

EFFORTS TO COMBAT THE EXPLOITATION OF CHILD WORKERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA FROM COMMUNITY LAW PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The development of digital technology and social media has significantly changed patterns of communication, social interaction, and economic activity. Besides providing benefits, social media also creates opportunities for the exploitation of children in forms increasingly complex and difficult to monitor. Children are not only users of social media but are also vulnerable to being used as objects of content commercialization, gaining popularity, and sources of economic profit for parties. This study aims to analyze the factors causing the exploitation of child workers on social media and efforts to address it from a community law perspective. The study employs a method using legal research through interviews, literature reviews, and documentation. Data were obtained



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from the Central Java DP3AKB, the Central Java UPTD PPA, and the Rumah Pejuang Keadilan Legal Aid Institute. The results indicate that the exploitation of children is influenced by poverty, low digital literacy, weak family supervision, permissive social culture toward child commercialization, and technological developments enabling anonymous and organized exploitation. From a community law perspective, effective child protection depends not only on regulations but also on legal culture and social awareness in protecting children's rights in digital spaces. Mitigation efforts are carried out through strengthening regulations, digital monitoring, age restrictions on social media use, improving digital literacy, and involving families, communities, and digital platforms in creating child-friendly digital spaces. This research is also related to achieving SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 16 on child protection, social justice, and strengthening legal institutions in the digital era.

Keywords: *Children, Exploitation, Social Media, Prevention, Sustainable Development Goals.*

A. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology in today's digital age has made it incredibly easy for individuals to exchange information and obtain news about various events or occurrences at a very fast pace. The information obtained is not limited to a specific region or even within the country, but can also be accessed from various locations around the world via the internet. These significant technological changes have provided a crucial boost to human civilization, thanks to this ease of access. These developments have subsequently given rise to various media platforms that serve as tools for individuals to exchange ideas, interact, and create various forms of content. However, while offering positive benefits, technological advancements can also

lead to detrimental effects in society, creating opportunities for (cyber crime).¹ If used irresponsibly, such misuse of social media can harm others, particularly children who are highly vulnerable to exploitation.²

In general, child exploitation refers to the act of profiting from the use of children, specifically by disregarding their development and well-being at an age when they are still relatively vulnerable. The Cambridge Learner's Dictionary defines exploitation as "the use of someone or something unfairly for one's own advantage."³ This definition indicates that exploitation is the act of unfairly taking advantage of someone for personal gain. In the context of children, child exploitation refers to the use of children by others to obtain economic, social, or specific benefits while disregarding the child's rights, well-being, and development. Child exploitation is a serious violation of children's rights and remains widespread today, permeating various aspects of human life. According to the International Labour Organization, child exploitation is the use of children for work or specific activities that benefit others but harm the child's physical, mental, social, or moral development. This exploitation is typically associated with hazardous work, forced labor, or work that hinders a child's education.⁴

The regulations specify several forms of exploitation, particularly in Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Exploitation, as shown in the following table:

No.	Type of Exploitation	Description
1.	Economic Exploitation	a. Exploitation of child labor;

¹ Nurul Zafika and Muridah Isnawati, "Pertanggungjawaban Pidana Pelaku Eksploitasi Anak Secara Ekonomi Di Panti Asuhan Melalui Media Sosial Tiktok," *PAGARUYUNGAN Law Journal* 9, no. 1 (2025): 208–29.

² Orchida Nadia Salsabila, *Transformasi Komunikasi Messenger: Evolusi Pola Interaksi Sosial Dalam Ruang Digital Terenkripsi*. (Afdan Rojabi, 2026).

³ Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). Exploitation. In Cambridge Learner's Dictionary. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/exploitation>

⁴ ILO, *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)*, 2009, <https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipecc>.

		b. The child is forced to work to the best of their ability; and c. Physical stress can slow a child's growth and development.
2.	Social Exploitation	a. Exploitation of a child's vulnerability; b. Using threats as a means of exerting power; and c. Inflicting cruel punishment.
3.	Sexual Exploitation	a. Involving a child in sexual activities solely to satisfy one's own desires; b. Children are used in the sex trade; c. Children are rewarded for their efforts.

**FORMS OF CHILD EXPLOITATION UNDER
LAW NO. 23 OF 2002
ON CHILD PROTECTION**

Table 1. Source. <https://l1nq.com/uu-23-tahun-2002>

In the context of child exploitation on social media, exploitation can take various forms and patterns, such as using children as content to generate financial gain through advertisements, donations, or digital rewards; forcing children to engage in certain activities to attract public attention; and disclosing children's personal information in ways that violate their privacy.⁵ This is deeply regrettable, as every child should be entitled to rights such as protection of their growth and development, education, and psychological well-being, as stipulated in Law No. 35 of 2014.⁶ However, with technological advancements, social media has opened up new avenues for more complex forms of exploitation. Children in vulnerable age groups, whose judgment is

⁵ Zafika and Isnawati, "Pertanggungjawaban Pidana Pelaku Eksploitasi Anak Secara Ekonomi Di Panti Asuhan Melalui Media Sosial Tiktok."

