sup>.
- **United Kingdom:** Educational institutions and law enforcement agencies issued warnings to parents and students<sup>x</sup>. Social media platforms, recognizing their role in the dissemination of such content, began implementing anti-suicide measures to curb the spread.

While some experts argued that the Blue Whale Challenge was a manifestation of moral panic, the pattern of behaviors and the psychological manipulation tactics employed highlighted the tangible dangers present in unregulated digital spaces.

## Evolution into Other Sinister Challenges

The Blue Whale Challenge set a grim precedent, paving the way for other hazardous online phenomena<sup>xi</sup>:

- **The Momo Challenge (2018):** Emerging primarily through WhatsApp, participants were reportedly contacted by a user named "Momo," characterized by a grotesque avatar—a distorted doll-like face<sup>xii</sup>. The challenge allegedly involved Momo instructing children to perform a series of dangerous tasks, including self-harm and suicide, under the threat of exposing their personal information or harming their loved ones. However, investigations later revealed that the Momo Challenge was largely a hoax, with no substantial evidence linking it to actual harm.
- **The Jonathan Galindo Challenge (2020):** Teens were reportedly contacted by individuals donning a masked persona resembling a distorted version of Disney's Goofy character<sup>xiii</sup>. These figures urged adolescents to engage in life-threatening dares, drawing parallels to the Blue Whale Challenge. The challenge was linked to at least one suicide, raising alarms about its potential impact.
- **The Skull Breaker Challenge (2020):** Originating on TikTok, this challenge involved three participants standing side by side. The two individuals on the sides would trick the person in the middle into jumping, only to then kick their legs out from under them, causing them to fall backward<sup>xiv</sup>. This prank led to severe injuries, including concussions and spinal damage, prompting TikTok to remove related content and issue warnings about the dangers of such stunts.

Each of these challenges, whether real or hoaxes amplified by media coverage, leveraged similar psychological tactics: exploiting fear, exerting social pressure, and operating under a veil of secrecy.

## II. The Psychological Impact of Digital Addiction and Dark Challenges

In today's digital era, the internet serves as both a playground and a battlefield for adolescents. While it offers unparalleled opportunities for learning and socialization, it also exposes young minds to significant risks, including digital addiction and harmful online challenges. Understanding the psychological mechanisms at play is crucial to safeguarding our youth.

## **2.1 Why Are Children So Vulnerable?**

Adolescents are at a pivotal stage of development, making them particularly susceptible to online manipulation. Several factors contribute to this heightened vulnerability:

- **Underdeveloped Critical Thinking:** The adolescent brain undergoes significant development, particularly in areas responsible for decision-making and risk assessment. This immaturity can lead to impulsive behaviors and a diminished capacity to foresee the consequences of their actions.
- **Social Validation Needs:** The quest for peer approval intensifies during adolescence. In the digital realm, this translates to a pursuit of likes, shares, and followers, often driving teenagers to engage in behaviors they perceive as commendable or trendsetting, regardless of potential risks.
- **Digital Isolation:** Excessive screen time can lead to reduced face-to-face interactions, weakening familial bonds and diminishing parental oversight. This isolation creates a void that online predators and harmful communities are quick to exploit.

### **2.1.1 The Role of Social Validation**

In the age of social media, teenagers' self-worth is increasingly tied to online recognition. This environment fosters:

- **Approval from Peers:** Positive reinforcement through likes and comments can become addictive, pushing teens to continually seek validation.
- **Belongingness in Online Communities:** Virtual groups offer a sense of identity and belonging, but not all communities have positive influences. Some may promote harmful behaviors or ideologies.
- **Recognition through Risky Behavior:** Viral challenges often glorify dangerous actions, enticing teens to participate for the sake of online fame.

### **2.1.2 Psychological Manipulation: The Digital Predator's Toolkit**

Online manipulators employ sophisticated tactics to ensnare their victims:

- **Fear Tactics:** Threats such as "If you leave, something bad will happen" instill anxiety, compelling compliance.
- **Gradual Desensitization:** Starting with benign tasks, predators slowly escalate demands, making harmful actions seem like a natural progression.
- **Emotional Isolation:** Predators often alienate victims from their support systems, asserting, "Your family doesn't understand you, but we do," to deepen dependence.

