

Between likes and silences: childhood at digital risk

ARTICLE

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Abstract

Child sexual exploitation in cyberspace constitutes a growing and highly complex phenomenon that challenges protective legislation and public policies. This article analyzes how digital platforms have become spaces of vulnerability, while simultaneously generating social and political disputes over rights and responsibilities. Based on a critical literature review, we articulate the contributions of authors such as Gil, Minayo, Fonseca, Nascimento and Maraschin, in addition to legislations such as the 1988 Federal Constitution, the Statute of Children and Adolescents, and Law No. 13,431/2017. The results highlight factors that intensify digital exploitation, such as the adultification of childhood, the commodification of images, and weaknesses in criminal investigation, while emphasizing discursive disputes surrounding the categories "sexual abuse," "sexual exploitation," and "pedophilia." We conclude that effective confrontation requires intersectoral, international, and educational actions, aimed not only at punishment but also at prevention and the promotion of emancipatory practices that safeguard the dignity of childhood.

Keywords: Child Sexual Exploitation. Cyberspace. Children's Rights. Public Policies. Integral Protection.

Entre *likes* e silêncios: a exploração sexual infantil nas plataformas digitais

Resumo

A exploração sexual infantil no ciberespaço configura um fenômeno crescente e de grande complexidade, que desafia legislações e políticas públicas de proteção. Este artigo analisa como as plataformas digitais se tornaram espaços de vulnerabilidade, ao mesmo tempo em que suscitam disputas sociais e políticas sobre direitos e responsabilidades. Com base em revisão bibliográfica crítica, articulamos autores como Gil, Minayo, Fonseca, Nascimento e Maraschin, além de legislações como a Constituição Federal de 1988, o Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente e a Lei nº 13.431/2017. Os resultados evidenciam fatores que intensificam a exploração digital, como adultização da infância, mercantilização das imagens e fragilidade da investigação criminal, ressaltando disputas discursivas em torno das categorias "abuso sexual", "exploração sexual" e "pedofilia". Concluímos que o enfrentamento requer ações intersetoriais,

internacionais e educativas, voltadas não apenas à punição, mas à prevenção e à promoção de práticas emancipatórias que assegurem a dignidade da infância.

Palavras-chave: Exploração Sexual Infantil. Ciberespaço. Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente. Políticas Públicas. Proteção Integral.

1 Introduction

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We live in a society in which childhood—now increasingly connected to digital technologies—faces, simultaneously, opportunities for learning, digital interaction, and significant risks. Digital platforms, originally designed as spaces for interaction, entertainment, and content sharing, have also become environments conducive to criminal practices, among which child sexual exploitation stands out. This reality, intensified by the globalization of the internet and the immediacy of communication, exposes children and adolescents to sophisticated forms of luring, violation, and silencing.

Reflecting on this scenario, we understand that online sexual violence is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a historical and structural process of violating children's rights, which were consolidated in Brazil through the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute – ECA). The rise of social networks, messaging applications, and online games expands the possibilities of contact between victims and offenders, who employ diverse strategies such as digital grooming, exploitation through live-streaming, and the circulation of materials produced for criminal purposes.

At this point, it is important to highlight Seffner and Felipe's (2022) critique of the expression “child sexual abuse,” since the term *abuse* presupposes the possibility of an acceptable “use” of a child’s body—which is inconceivable. Thus, the authors argue for the use of the expression “sexual violence” as a way to emphasize the power imbalance between adults and children. In dialogue with this perspective, Rosa and Felipe (2020) show that terminology is not neutral, as its choice directly shapes how we conceptualize, prevent, and confront the issue. Based on the concept of “pedofiliação” (the social process of eroticizing children’s bodies and normalizing such practices; Seffner; Felipe, 2022), we understand that the eroticization of children’s bodies—disseminated across cultural

artifacts and intensified in digital environments—helps legitimize social practices that trivialize violence. This reality exposes gaps in protection, in platform regulation, and in the ability of the State and society to keep pace with the speed of technological transformations.