⁶ Putu Cyntia Rizdyanti, Agung Anak Sagung Laksmi Dewi, and I Made Minggu Widyantara, "Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Anak Sebagai Korban Eksploitasi Seksual Komersial Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Konstruksi Hukum* 2, no. 2 (2021): 332–37, <https://doi.org/10.22225/jkh.2.2.3232.332-337>.

still developing, are seen as easy to control and can be hired for lower wages than adults.

The likelihood of a child being exploited can also be influenced by environmental, cultural, and even immediate family factors. Such actions can sometimes occur consciously or unconsciously. One form of exploitation commonly found today is the practice of “sharenting”—the habit of parents or family members sharing photos, videos, or activities intended to attract viewers’ interest. Initially, this activity was seen as a way to simply share joy or showcase a harmonious family life. However, in practice, over time, sharenting can evolve into a pattern of commercializing children. Children can be used as tools to gain benefits ranging from popularity and the number of followers to financial gain..⁷

Over the past five years, cases of child labor exploitation in Indonesia have varied in terms of their patterns, underlying causes, and motivations; here are a few examples:

No.	Date of Occurrence	Location of the Case	Contents	Description
1.	2023-Now	East Jakarta	a. Jane, a girl employed by her own parents; b. Asked to sell homemade cookies through the Plenger Family’s TikTok account; c. Jane did not receive a formal education; instead, she was	a. The content on that account sparked comments from netizens regarding Jane’s parents’ parenting style; b. Jane’s difficulty in expressing herself evoked sympathy;

⁷ Tiara Annisa Zephania and Yolanda Natasia Letare, “Anti-Sharenting Selebritas: Strategi Non-Disclosure Dan Etika Visibilitas Anak Di Media Sosial,” *Jurnal Lensa Mutiara Komunikasi* 9, no. 1 (2025): 124–39, <https://doi.org/10.51544/jlmk.v9i1.5958>.

			homeschooled by her parents; d. Jane has a motor delay due to a lack of social interaction with her peers . ⁸	c. Jane's parents, however, responded harshly to the netizens' comments because they felt their parenting methods were the best.
2.	August 30, 2023	Ivins, Utah, United States	a. Ruby Franke, a stay-at-home mom and family content creator on the YouTube channel 8 Passengers ; b. Depicting everyday family life and child-rearing ; c. Kasus terungkap ketika salah satu anak melarikan diri dengan kondisi buruk terlihat kurus dan memiliki luka ikatan. ⁹	a. Ruby Franke and Jody Hildebrandt were arrested for committing acts of severe child abuse ; b. It turns out that the children were forced to act in front of the camera; c. Done to attract a large audience and generate ad revenue.
3.	September, 2023	Pelita Street, Medan, North Sumatra	a. Case of Exploitation of Orphanage Children at the Tunas Kasih Olayama Foundation in Medan: Children Forced to Beg via TikTok Live ; b. Children are used to elicit public sympathy in order to solicit donations ; c. When the matter came to light, the police conducted an investigation and found that it had been used for personal purposes; d. Zamanueli Zebua, the shelter's manager, was	a. Intentionally broadcast to solicit donations out of sympathy ; b. All profits are used to meet personal needs.

⁸ Ais Fahira, "Unschooling Ala Plenger Family Ramai Diperdebatkan, Benarkah Ramah Bagi Anak?," Bincang Perempuan, 2026, <https://bincangperempuan.com/unschooling-ala-plenger-family-ramai-diperdebatkan-benarkah-ramah-bagi-anak/>.

⁹ Mattea Bubalo, "Who Is Ruby Franke, the Parenting Influencer Jailed for Child Abuse?," BBC News, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-66719859>.

			named a suspect on September 20, 2023. ¹⁰	
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Table 2. Cases of Child Exploitation Worldwide in 2025

Based on Social Media

Although in practice Indonesia has enacted regulations designed to protect children from widespread exploitation—such as Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, and the ratification of International Labour Organization conventions—the existence of these regulations has indeed brought about changes in child protection. However, achieving significant results remains very difficult to maximize. Given this situation, the issue of child exploitation needs to be examined more deeply, particularly from a community law perspective. This approach is crucial because the practice of child exploitation is not only related to existing regulations but also to raising awareness within the community itself, cultural factors, and the role of the surrounding environment in creating a safe space for children.

This study aligns with the goals of sustainable development, which prioritize human beings—particularly children—as individuals whose rights and dignity must be protected. The exploitation of children on social media is a social and legal issue that can hinder children's growth and development, education, mental health, and the future of the nation's next generation. Therefore, efforts to address this issue are a crucial component of supporting equitable and sustainable social development.

Specifically, this study relates to **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No.16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**¹¹ as it addresses the

¹⁰ Goklas Wisely, "Viral, Panti Asuhan Di Medan Diduga Eksploitasi Anak Lewat Live TikTok," *detik sumut*, 2023, <https://www.detik.com/sumut/berita/d-6942018/viral-panti-asuhan-di-medan-diduga-eksploitasi-anak-lewat-live-tiktok>. <https://www.detik.com/sumut/berita/d-6942018/viral-panti-asuhan-di-medan-diduga-eksploitasi-anak-lewat-live-tiktok>

¹¹ United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goal 16: Perdamaian, Keadilan dan Kelembagaan yang Tangguh" Diakses 11 Mei 2026, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

protection of children from exploitation and the strengthening of the role of community law in fostering social justice. This study also supports SDG Target 16.2, which aims to end all forms of violence and exploitation against children. Additionally, this study is related to Sustainable Development Goal No. 4: Quality Education¹² that ensures quality education in an inclusive and equitable manner.