Once entrapped, victims often feel powerless, ensnared in a web of manipulation and control.

## 2.2 How Social Media Algorithms Worsen the Problem

Social media platforms are designed to maximize user engagement, often at the expense of user well-being. The algorithms that curate content can inadvertently expose adolescents to harm:

- **Amplification of Harmful Content:** Engagement-based algorithms prioritize content that garners attention. Unfortunately, sensational and extreme content often fits this criterion, leading to the proliferation of harmful material.
- **Echo Chambers:** Algorithms create feedback loops where users are continually exposed to similar content, reinforcing harmful beliefs or behaviors without exposure to corrective perspectives.
- **Exploitation by Predators:** Certain platforms, through their design and algorithmic suggestions, inadvertently facilitate connections between vulnerable youths and malicious actors.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies to protect adolescents in the digital landscape.

Staying Informed: Recent Developments

Recent discussions have emerged around the potential regulation of smartphone usage among minors. Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza has advocated for banning smartphones for individuals under 18, citing tech companies' failure to regulate harmful content effectively. Conversely, experts like Dr. Amy Orben caution against blanket bans, suggesting they may be unrealistic and potentially detrimental<sup>xv</sup>. Instead, they advocate for nuanced strategies, including digital literacy and platform safety measures.

The intersection of adolescent psychology and digital technology presents complex challenges. Recognizing the factors that make children vulnerable, understanding the mechanisms of online manipulation, and acknowledging the role of social media algorithms are critical steps toward creating a safer digital environment. Collaborative efforts involving parents, educators, policymakers, and tech companies are essential to empower our youth and protect them from the darker facets of the online world.

### **India's Role in Combating Digital Dangers**

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, India's burgeoning youth population faces unprecedented challenges. The proliferation of harmful online content, exacerbated by algorithm-driven platforms, necessitates urgent intervention to safeguard children's health and well-being.

#### **3.1 India's Growing Digital Youth Population**

India boasts one of the largest youth demographics globally, with millions of children and adolescents accessing the internet daily. This widespread digital engagement, while offering educational and social benefits, also exposes young users to significant risks.

- **Mobile-First Exposure:** Unlike many Western nations where children's initial digital interactions are often through shared or monitored devices like family computers or tablets, Indian youths frequently gain access via personal smartphones. This trend leads to unmonitored and unrestricted internet usage, increasing exposure to potential online threats.
- **Parental Unawareness:** A concerning number of Indian parents do not actively monitor their children's online activities, leaving them vulnerable to harmful content and interactions.

- **Gaps in Cybersecurity Laws:** India's existing cyber laws lack robust, child-specific provisions, making it challenging to address and mitigate issues unique to children's online safety effectively.

### 3.2 The Role of Algorithms in Spreading Harmful Content

Social media platforms employ engagement-driven algorithms designed to maximize user interaction. Unfortunately, these algorithms often prioritize sensational and provocative content, leading to unintended consequences:

- **Rapid Dissemination of Harmful Material:** Content related to self-harm or suicide can spread more quickly than resources promoting mental health, inadvertently glorifying dangerous behaviors.
- **Emergence of Dark Web Forums and Private Groups:** The algorithmic emphasis on engagement facilitates the formation of secluded online communities where harmful challenges and behaviors can be promoted without oversight.

Given that India has over 800 million internet users<sup>xvi</sup>, the potential scale of exposure to such harmful content is vast, underscoring the need for immediate regulatory measures.

### 3.3 What Has India Done So Far?

Recognizing the escalating digital threats to its youth, the Indian government has initiated several measures:

- **Banning Harmful Online Challenges:** In response to incidents like the Blue Whale Challenge, authorities directed major tech companies to remove related links and content.
- **Establishment of Cybercrime Reporting Portals:** Platforms have been set up to facilitate the reporting of cyber offenses, aiming to provide a streamlined process for victims and concerned individuals.
- **Introduction of Digital Literacy Initiatives:** Programs aimed at educating the public about safe internet practices have been launched, targeting both urban and rural populations.