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According to the *Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e da Cidadania* (Brazilian Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship), based on data published on its official portal (*gov.br*), in 2023—up to the month of April—there were 69.3 thousand reports and 397 thousand recorded violations of the human rights of children and adolescents filed through *Disque 100 (Disque Direitos Humanos)*, Brazil's national human rights reporting hotline. Of these, 9.5 thousand reports and 17.5 thousand violations involved physical sexual violence (abuse, rape, and sexual exploitation) and psychological forms of violence¹.

In its Annual Report, the *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (Brazilian Forum on Public Safety, 2023) states that there were 56,820 cases of *estupro de vulnerável*—a crime defined under Brazilian law as sexual assault against a victim under 14 years of age, or a person with an illness or disability that renders them unable to give consent or resist coercion. Of all such cases, 40,659 involved victims aged 13 or younger, representing 61.4% of recorded rape cases in 2022. The report also indicates that most victims are girls between 10 and 13 years old. However, it is important to note that boys are also victims of abuse, accounting for 14% of cases, 43.4% of whom are between 5 and 9 years old.

Recently, the urgency of this debate resurfaced in the public sphere after digital influencer and comedian Felca² released a widely circulated video titled *Adultização*, in which he denounced practices of child exploitation by influencers on digital platforms and exposed the functioning of an alleged “Algoritmo P” that facilitates the dissemination of

¹ BRASIL. Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e da Cidadania. **Disque 100 registra mais de 17,5 mil violações sexuais contra crianças e adolescentes nos quatro primeiros meses de 2023**. Disponível em: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/maio/disque-100-registra-mais-de-17-5-mil-violacoes-sexuais-contra-criancas-e-adolescentes-nos-quatro-primeiros-meses-de-2023>. Accessed on: 24 Sept. 2023.

² Felca is the pseudonym of Felipe Bressanim Pereira, a Brazilian digital influencer, YouTuber, and comedian known for producing satirical and critically humorous videos. He recently gained national prominence after denouncing the “adultização” of minors on social media through his video *Adultização*, which sparked widespread public debate in Brazil.

such content. The video went viral, reaching more than 20 million views in just a few days and triggering an unprecedented wave of legal, political, and media repercussions.

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In light of this, we understand that the relevance of this study stems from the need to address a problem that threatens fundamental rights and compromises the full development of children and adolescents. By investigating child sexual exploitation on digital platforms, our aim is not only to give visibility to a phenomenon that is often silenced but also to contribute to the strengthening of protective practices and to the development of more effective public policies. Conducting a literature review allows us to map recent scientific production, institutional reports, and national and international legislation, offering a critical analysis that engages both theory and practice.

Given this context, the present study is guided by the following question: how has child sexual exploitation on digital platforms been configured in the contemporary context, and what are the main limitations faced by public policies and the protection network in addressing this phenomenon?

Accordingly, our general objective is to critically analyze child sexual exploitation on digital platforms, identifying its mechanisms of occurrence, as well as its social and institutional impacts, and the responses proposed by public policies and the protection network. More specifically, we aim to examine—based on scientific literature and institutional documents—the forms of luring, violation, and silencing that characterize child sexual exploitation in cyberspace, and to discuss the main challenges and gaps in public policies, legislation, and intersectoral practices in confronting this issue in digital environments.

We hypothesize that child sexual exploitation on digital platforms is intensified by the absence of effective mechanisms for regulation, monitoring, and accountability of technology companies. Despite normative advances, such as the Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute – ECA, Law No. 13.441/2017, and the *Marco Civil da Internet* (Brazilian Civil Rights Framework for the Internet), significant gaps persist in the articulation of public policies and in the actions of the protection network, especially when confronted with the complexity of the digital environment.

By bringing visibility to this issue, we reaffirm our commitment to building a fairer, safer, and more protective society for children. In this context, it becomes urgent to develop critical analyses that deepen our understanding of the effects of child sexual exploitation in cyberspace and of the challenges involved in confronting it. This study is part of that effort, seeking—through a literature review—to understand the dimensions of this phenomenon, highlight its consequences, and indicate pathways for public policies, protective practices, and educational strategies capable of safeguarding childhood.