Several previous studies have addressed this issue from various perspectives and with differing understandings. These range from studies examining child exploitation from the perspective of child protection law, to studies on child labor in the digital age, to research on the impact of social media use on child development. There remains a regulatory gap regarding specific regulations governing the exploitation of child workers on social media. Indonesian laws and regulations do indeed provide for child protection and prohibit child exploitation through the Child Protection Law and labor regulations; however, they do not yet specifically address the forms of digital exploitation emerging on social media, including limitations on working hours for children as content creators, the management of children's earnings, the protection of children's privacy, and the responsibilities of digital platforms and parents.

Thus, this research warrants further study due to the gap between the growing prevalence of child exploitation on social media and the current state of legal regulations, public oversight, and the implementation of child protection measures in the digital age. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the development of child protection laws and policies that are better adapted to advancements in technology and social media.

¹² United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education," Diakses 11 Mei 2026, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

B. Method

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach within the framework of empirical legal research. According to John W. Creswell, the qualitative research process involves data collection in natural settings, inductive data analysis, and the interpretation of the meaning of participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon under study.¹³ Empirical legal research is research that examines law as it is actually practiced in society.¹⁴ Using this approach, the study can illustrate how child protection laws are applied in practice and how the public responds to the phenomenon of child exploitation on social media.

This study focuses on the forms of exploitation of child laborers on social media, the factors contributing to such exploitation, and efforts to address it from a public law perspective. The study also examines the relationship between child protection laws and the evolving social realities in the digital society. Although the study is not limited to a specific region, direct data collection is primarily focused on Central Java Province, as it is considered to possess sufficiently representative social characteristics to illustrate general societal conditions.

Research data was obtained through primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. Primary data was obtained directly through semi-structured interviews with questions related to the research, conducted with informants who have expertise and understanding of child protection, such as paralegals from the Rumah Keadilan Legal Aid Institute, the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP3AKB), and the Regional Technical Service Unit for Women's (UPTD PPA) and Child Protection in Central Java. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various written sources such as laws and regulations, scientific journals, books, reports from child protection

¹³ J. David Creswell John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹⁴ Soerjono Soekanto, *Pengantar Penelitian Hukum* (Universitas Indonesia (UI) Press, 1986).

agencies, and digital news relevant to the study. Unstructured interviews were used to allow the researcher to explore information more deeply and flexibly from informants regarding forms of exploitation, contributing factors, and mitigation efforts. Additionally, a literature review was conducted by examining various documents, literature, and regulations related to child protection on social media. Tertiary data was used as supplementary sources, such as dictionaries and general references, to understand terms and concepts related to the research.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employs triangulation or cross-checking by comparing information obtained from various sources and informants. According to Arikunto, triangulation is a technique for verifying data validity by utilizing various data sources or different methods to obtain reliable data.¹⁵ Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through a process of data grouping, organization, and interpretation, resulting in a descriptive analysis that explains the phenomenon of child labor exploitation on social media and efforts to address it from a community law perspective.¹⁶

C. Factors Contributing to the Exploitation of Child Laborers on Social Media

Regulations regarding the protection of children from exploitation are set forth in Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, Law No. 13 of 2003 on Manpower, and the ratification of conventions by the International Labour Organization. However, in practice, child exploitation still occurs frequently and receives insufficient attention. The empirical data in this study was obtained by the researcher through the Legal Analyst at the Central Java Provincial Government's UPTD PPA as one of the data sources supporting the

¹⁵ Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktek* (Rineka Cipta, 1992).

¹⁶ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984).

research analysis. The data indicates a significant year-over-year increase in the number of cases, as shown in the following table:

Year	Number of Cases	Number of Victim	Types of Violence					
			Physical	Psychological	Sexual	Exploitation	Trade	Neglect
2022	15.785	17.284	3.647	3.993	9.410	200	198	2.016
2023	17.628	19.498	4.363	4.342	10.571	253	210	1.216
2024	19.169	21.053	4.898	4.679	11.408	279	224	1.203
2025	16.787	18.123	4.369	4.3320	9.374	251	146	851

SUMMARY OF DATA ON CHILD ABUSE IN INDONESIA

2022–2025¹⁷

Table 3. Source: <https://slink.com/simfoni-ppa>

Various forms of violence can explain why child exploitation continues to persist. The exploitation of child laborers on social media can occur due to changes in social and economic interaction patterns in the digital age, which have transformed social media from merely a means of communication into a space for commercialization and a source of economic profit.