However, these efforts have primarily been reactive. Social media platforms are not legally obligated to pre-emptively remove harmful content unless explicitly directed by

governmental authorities, highlighting a significant gap in proactive digital safety measures.

### **3.4 The Need for a National Digital Safety Strategy**

While existing frameworks like the Information Technology Act of 2000 address various cybercrimes, they lack specific provisions tailored to children's online safety. The National Cyber Security Policy of 2013 outlines strategies for digital risk mitigation but does not focus explicitly on challenges affecting minors.

To effectively protect its youth, India must develop a comprehensive National Digital Safety Strategy that includes:

- **Child-Centric Legal Provisions:** Amending existing laws to incorporate clear, enforceable measures specifically designed to protect children online.
- **Mandatory Content Regulation:** Implementing policies that require social media platforms to proactively monitor and remove harmful content, with stringent penalties for non-compliance.
- **Enhanced Digital Literacy Programs:** Expanding educational initiatives to promote responsible internet use among children and equip parents and educators with the tools to guide and monitor online activities effectively.
- **Support Systems for Affected Individuals:** Establishing accessible resources for children and adolescents struggling with digital addiction or exposure to harmful online content, including counseling services and helplines.

By adopting a proactive and comprehensive approach, India can not only address the current digital threats facing its youth but also set a global precedent for child-centric digital safety in the ever-evolving online world.

## **IV. What Can India Do? Recommendations for a National Digital Child Safety Strategy**

Banning harmful online challenges such as the Blue Whale Challenge or the Momo Challenge is merely a temporary solution. Since the threats are bound to evolve, adapt, and often reappear in new disguises on different platforms, this needs a different approach of countermeasure. The threat which once was just being forwarded via chat groups later on went to find dedicated hashtags and also circulation of viral videos.

Therefore India being a promoter of digital accessibility and resources must aim for a proactive, long-term strategy that tackles the root causes of online danger. The measures can come in the way of drafting legal reform, enhancing public awareness across sectors, better cooperation and coordination with tech companies, and post recovery mental health support.

#### 1. Fixing the Legal Gaps: Holding Algorithms and Platforms Accountable

India's current cyber regulations, which have travelled from the Information Technology (IT) Act of 2000 to Digital India Act of 2023 (Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA)<sup>xvii</sup>. The IT Act 2000 although is regarded as foundation of the regulations but they fall short when it comes to protecting children and teenagers from platform-driven harm in this digital era when large part of kid's life is spent online.

Another crucial issue is the algorithms of the social media platforms, since the systems are built keeping in mind for more engagement the contents which are often offensive in nature receives more promotion. This includes posts encouraging self-harm or cyberbullying that not only promotes hatred but deprives the help to the affected in a larger way.

India given its digital leadership must update its laws to clearly define platform responsibility, just like it introduced the concept of compliance officer, but now it needs a chief coordinating officer. Provisions must be drafted for social media companies to face serious consequences if their algorithms promote or fail to block harmful content, especially when it affects children. There is a need for amending the IT Act for better inclusion of strong, enforceable penalties for platforms that fails to ensure safety of child rights.

Additionally, the government should make it mandatory for **platforms to integrate AI-powered content moderation systems** that proactively detect and remove harmful material before it gains traction.

#### **Global Precedents:**

- **The European Union's Digital Services Act (2022)<sup>xviii</sup>** requires platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to **remove harmful content proactively**, preventing them from relying solely on user reports.

- India can **adopt similar legal mechanisms to hold tech companies accountable** for the dangers their algorithms perpetuate.

### Empowering Parents: The First Line of Defense at Home

One of the biggest blind spots in keeping kids safe online is right at home. The truth is, many parents—especially in rural areas or households where digital tech is still new—just don't know what their children are really up against online. Whether it's cyberbullying, unhealthy screen habits, or creepy viral challenges like the Blue Whale game, a lot of these dangers fly completely under the radar.

This gap between what kids experience online and what parents understand is growing fast. And that leaves young people to figure out the digital world on their own—often without the support they need when things go wrong.

That's why India needs a big, bold awareness drive for parents. Think of something as widespread as the Pulse Polio campaign—but this time, for digital safety. The goal? To make sure every parent, in every part of the country, knows how to protect their child online.