To achieve these objectives, the article is organized into sections that dialogue with one another. Following this introduction, we present the theoretical framework, in which we discuss the central categories of the debate and the normative frameworks that support comprehensive protection. Next, we describe the methodology that guided the research. We then present the results and discussion, highlighting the main issues identified in the literature and in the institutional documents analyzed. Finally, in the concluding remarks, we summarize the findings and outline possible directions for strengthening public policies and practices aimed at confronting this issue.

2 Methodology

In outlining the methodological approach of this study, we chose to conduct a critical-analytical literature review, as our aim was to understand child sexual exploitation on digital platforms based on existing scientific production, normative frameworks, and institutional documents. According to Gil (2017), a literature review enables the identification, analysis, and synthesis of systematized knowledge, allowing us to develop our own interpretations from multiple sources. This choice is justified by the relevance of mapping the state of the art of a phenomenon still in transformation, marked by the rapid pace of technological change and the complexity of its social implications.

For the review, we conducted searches in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), *Periódicos Capes*, and the *Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações* (BDTD), using the descriptors “child sexual exploitation,” “sexual abuse,” “cyberspace,” and

“digital platforms.” The temporal scope prioritized works published in the last fifteen years (2010–2025), corresponding to the period in which digital social networks became more consolidated and academic and institutional debates on sexual exploitation in virtual environments intensified. We selected scientific articles, books, legislation, and institutional reports that address the topic directly, with emphasis on the most recent studies.

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We also included international documents produced by organizations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations (UN), and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), as well as national reports from SaferNet Brasil, a non-governmental organization recognized for its work in combating online crimes and human rights violations. Additionally, we incorporated documents from the *Comitê Nacional de Enfrentamento à Violência Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes* and from institutions within the Brazilian justice system. This diversity of sources enabled us to develop a comprehensive analysis that integrates different disciplinary and institutional perspectives.

The selection process followed previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. We included works that discuss: childhood in the digital context; forms of online luring and sexual exploitation; national and international legislation; and strategies for addressing the issue developed by public policies and civil society. We excluded materials that did not present a direct relationship with the topic or that dealt only tangentially with digital technologies without addressing sexual exploitation. As indicated by the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM, 2018), the use of clear criteria is essential to ensure consistency, transparency, and reliability in bibliographic research.

The analysis of the collected material was conducted in an interpretive and critical manner. First, we organized the references into thematic axes such as “cyberspace and childhood vulnerability,” “legal frameworks and public policies,” “strategies for addressing the issue,” and “contemporary reports and denunciations.” We then carried out analytical reading, seeking to identify convergences, divergences, and gaps in academic and documentary production. Inspired by Minayo (2001), we understand that social phenomena must be analyzed in their complexity, acknowledging that digital child sexual exploitation is shaped by historical, cultural, political, and technological factors.

Furthermore, the approach adopted is qualitative and critical, insofar as we do not limit ourselves to describing existing literature but seek to problematize its findings in light of social theories and normative frameworks. As argued by Fonseca, Nascimento, and Maraschin (2012), researching “in difference” means valuing multiple perspectives, recognizing the production of meaning that emerges in diverse contexts, and avoiding reductionist interpretations. This stance allows us to highlight the plurality of voices and the need for interdisciplinary interpretations when addressing child sexual exploitation in digital environments.

Thus, we reaffirm that the chosen methodology is not merely a technical path but also an ethical-political position. By opting for a critical literature review, we commit to giving visibility to a phenomenon that is often silenced, highlighting both institutional responses and the contemporary reports that have mobilized society. This methodological choice enables us to understand the nuances of the problem and provide support for the development of more effective public policies and educational strategies committed to the comprehensive protection of children.

Based on these methodological procedures, we now proceed to the presentation of the results and discussion, in which we highlight the main findings from the literature, legislation, and recent reports on child sexual exploitation on digital platforms.