Based on an interview with Achmad Misrin, S.H., a lawyer who currently serves as a Senior Legal Analyst at the Central Java Regional Technical Service Unit (UPTD), he explained that, based on cases handled by the UPTD, child exploitation can occur through abuse of authority and economic exploitation. Economic exploitation is defined in Article 66 of Law No. 35 of 2014, where the term “economic exploitation” refers to “an act, with or without the consent of the child who is the victim...” . This indicates that exploitation is a form of coercion to derive profit from others, particularly children. Suspects can be individuals or business entities, meaning it can be carried out by various

¹⁷ The Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning (DP3AKB) of Central Java Province, Recapitulation of Data on Violence Against Children 2022–2025 (SIMFONI-PPA), data obtained through the UPTD PPA Central Java, 2026.

parties. According to him, *“Children do not understand persuasion or enticement; anyone who employs a child while they are still of child age is clearly violating the Child Protection Law. Why does this happen? It may be due to the power held by adults who then exploit children in ways that can be categorized as sexual, economic, and psychological. These influences can then serve as a sufficient basis for the perpetrator to engage in further exploitation.”*¹⁸ This demonstrates that child exploitation occurs due to power imbalances between adults and children. Children are viewed as lacking psychological maturity and the ability to recognize manipulation, persuasion, or the hidden agendas of others. This situation places children in a vulnerable position where they can be influenced, directed, or even exploited for the benefit of adults—whether for economic gain, the fulfillment of personal interests, or the pursuit of social capital on social media.

One of the cases previously handled by the Central Java Provincial UPTD PPA involved covert prostitution carried out by several perpetrators in Gunung Kemukus. A child was reported to be working as a commercial sex worker. Initially, the child was persuaded to work at a restaurant; however, all the amenities provided were treated as debt. When the child could not pay, they were forced to work as a commercial sex worker, with the main perpetrator soliciting clients through social media..¹⁹ *“When it comes to social media use, this isn’t the only case. In Gunung Kemukus, they used WeChat; in Banyumas, the dating app Imo; and in Grobogan, they used the Bigo Live app. So the mom actually went live right away.”*²⁰ Advances in digital technology and the diversity of social media platforms have created new avenues for child exploitation in various forms that are increasingly complex and difficult to monitor. The use of apps such as WeChat, Imo, and Bigo Live demonstrates

¹⁸ Interview with Achmad Misrin, S.H., Advocate and Legal Analyst, conducted on 30 April 2026 in Semarang, Central Java.

¹⁹ Polda Jateng, Polda Jateng Ungkap Kasus Tindak Pidana Perdagangan Orang di Gunung Kemukus (2025).

²⁰ Achmad Misrin, interview, 30 April 2026..

that digital media is no longer merely a tool for communication but has evolved into a medium that can be used for exploitative activities, including those involving children and other vulnerable groups. Variations in platform usage across different regions indicate that digital exploitation practices adapt to technological advancements and the local social conditions of communities.

In addition, there are cases in the KBGO sphere involving violence targeting gender or sexuality, stemming from romantic relationships formed online without knowing the identity of the other person. According to Galtung, violence is not limited to physical acts that can be directly observed, but can also occur in more hidden forms through social and cultural structures. He categorizes violence into three main forms: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence is a form of violence that is visibly evident, such as physical assault, threats, torture, or other actions that directly cause suffering to the victim. Furthermore, structural violence refers to conditions of injustice embedded in social, economic, or political systems that cause certain individuals or groups to face limitations in accessing their basic rights. This form of violence is not always directly visible, yet its effects can be felt in the form of poverty, social inequality, or limited access to education and welfare.²¹ *“So, they’re groomed through social media even though they don’t know who the person is and eventually start dating. Then the perpetrator asks them to video chat and records the conversation, using the recording as a tool to threaten them”.*²² In such situations, perpetrators often exploit the anonymity and ease of access in the digital space to build emotional closeness, gain the victim’s trust, and create manipulative relationships in order to achieve specific goals.

This situation indicates that the rise of social media has transformed the nature of child exploitation, making it more covert, flexible, and difficult to

²¹ Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

²² Achmad Misrin, interview, 30 April 2026.

detect compared to conventional forms of exploitation. The digital space allows perpetrators to interact without having to meet the victim in person, enabling the exploitation process to occur rapidly and transcend geographical boundaries. Easy internet access, private communication features, live streaming, and digital monetization systems further increase the likelihood of child exploitation on social media through more complex and organized patterns.²³ In this context, social media no longer serves merely as a means of communication and entertainment, but has also evolved into a digital economic space that can be exploited to generate profit through children's engagement with various forms of content. Furthermore, the use of anonymous identities on social media makes it easier for perpetrators to conceal their true identities and evade legal accountability. In many cases, perpetrators use fake accounts, specific apps, or closed digital networks to build relationships with victims and carry out psychological and economic manipulation. This situation is exacerbated by the still-limited oversight of digital activities and the public's low digital literacy, meaning that exploitation often goes unnoticed from the start. Consequently, addressing cases of child exploitation on social media requires a more adaptive approach through strengthened digital oversight, enhanced interagency cooperation, and the development of a child protection system capable of keeping pace with technological advancements and evolving patterns of cybercrime.

In the Uses of Gratification theory developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, the theory explains that there are several primary needs that drive people to use media. First, cognitive needs, which are the need to obtain information, knowledge, and understanding of a subject. Second, affective needs, which are the need for entertainment, emotional pleasure, or aesthetic experiences. Third, personal integrative needs, which are the need to enhance self-confidence, social status, or self-identity. Fourth,

²³ A Abdullah, S., Widyastuti, T. A. R., Suharyanto, C. E., Januru, L., Safii, M., Santioso, L. L., ... & Faqihuddin, *Pemberdayaan Media Cyber Di Era Digital* (Yayasan Tri Edukasi Ilmiah, 2025).

social integrative needs, which are the need to establish relationships and interact with others. Fifth, escapist needs, which are the need to avoid the pressures of daily life through entertainment media.²⁴ Children's involvement in digital content is often driven by specific needs of parents or other parties who use social media as a means of fulfilling social and economic needs. Children are seen as having an emotional appeal that can boost an account's popularity, increase viewership, and generate financial gains through content monetization, product promotions, or other commercial partnerships.