Here's what that could look like:

- Mass awareness campaigns on TV, radio, and social media, in regional languages, breaking down online risks in a way that's easy to understand.
- Workshops in schools, villages, and community centers, where parents can ask questions, share concerns, and learn how to spot red flags early.
- A simple, government-backed app that gives real-time alerts on dangerous online trends, tips for setting boundaries, and advice on what to do if your child seems anxious, withdrawn, or overly attached to their screen.

At the end of the day, digital safety can't just be taught in classrooms. It needs to start at the dinner table, during bedtime conversations, in the quiet moments when kids are most likely to open up. Parents don't need to be tech experts—they just need the right tools, the right information, and a little help getting started.

This app could include features such as parental controls, internet safety checklists, and direct links to cybercrime reporting portals.

Why This Matters:

- A 2020 study by non-profit Child Rights and You (CRY) Delhi found that 48% of Indian teenagers suffer from social media addiction, making them highly susceptible to dangerous online trends<sup>xix</sup>. This is expected only to increase now in 2025 with digitalisation in full swing.
- A survey revealed that 72% of Indian parents do not actively monitor their children's online activities, leaving them at risk of exposure to harmful content<sup>xx</sup>.
- Children at very early age are now participating in dangerous online challenges, often without parental supervision.<sup>xxi</sup>

By equipping parents with the right knowledge and tools, India can prevent online harm at the household level.

### 3. Collaborating with Tech Giants to Implement AI-Driven Safety Measures

Given the immense influence that companies like Google, Meta, TikTok, and YouTube wield in the digital ecosystem, India must actively engage with them to implement robust child-protection measures. Currently, social media platforms prioritize user engagement over safety, resulting in the rapid spread of dangerous challenges, cyberbullying, and exploitative content.

To mitigate these risks, the Indian government should work closely with Silicon Valley firms to develop AI-driven child-protection tools. This can include:

- Developing AI-powered content moderation algorithms that detect and restrict the spread of self-harm content before it goes viral.
- Introducing stricter age verification systems for high-risk platforms like TikTok and Discord, ensuring that children under a certain age cannot create accounts without parental consent.
- Mandating a "Safe Mode" for minors, which automatically limits exposure to harmful content, similar to YouTube's "Restricted Mode" feature.

Example from Global Best Practices:

- YouTube modified its algorithm in 2021 to prevent self-harm videos from appearing in recommendations. However, other platforms have yet to follow suit. India must demand greater accountability from social media companies.

#### Why It's Important:

- Social media algorithms are designed for engagement, not safety.
- Without regulation, harmful content spreads unchecked, leading to severe mental health consequences for children.
- If India enforces strict safety standards, it can push global tech companies to adopt responsible AI-driven moderation.

#### 4 Building a 24/7 Lifeline: Psychological Support for Children in Digital Distress

Behind every online challenge or cyberbullying incident is a child silently battling fear, confusion, and emotional trauma. Too many children are suffering in silence—ashamed to speak up, or too afraid of how their families and friends might react. This is a quiet crisis, unfolding in homes, schools, and on screens across the country.

India needs to act—urgently. We must set up a nationwide, 24/7 **Digital Crisis Helpline** dedicated to children dealing with online coercion, cyberbullying, or digital exploitation. This isn't just about technology; it's about people. The helpline should be run by trained mental health professionals who can offer compassionate support on the spot—whether that means calming a panicked child, helping them report abuse, or connecting them with long-term care.

But support shouldn't stop there. Mental health awareness must be integrated into school counselling programs. We need to teach kids how to recognize warning signs and, more importantly, to feel safe asking for help. No child should feel alone in navigating this.

To reach more children—especially teens who may not feel comfortable talking to adults—confidential chatbot-based services could offer an anonymous lifeline. These tools, available in regional languages and designed with cultural sensitivity, can make all the difference in a moment of crisis.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We can learn from models that are already working. The UK's **Childline**, for instance, provides live chat support for children facing online threats and helps thousands each year<sup>xxii</sup>. South Korea's **Digital Detox Program** offers structured therapy for young people struggling with internet addiction<sup>xxiii</sup>.