3 Results and Discussion

In this section, we present the results and discussion organized into three interdependent axes that make it possible to understand child sexual exploitation on digital platforms in its full complexity. First, we address the social issue, childhood, and cyberspace within the context of liquid modernity, highlighting how social and technological transformations heighten vulnerabilities and intensify violent practices (Section 3.1). Next, we discuss the normative frameworks, public policies, and contemporary reports that shape the Brazilian and international landscape, emphasizing legal advances, institutional gaps, and the impact of recent episodes that have mobilized society and the State (Section 3.2).

Finally, we analyze cyberspace as an ambivalent territory of violation and resistance, where practices of exploitation, negligence by digital platforms, and efforts to confront the issue coexist, while also offering possibilities for social mobilization, regulation, and the comprehensive protection of children (Section 3.3).

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3.1 The social issue, childhood, cyberspace, and liquid modernity

Child sexual violence is characterized as “a sexual act or sexual game, in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship, between one or more adults and a child or adolescent, with the purpose of sexually stimulating this child or adolescent, or using them to obtain sexual stimulation” (Azevedo; Guerra, 1998, p. 33). Today, child sexual violence is considered by the Pan American Health Organization (2003) to be a serious public health problem, due to its complexity and the frequency with which cases are recorded across societies worldwide.

According to the literature, child sexual violence is a complex phenomenon that manifests in various ways in societies around the world. As the data presented here indicate, this type of violence occurs predominantly within the family context. Saffioti (2015) argues that such practices are not associated solely with poverty or material deprivation. Rather, this phenomenon is rooted in historical, social, cultural, and economic dynamics, and is shaped primarily by power relations mediated by gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. It is essential to emphasize that child sexual violence, in its multiple dimensions, is also an expression of the social issue.

In this same perspective, Iamamoto (2018) reinforces that the social issue is defined as a phenomenon inseparable from class relations and from the structural inequalities produced by the capitalist mode of production. The author highlights that the exploitation of labor and the private appropriation of collectively generated wealth result in social contradictions manifested in poverty, unemployment, labor precarity, and social exclusion. She stresses that, in Brazil, these inequalities are amplified by the State, which, instead of guaranteeing rights, frequently operates to benefit financial capital and economic

elites. Furthermore, Iamamoto (2018) criticizes targeted social policies and the individualization of responsibility for poverty, arguing that such strategies depoliticize the social issue and weaken collective struggles for rights. Thus, we reaffirm that the social issue is not a matter of management or morality, but an expression of the contradictions of capitalism—one that demands political confrontation and collective organization of workers to build a more just society.

In analyzing child sexual exploitation on digital platforms, we begin with the understanding that the phenomenon must be interpreted in light of contemporary social transformations. Bauman (2001; 2007) describes liquid modernity as a time marked by fragile, transient, and volatile bonds, in which relationships are formed and dissolved with the same speed. In this context, internet-mediated interactions intensify this liquidity, making children and adolescents even more vulnerable to contact with groomers and exploiters. The ephemerality and superficiality of digital ties allow abusive practices to occur covertly, sustained by anonymity and by the absence of boundaries characteristic of cyberspace.

This perspective is complemented by Castells (2003), who emphasizes that we live in a network society in which technologies are not merely tools but structures that shape social life, communication, and the production of meaning. Thus, cyberspace becomes an ambivalent territory: while it offers opportunities for interaction, learning, and leisure, it also opens gaps for violations and practices of child sexual exploitation. Minayo (2001) reminds us of the need to understand social phenomena in all their complexity, recognizing the intersections between the historical, cultural, and political dimensions that shape childhood.

In this logic, online child sexual exploitation cannot be reduced to isolated acts of violence but must be understood as an expression of a broader social context, in which childhood vulnerability is shaped by consumerist logics, the liquidity of social bonds, and the fragility of protection policies. Santiago and Ribeiro (2023) emphasize that cyberspace expands the reach of child sexual abuse by amplifying forms of luring and control, while simultaneously hindering the accountability of offenders. Based on this analysis, we

understand that digital sexual exploitation is, above all, a structural and collective phenomenon that demands continuous and intersectoral responses.