To analyze the factors contributing to child exploitation on social media, this study employs the Uses of Gratification theory by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, as well as Johan Galtung's theory of violence. These two theories are used to understand the motives behind social media use and the forms of covert violence that can lead to child exploitation in the digital space. Based on these theories, the following is a comparative analysis related to the research problem:

No.	Subject	Theoretical Analysis		Description
		Uses of Gratification Theory	The Theory of Violence	
1.	Factors contributing to the exploitation of children on social media.	a. Social media is used for entertainment; b. Parents seek popularity and social recognition; c. Children's content is exploited for financial gain.	a. Children are in a vulnerable position; b. There is an imbalance of power between children and adults.; c. The social system has not yet provided maximum protection for adults lebih dominan.	The Uses of Gratification theory views exploitation as the fulfillment of needs through media use, whereas Galtung's theory views exploitation as a form of social violence arising from structural and cultural inequalities in society.
2.	Forms of exploitation	a. Exploitation arises through the monetization	a. Exploitation can take the form of	The Uses of Gratification theory

²⁴ Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch Elihu Katz, "Uses and Gratifications Research," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1973): 509–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747854>.

	that have emerged	of content; b. Children are being exploited for digital popularity; c. Media activities are aimed at achieving specific benefits.	psychological abuse; b. There is social pressure on children c. Exploitation occurs covertly through digital culture.	explains the motives behind media use, while Galtung's theory explains the forms of injustice and suffering experienced by children as a result of such exploitation.
3.	The link between the economy and child exploitation	a. Social media is used to generate income; b. Children are being used as tools for digital commercialization; c. Children's content with high economic value.	a. Economic inequality increases children's vulnerability; b. Economic pressures drive exploitation; c. Social structure influences a child's position.	The Uses of Gratification theory places greater emphasis on economic motives in media use, whereas Galtung views economic factors as part of structural violence.

Table 4. An Analysis of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Violence

Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, S.Psi., a Junior Policy Analyst for the Fulfillment of Children's Rights at the DP3AKB of Central Java, he explained that child exploitation can occur due to many factors. *"There are many factors, actually. The most obvious one is an unsafe environment, which can stem from a lack of education in the community. The second factor might be poverty, forcing children to work—often starting with them not attending school and then being forced to work, so their basic right to education cannot be fulfilled."*²⁵ This explains that child exploitation does not occur as an isolated incident, but rather is the result of an accumulation of various interrelated social, economic, and structural issues within society.

²⁵ Interview with Ardian Agil Wasito, S.Psi., Young Expert Policy Analyst on Fulfillment of Children's Rights, conducted on 30 April 2026 in Semarang, Central Java.

An “unsafe” environment, as described in the interviews, can be understood not only as a physical condition vulnerable to violence, but also as a social condition that fails to provide adequate protection, supervision, and fulfillment of children’s basic rights. In this context, communities that are poorly educated about children’s rights and child protection tend to view children’s involvement in work as normal, especially when faced with family economic pressures. Consequently, child exploitation often occurs covertly and gains social legitimacy because it is seen as part of a survival strategy.

Based on interviews with experts in the field regarding the factors contributing to child exploitation, the most striking findings of the analysis are outlined in the following table:

No.	Subject	Analysis of Interview Findings	Description
1.	The power imbalance between adults and children	a. Children are easily influenced; b. The presence of persuasion and enticements; c. Children are not yet psychologically mature; d. Adults are more dominant.	Achmad Musrimin, S.H., Attorney and Legal Analyst at the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children, conducted at the Central Java UPTD PPA, 9.30 pm, Thursday, April 30, 2026.
2.	Economic gain	a. Children are treated as a source of profit; b. Exploitation is carried out for financial gain; c. Children are exploited for economic gain.	Achmad Musrimin, S.H., Attorney and Legal Analyst at the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children, conducted at the Central Java UPTD PPA, 9.30 pm, Thursday, April 30, 2026.
3.	Lack of oversight and digital literacy	a. Monitoring of digital activities remains limited; b. The public lacks an understanding of the risks associated with social media;	Achmad Musrimin, S.H., Attorney and Legal Analyst at the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children, conducted at the

		c. Exploitation often goes unnoticed at first	Central Java UPTD PPA, 9.30 pm, Thursday, April 30, 2026.
4.	An unsafe social environment	a. The environment does not provide adequate protection for children; b. Supervision of children is inadequate; c. Children are more vulnerable to exploitation.	Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, M.A., Junior Policy Analyst for the Fulfillment of Children's Rights at the DP3AKB of Central Java, 9 am, Wednesday, May 6, 2026.
5.	Faktor Ekonomi Keluarga	a. Family financial pressures; b. Children are forced to help support the family; c. Financial needs take priority.	Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, M.A., Junior Policy Analyst for the Fulfillment of Children's Rights at the DP3AKB of Central Java, 9 am, Wednesday, May 6, 2026.