India can—and must—develop its own version, one that reflects our social and cultural diversity. We need to build a support system that doesn't just react to problems, but helps

prevent them.

To make this sustainable, the government should consider creating a **Digital Child Safety Authority (DCSA)**—either under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) or as a new branch within the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the MHA<sup>xxiv</sup>.

**The DCSA could:**

- Monitor emerging online threats facing children
- Build awareness campaigns tailored for different age groups and regions
- Support local NGOs and schools with training and tools
- Coordinate with tech companies to enforce child safety standards
- Work directly with technology companies to introduce stronger child-protection algorithms.
- Manage a 24/7 national helpline for reporting and responding to online abuse cases.
- Involve cyber security experts from tri-services and police forces (on deputation) to the digital de-addiction centre for accessing threats aimed at impacting national security, like that of one established in AIIMS<sup>xxv</sup>.

A dedicated government body focused solely on digital child safety would ensure that proactive measures are taken rather than relying on reactive bans of individual challenges.

## 6. Strengthening Cyber Laws and Digital Literacy Initiatives

To create a safer digital environment for Indian children, the government must:

- Amend the IT Act to include explicit penalties for platforms that promote or fail to remove harmful online challenges.
- Introduce digital age verification mechanisms (similar to those in the EU<sup>xxvi</sup> and Australia<sup>xxvii</sup>) to prevent children from accessing harmful content.
- Make digital literacy a mandatory subject in schools, ensuring that children are taught how to identify and respond to online dangers.

India must transition from reactive policies to proactive digital safety frameworks, ensuring that future generations are well-equipped to navigate the online world safely.

India, as the world's largest online youth market, has the opportunity to take a leadership role in shaping global digital safety frameworks. While national efforts are crucial, the borderless nature of the internet means that tackling digital threats effectively requires international collaboration.

### 7.1 Working with International Organizations on Child Safety Standards

Organizations such as UNICEF<sup>1</sup>, INTERPOL<sup>2</sup>, and ASEAN<sup>3</sup> have developed comprehensive child protection frameworks that address online risks, cybercrime, and digital literacy. India must actively engage with these bodies to:

- Create globally recognized digital safety guidelines that social media companies and online platforms must adhere to.
- Develop real-time monitoring systems to track and respond to the emergence of dangerous online challenges across different countries.
- Implement cross-border reporting mechanisms, allowing Indian authorities to collaborate with global partners to quickly identify and dismantle online predators, trafficking networks, and harmful content spreaders.

### Conclusion: The Need for Urgent Action

Digital safety is not just a policy issue—it is a life-and-death concern. India must take proactive leadership in global child digital protection before another innocent life is lost to the digital suicide trap. India, as a digital leader, must take proactive measures—from legal reforms to technological innovations—to protect its children. The future of a safe digital world depends on stronger laws, parental vigilance, and ethical tech practices.

By implementing a National Digital Child Safety Strategy, India can lead global efforts in making the internet a safer place for future generations.

### Why India Must Lead in Global Digital Safety

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund

<sup>2</sup> International Criminal Police Organization

<sup>3</sup> Association of Southeast Asian Nations

- India's internet outreach is now extending to both rural and urban with large under-18 internet users, making it a critical stakeholder in shaping global digital safety norms<sup>xxviii</sup>.
- Emerging economies often follow India's lead in policy formulation—by setting high safety standards, India can influence other nations to adopt similar protections.
- A collaborative approach with global partners ensures that online child protection measures are implemented at a systemic level, rather than relying on isolated national interventions.
- Child safety being a concern for all countries, India can form a coalition with uniting countries like Russia and USA and Europe under one umbrella to make it a successful venture.

By engaging with international organizations, learning from global best practices, and partnering with technology leaders, India can position itself as a global leader in digital child safety—ensuring a safer online environment for future generations worldwide.

The rise of online challenges like Blue Whale exposes the digital dangers faced by India's youth. While the government has made strides in cybercrime regulation, existing policies remain inadequate in tackling child-specific online threats, demanding a coordinated approach with inclusion of defence representation in all future policy formations.

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