Thus, we understand that child sexual exploitation in digital environments must be interpreted in its full complexity, marked by the liquidity of relationships and by the vulnerability of childhood. In the following section, we examine the normative frameworks and contemporary reports that inform the understanding of advances, gaps, and tensions underpinning the protection of children and adolescents in cyberspace.

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3.2 Normative frameworks, public policies, and contemporary reports

In the field of child protection, the Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute (1990) establishes comprehensive protection as the guiding principle of State and societal action. More recently, legislation such as Law No. 13.441/2017—which regulates the infiltration of agents on the internet to investigate crimes against the sexual dignity of children and adolescents—and the Brazilian Civil Rights Framework for the Internet (Law No. 12.965/2014), which defines principles and guarantees for the use of the internet in Brazil, represent important normative advances. However, as Santos (2024) notes, there remains a significant gap between the legal framework and the reality of violations, particularly in digital environments.

This gap underscores the need for public policies that keep pace with the speed of technological transformations and the complexity of child sexual exploitation practices in cyberspace. In this regard, international organizations such as UNICEF and the UN have highlighted the importance of global strategies that combine legislation, digital education, strengthening of protection networks, and platform accountability. Yet the effectiveness of such measures depends on coordination among civil society, the State, and technology companies—a coordination that does not always materialize in practice.

A recent emblematic example in Brazil was the denunciation made by digital influencer Felca through the video *Adultização*, published in 2025. The impact was immediate: the video reached millions of views, several reported profiles were suspended,

the judiciary issued precautionary measures, and the Brazilian Parliament began discussions on bills related to the monetization of content involving minors. This case illustrates how viralization can become a catalyst for political and social mobilization, albeit one marked by the volatility of liquid modernity. On the one hand, it reveals society's capacity to pressure institutions; on the other, it warns of the risk that such advances may dissipate if not incorporated into structural and permanent public policies.

With the rise of Jair Bolsonaro (PL) to the Presidency of the Republic in the 2018 elections, Brazil witnessed an intensification of conservative discourse and an increase in cases of child and adolescent sexual abuse and exploitation, according to data from the *Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública* (2023). The year 2022 presented an alarming scenario, marked by a rise in violence and abuse against children and adolescents. The various forms of violence affecting individuals aged 0 to 17 grew significantly, surpassing pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. At the same time, a reduction and restriction of public policies aimed at confronting such violence was observed.

Since the return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency in 2023, Brazil has implemented significant measures to strengthen the response to child sexual abuse and violence. One notable initiative was *Operação Caminhos Seguros*, coordinated by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which resulted in the rescue of 163 children and adolescents who were victims of abuse and sexual exploitation in May 2024. The operation involved the inspection of more than 5,300 locations across 453 municipalities, with the participation of approximately 12,700 security agents, demonstrating a coordinated and wide-reaching effort to combat this type of violence (Brasil, 2024).

In addition to operational actions, the government enacted important laws aimed at preventing and combating child sexual abuse and exploitation. Law No. 15.035/2024 created the *Cadastro Nacional de Pedófilos e Predadores Sexuais* (National Registry of Pedophiles and Sexual Predators), allowing public searches for information on individuals convicted of sexual crimes such as rape and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents (Brasil, 2024).

Another significant measure was the enactment of Law No. 15.032/2024, which establishes guidelines for preventing sexual abuse in educational sports environments, including the requirement of continuous training for professionals who work with the athletic development of minors. These actions reflect a renewed commitment by the Federal Government of Brazil to protecting children and adolescents and promoting a safer environment free from sexual violence (Brasil, Senado Federal, 2024).

Thus, we understand that child sexual exploitation on digital platforms must be confronted through the articulation of theoretical foundations, normative frameworks, and contemporary reports. It is at this intersection that a critical analysis can emerge—one capable of revealing both the structural roots of the problem and the possible pathways for addressing it.