Table 5. Analysis of Interviews on the Causes of Child Exploitation

D. Efforts to Combat the Exploitation of Child Workers on Social Media from a Community Law Perspective

Normatively, Indonesia already has several regulations in place that serve as a legal framework, covering everything from prevention to response. These existing regulations reflect the state's efforts to create a safe environment for children. They ensure that children are protected from all forms of abuse, particularly regarding child exploitation. One of the key regulations is Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, which affirms that every child has the right to protection from economic and sexual exploitation.²⁶ The provision states that the exploitation of children constitutes a violation of children's human rights and is subject to criminal penalties. This regulation serves as a crucial legal basis for taking action against parties who exploit children for economic gain,

²⁶ Yayan Agus Siswanto, Fajar Rachmad, and Dwi Miarsa, "Upaya Preventif Sebagai Bentuk Perlindungan Hukum Dari Kejahatan Kekerasan Seksual Pada Anak Preventive Efforts as a Form of Legal Protection Against Crimes of Sexual Violence in Children" 7, no. 5 (2024): 1651–67, <https://doi.org/10.56338/jks.v7i5.5313>.

including through digital activities and social media. Such protection encompasses children's rights to growth and development, education, privacy, mental health, and social well-being—rights that must not be sacrificed for the sake of economic interests or digital popularity, issues that warrant serious attention.²⁷ However, even with regulations in place, it will be difficult to prevent child exploitation if the principles outlined in them are not enforced.

Lawrence M. Friedman's perspective on legal culture suggests that the effectiveness of the law is not determined solely by the existence of regulations as the substance of the law, but is also influenced by how society understands, accepts, and applies the law in social life.²⁸ In this context, a legal culture cannot function effectively without the support of a strong legal culture within society. Although various regulations regarding child protection are in place, the exploitation of children on social media can still occur if society maintains a permissive attitude toward the use of children as subjects of digital content for economic gain or popularity. Weak legal awareness leads the public to tend to view digital exploitation as something normal and not see it as a violation of children's rights. Thus, the success of combating the exploitation of child workers on social media depends not only on the number of regulations enacted but also on the effectiveness of oversight and the public's social awareness in protecting children's rights in the digital space, particularly on social media.

In a discussion with Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, S.H., a paralegal at the Rumah Pejuang Keadilan Legal Aid Institute, he stated that *"From a regulatory perspective, it is not the regulations themselves that are flawed, nor do the regulations need to be strengthened; rather, it is oversight that needs to be*

²⁷ Lya Fayola Zen, "Eksplorasi Anak Dalam Keluarga: Menganalisis Kasus Ibu Suhera Sebagai Tantangan Bagi Kesejahteraan Anak Dan Upaya Pemberdayaan," *Jurnal Ilmu Kesejahteraan Sosial HUMANITAS* 6, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.23969/humanitas.v6i2.17900>.

²⁸ Lawrence M Friedman, *Sistem Hukum: Perspektif Ilmu Sosial* (Bandung: Nusa Media, 2009).

emphasized."²⁹ This indicates that the problem lies in the implementation of the law and the legal culture of society, not merely in a lack of legal norms. This statement suggests that, normatively speaking, Indonesia already has various legal provisions governing child protection and prohibiting child exploitation; however, in social practice, oversight of the enforcement of these laws has not yet been fully effective. This situation indicates an imbalance between the substance of the law and the legal culture of society in responding to the rise of child exploitation on social media.

From a legal perspective, the lack of oversight can be understood as a reflection of the public's lack of collective awareness regarding the importance of child protection in the digital space. Consequently, the exploitation of children is often not viewed as a legal violation or a violation of children's rights, but rather as a normal social phenomenon in the development of modern digital culture. This indicates that the public's legal culture regarding child protection on social media has not yet fully developed in a critical and responsive manner.

According to Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, S.H., the provisions regarding age restrictions on social media use in Minister of Digital Communication Regulation No. 1 of 2025 also reflect the government's efforts to control children's access to the digital space—particularly social media—which has the potential to negatively impact children's growth and development. He noted, *"Especially on social media for children, there are new rules regarding age restrictions on children's use of social media as a measure to prevent child exploitation."*³⁰ Social media essentially not only provides a space for communication and entertainment, but also opens the door to exploitation through content monetization, exposure to inappropriate content, misuse of personal data, and social pressure stemming from the culture of digital

²⁹ Interview with Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, S.H., Paralegal, conducted on 9 April 2026 in Semarang, Central Java.

³⁰ Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, interview, 9 April 2026.

popularity. Therefore, age restrictions on social media use serve as a legal tool designed to minimize children's involvement in exploitative and commercial digital activities before they have developed sufficient psychological and social readiness.

These age-restriction policies also serve an educational and preventive function for parents and the community. Age restrictions on social media use help convey the understanding that children require supervision and guidance when using digital technology. With these restrictions in place, parents are expected to refrain from freely involving their children in social media activities focused on financial gain, popularity, or excessive content production. This policy simultaneously reaffirms that the protection of children in the digital space is not only the responsibility of the state but also the responsibility of families and society as part of social control.

In addition, one important step that needs to be taken is strengthening digital education and literacy among the public, particularly parents and children. The rapid development of social media has brought about changes in social and economic interaction patterns that are not yet fully understood by the public. Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, S.Psi., many parents still view their children's involvement in social media activities as a form of entertainment, creativity, or economic opportunity without realizing the potential for exploitation that could harm the child's development. According to him, "It ultimately comes down to the parents' boundaries. While children might attract viewers for some content creators, it is the parents who must regulate whether their child is safe or not. Additionally, the child's identity must be protected—their privacy must be safeguarded to prevent any harassment directed at them—and this is something that must be carefully considered."³¹

Parents play a crucial role in determining whether a child's involvement in social media remains within the bounds of reasonable participation or has

³¹ Ardian Agil Waskito, interview, 6 May 2026.

crossed into a form of digital exploitation. In the context of modern social media, children are often viewed as figures capable of attracting public attention due to their emotional appeal and are considered more effective at boosting engagement in the form of view counts, comments, and followers.³² This situation has led some content creators to feature children as the central focus of their digital content in order to gain popularity and financial gain. However, the interviews emphasized that the primary responsibility still lies with parents, as the parties who hold authority and control over their children's activities in the digital space.

Therefore, improving digital literacy is necessary so that the public can understand the distinction between children's participation in the digital space and acts of child exploitation. Such education is also crucial for raising awareness that children have the right to privacy, education, mental health, and protection from social pressure as well as digital commercialization. Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, M.A., the issuance of Government Regulation TUNAS on the Governance of Electronic Systems in Child Protection represents the government's effort to address the rising risk of child exploitation on social media due to the rapid advancement of digital technology. According to him, "The TUNAS Regulation does not specifically address the risks faced by parents, but community and parental involvement should be greater to limit children's use of gadgets".³³ Child protection in the digital space cannot be left entirely to formal regulations or the state alone; rather, it requires the active involvement of families and the community as a form of social oversight of children's use of digital media. Although the TUNAS Government Regulation has established guidelines for the management of electronic systems in child protection, these regulations are fundamentally

³² Nanda Dea Athalia and Faizal Kurniawan, "Peran Media Sosial Sebagai Media Distribusi Nilai" 8 (2025): 8543–53, <http://jiip.stkipyapisdmpu.ac.id/jiip/index.php/JIIP/article/view/8461>. Athalia and Kurniawan.

³³ Ardian Agil Waskito, interview, 6 May 2026.

limited in their ability to control behavior and parenting practices within the family environment.

This regulation was established to strengthen child protection in the digital space, given that children no longer merely act as social media users but are also vulnerable to being exploited as objects of content commercialization and sources of economic profit. Through the TUNAS Government Regulation, the government seeks to create a protection system that is more responsive to the evolution of social media by implementing age restrictions on the use of digital platforms and requiring electronic system operators to provide a safe and child-friendly digital environment. This policy reflects a preventive approach aimed at protecting children from risks such as economic exploitation, misuse of personal data, digital violence, and psychological pressure resulting from excessive social media activity.

The issue of child exploitation on social media is not merely a legal matter but is also intertwined with parenting cultures and social interaction patterns in modern society, which increasingly rely on digital technology. Excessive gadget use among children can increase their exposure to various risks in the digital space, such as social media addiction, psychological pressure, digital violence, and economic exploitation through digital content. Under certain conditions, children who are overly active on social media become more vulnerable to being used as objects of content commercialization or exploited for the sake of popularity and economic gain by others, including those in their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, the TUNAS Regulation also reflects a paradigm shift in child protection in the digital age, where the responsibility for protection is not only placed on families and society but also on digital platforms as part of the oversight system for children's activities in cyberspace. From a public law perspective, this regulation has an educational dimension as it seeks to build collective awareness regarding the importance of protecting children's rights on social media. Regulations regarding age verification, content monitoring, and access restrictions to certain services

serve as steps to narrow the gaps in child exploitation that have long thrived due to anonymity and ease of access in the virtual space. Thus, the TUNAS Regulation can be understood as a form of strengthening legal protection and digital oversight aimed at creating a safer social media environment and supporting the best interests of children in the modern digital society. Based on the interview results, the findings are as follows:

No.	Subject	Interview Results Analysis	Description
1.	Strengthening supervision of law enforcement	a. Supervision needs to be tightened b. Law implementation must be maximized c. Social control needs to be strengthened d. Digital supervision must be more active	Based on an interview with Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, S.H., Paralegal at the House of Justice Fighters Legal Aid Institute, conducted at the Office of Legal Aid Agency, 1.30 pm, Thursday, April 9, 2026.
2.	Age restrictions on social media use	a. Children's access to social media needs to be restricted. b. There are age restrictions on the use of digital platforms. c. Reducing the risk of digital exploitation. d. Preventing exposure to inappropriate content.	Based on an interview with Hafid Nafi Rozzaki, S.H., Paralegal at the House of Justice Fighters Legal Aid Institute, conducted at the Office of Legal Aid Agency, 1.30 pm, Thursday, April 9, 2026.
3.	Strengthening digital education and literacy	a. The public needs to be educated about the dangers of exploitation b. Parents need to understand the risks of social media c. Children need to be taught safe digital usage d. Digital literacy must be improved	Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, S.Psi., Young Expert Policy Analyst for Fulfillment of Children's Rights, conducted at DP3AKB Central Java, 9 am, Wednesday, May 6, 2026.
4.	Strengthening child protection	a. The public needs to be educated about the dangers of exploitation	Based on an interview with Ardian Agil