3.3 Cyberspace as a territory of violation and resistance

The expansion of the digital era has brought new possibilities for interaction, leisure, and learning, but it has also created openings for practices of sexual violence against children and adolescents. Cyberspace, with its anonymous and transnational character, has become an environment conducive to exploitation, rendering abusive dynamics invisible—dynamics that were once confined primarily to domestic spaces.

In Brazil, the numbers are alarming. In 2023, SaferNet Brasil recorded more than 71,000 reports of child sexual abuse images on the internet—a 77% increase compared to the previous year. This growth is associated both with the use of artificial intelligence to produce images and with the circulation of self-generated content by adolescents, challenging ethical and legal boundaries (Santiago; Ribeiro, 2023; Almeida, 2024).

Recent cases illustrate the gravity of the situation. In 2024, the arrest of a priest in the Amazon region revealed an archive of 260 pornographic videos and raised suspicions of illicit material being commercialized (González, 2024). Such episodes demonstrate how digital child sexual abuse is connected to networks of power and profit that transcend physical borders.

The Brazilian State has sought to respond with more rigorous policies. Law No. 14.811/2024 established the *Política Nacional de Prevenção e Combate ao Abuso e Exploração Sexual da Criança e do Adolescente*, and new proposals under debate in the Brazilian Parliament seek to hold digital platforms accountable for the circulation of illicit content and to regulate high-risk artificial intelligence systems (Brasil, 2024).

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Santiago and Ribeiro (2023) understand the phenomenon as multifaceted: the internet does not create violence, but it amplifies practices rooted in a patriarchal and adult-centered culture. This point aligns with Seffner and Felipe (2022), who denounce the eroticization of childhood and *pedofilização* as processes that transform children's bodies into commodities.

Azevedo and Guerra (2015) remind us that, in most cases, the perpetrator is someone close to the child. This logic of power and trust, when transposed to the digital environment, takes on new forms: abusers manipulate victims through virtual interactions, simulating bonds of intimacy. This constitutes a reproduction—mediated by screens—of incest and para-incest dynamics.

Holding perpetrators accountable faces significant obstacles. Anonymity and encryption hinder investigations, while the lack of technical preparedness among authorities compromises the effectiveness of responses (Da Costa Oliveira; Oliveira, 2024). For this reason, experts advocate for trained teams and international cooperation to remove content and trace offenders.

Another challenge is identifying violence suffered by young children, who often cannot verbalize their experiences. Santiago and Ribeiro (2023) defend digital literacy policies beginning in early childhood, complemented by continuous training for professionals within the protection network (Da Silva, 2022).

The family plays a crucial role in this process. Parents and caregivers must guide children on basic safety measures—such as not sharing personal data or images—and maintain ongoing dialogue about the risks of the internet (Santiago; Ribeiro, 2023). However, many adults also lack digital literacy, which calls for continuous educational campaigns.

The problem is intensified by the use of messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram for the dissemination of child pornography. Groups with thousands of users make monitoring exceedingly difficult, revealing the fragility of reporting and accountability mechanisms already noted by De Souza Lima and Deslandes (2011).

Digital platforms, in turn, are criticized for their slow response in combating abusive content. The prioritization of profit over safety, combined with insufficient investment in moderation teams, reveals corporate negligence (Santiago; Ribeiro, 2023). This is a central point for regulation currently under debate in the Brazilian Parliament.

The hypersexualization of children on social media further aggravates the situation. Algorithms reinforce eroticized aesthetic patterns, fueling practices of *pedofiliação* (Seffner; Felipe, 2022), while dances, songs, and filters often become tools of exploitation.

Although Brazilian legislation has made advances—such as the Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute and Law No. 14.811/2024—its effectiveness depends on practical implementation. Underreporting remains a major barrier, requiring investments in technology, professional training, and intersectoral coordination (Da Silva, 2022).

Another critical issue is the production of child pornography through artificial intelligence. Even without the physical involvement of a child, these images feed pedophilic imaginaries and perpetuate symbolic violence (Santiago; Ribeiro, 2023). Regulation is urgent in light of the risks they pose.

Confronting this issue must go beyond a punitive logic and address the structures that sustain early sexualization (Seffner; Felipe, 2022). This includes valuing qualified listening and ensuring the participation of children and adolescents in the development of prevention strategies (Santiago; Ribeiro, 2023).

Thus, cyberspace emerges as a territory of risk but also of resistance. It is up to society to determine whether the internet will be a space of exploitation or one of protection, mobilization, and transformation. The defense of children's rights, in any environment, depends on collective, intersectoral responses committed to comprehensive protection.

4 Final considerations

15 In concluding this analysis, we reaffirm that child sexual exploitation on digital platforms is a multifaceted phenomenon that challenges legislation, public policies, and social practices at multiple levels. The central objective of critically examining the mechanisms through which it occurs, its social and institutional impacts, and the responses proposed by the protection network proved pertinent, given the finding that—even with relevant normative advances—a significant gap persists between the legal framework and the effectiveness of actions aimed at confronting the issue.

The hypotheses presented were confirmed by demonstrating that the absence of effective mechanisms for regulating, monitoring, and holding technology companies accountable contributes to the intensification of child sexual exploitation in digital environments. The analysis showed that existing legal instruments—such as the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, Law No. 13.431/2017, the *Marco Civil da Internet*, and Law No. 14.811/2024—are important protective milestones, yet still insufficient when faced with the speed and sophistication of abusive practices taking shape in cyberspace.

Recent reports from SaferNet Brasil, which recorded unprecedented numbers of complaints in 2023, along with emblematic national cases—such as the arrest of a priest in the Amazon region for abuse and the commercial distribution of child pornography—highlight the gravity of the situation. Added to this are new dynamics of exploitation, such as the use of artificial intelligence to create abusive content which, even without the physical involvement of a child, fuels pedophilic imaginaries and perpetuates symbolic violence. These elements underscore the urgency of regulating emerging technologies and strengthening mechanisms for controlling digital platforms.

The widespread impact of influencer Felca's denunciation video demonstrated the power of social mobilization in times of liquid modernity, in which viralization becomes a political force capable of pressuring institutions and generating immediate responses. However, as we have emphasized, such rapid reactions coexist with the fragility of

structural measures that would ensure consistency and continuity in protection policies, beyond the momentary momentum generated by viral denunciations.

We also highlight recent initiatives such as *Operação Caminhos Seguros*, which rescued more than 160 children and adolescents in 2024, and the creation of the National Registry of Pedophiles and Sexual Predators, both of which signal efforts by the Brazilian State to expand protection. Even so, such actions must be accompanied by long-term educational policies, large-scale digital literacy strategies beginning in early childhood, and awareness campaigns that include families and recognize children as active subjects in their own defense.

Drawing on the contributions of the authors examined throughout this study, we understand that digital child sexual exploitation cannot be reduced to a criminal issue alone. It is a phenomenon shaped by gender, class, and racial inequalities, rooted in an adult-centered and patriarchal culture that eroticizes and commodifies children's bodies. Cyberspace, in this regard, does not create violence but amplifies existing structures, requiring intersectoral, international, and educational responses that bring together the State, civil society, families, schools, technology companies, and multilateral organizations.

We therefore conclude that confronting child sexual exploitation in cyberspace requires going beyond a punitive logic. Regulation and platform accountability must be combined with emancipatory practices that strengthen family bonds, expand qualified listening, value the participation of children and adolescents, and consolidate public policies grounded in the doctrine of comprehensive protection. Only then will it be possible to transform the internet from a space of violation into a territory of resistance, ensuring that childhood may be lived in full, free from abuse and violence.

Finally, we underscore the need for future research that investigates the effectiveness of recently implemented policies, the impacts of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, and the perceptions of children and adolescents regarding their own digital experiences. This is a collective challenge that demands that, amid the uncertainties of liquid modernity, we construct solid, ethical, and enduring responses committed to the dignity and best interests of the child.

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