	through TUNAS	PP	b. Parents need to understand the risks of social media c. Children need to be taught safe digital usage d. Digital literacy must be improved	Waskito, S.Psi., Young Expert Policy Analyst for Fulfillment of Children's Rights, conducted at DP3AKB Central Java, 9 am, Wednesday, May 6, 2026.
5.	The active role of parents in supervising children		a. Parents should limit their children's digital activities b. Children's privacy needs to be protected c. Parents should monitor their children's content	Based on an interview with Ardian Agil Waskito, S.Psi., Young Expert Policy Analyst for Fulfillment of Children's Rights, conducted at DP3AKB Central Java, 9 am, Wednesday, May 6, 2026.

Tabel 6. Interview Analysis on Factors Causing Child Exploitation

Interviews with various informants indicate that efforts to address the exploitation of child laborers on social media cannot be understood merely as a matter of legal violations, but rather as a multidimensional social issue related to the community's legal culture, family upbringing patterns, the development of digital technology, and the public's low level of digital literacy.

The link to SDG 4 is evident because the exploitation of children on social media can hinder the fulfillment of children's right to education. Children who are overly engaged in social media activities risk losing study time, experiencing psychological stress, and being exposed to a digital culture that is unhealthy for their mental and social development. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, age-based restrictions on social media use, and parental supervision are integral to efforts supporting quality education and a healthy environment for children's growth and development.

Meanwhile, the link to **SDG 16** is evident through efforts to strengthen legal protection, digital oversight, and the development of legal institutions and culture that are more responsive to child protection in cyberspace. Child exploitation on social media is a violation of children's rights, demonstrating the importance of strengthening social justice and protecting vulnerable groups in the digital era. The implementation of the TUNAS Government Regulation, the regulation of age restrictions on social media use, and the increased responsibility of digital platforms demonstrate the state's efforts to build a stronger and more adaptive child protection system to the development of digital technology. Therefore, this study demonstrates that addressing the exploitation of child workers on social media is not only part of national legal protection but also contributes to achieving the sustainable development goals, which place child protection, education, social justice, and digital security as essential components of modern societal development.

E. Kesimpulan

The development of digital technology and social media in the modern era has brought about significant changes in communication patterns, social interactions, and economic activities within society. In addition to providing various conveniences in accessing and disseminating information, social media has also opened up new avenues for the exploitation of children in increasingly complex forms. Children are no longer merely users of digital media; they are also vulnerable to being used as objects of content commercialization, a means of gaining popularity, and even a source of economic profit for certain parties. This study demonstrates that the exploitation of child workers on social media constitutes a violation of children's rights that impacts their development, mental health, education, and social well-being in the digital age.

Based on the research findings, child exploitation on social media occurs due to the interplay of various social, economic, cultural, and digital technological factors that influence one another. Poverty, low digital literacy,

weak parental supervision, a societal culture that is permissive toward the commercialization of children, and a high societal focus on digital popularity are the primary factors driving child exploitation in cyberspace. Furthermore, the development of social media has shifted exploitation patterns from physical spaces to virtual spaces, which are harder to monitor due to anonymity, ease of access, and the proliferation of digital platforms that perpetrators can exploit to carry out covert and organized exploitation.

From a legal-cultural perspective, this study indicates that the success of combating the exploitation of child workers on social media depends not only on the existence of legal regulations but is also significantly influenced by the legal culture of society. Lawrence M. Friedman's perspective on legal culture demonstrates that the effectiveness of the law is determined by how society understands, accepts, and applies the law in social life. Although Indonesia has established various regulations regarding child protection, the practice of child exploitation on social media persists due to weak oversight and low public awareness regarding the protection of children's rights in the digital space. Therefore, combating child exploitation requires strengthening social oversight, enhancing digital literacy, reinforcing the role of families, and fostering a more ethical and responsive digital culture toward child protection.

This study also indicates that the state's efforts to address child exploitation on social media have been implemented through regulatory strengthening, including the TUNAS Regulation and age-restriction policies for social media use. These regulations represent the state's preventive approach in building a child protection system that is more adaptive to advancements in digital technology. However, child protection in the digital space cannot be solely entrusted to the state and law enforcement agencies. The active involvement of families, communities, educational institutions, and digital platforms is a crucial component in creating a safe and child-friendly social media environment. Thus, child protection in the digital age requires a

multidimensional approach that integrates legal, social, educational, technological, and cultural aspects of society simultaneously.

Furthermore, this research has a strong connection to the United Nations within the framework of sustainable development, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 16. The exploitation of children on social media has the potential to hinder the fulfillment of children's right to education, disrupt psychological development, and create social injustice against vulnerable groups. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, age-based restrictions on social media use, and the protection of children's rights and privacy are crucial components in supporting the creation of quality education, social justice, and a stronger legal protection system in the digital age. Thus, efforts to combat the exploitation of child laborers on social media are not only a national legal responsibility but also part of a global commitment to creating a just, safe, and sustainable society for future generations.

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