

Technology V11/S5: Monetized Image Sharing of Minors

People have created ways to monetize their presence on social media over time. This has led to the rise of the “influencer” lifestyle as a viable job title. Increased usage of social media has created moral questions that have yet to be answered. There is an ongoing debate that surrounds the use of children on social media and on family channel accounts. Family channels are accounts that follow the lives of families, including the children. They showcase the high and low moments these families experience. Family channel content can range from silly TikTok videos to full length videos on YouTube.



The monetization of children is not new. **The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938** created sweeping child labor laws meant to protect children from dangerous work conditions (such as factories). In 1939, the Coogan Act went into effect. **The Coogan Act**, named after a famous child actor, stipulates that a portion of a child actor’s wages be held in an account, only to be accessed by the child when they become an adult. There is debate on whether children on family channels are considered workers. Furthermore, if they can be considered workers, should they then be required to have Coogan accounts?

There are also concerns about children having the ability to consent to their images being used. Because there is a power dynamic between parents and children, some wonder if these children actually have the ability to deny being filmed. Even if they are not outright forced, they may feel pressured to help their family continue the lifestyle the content provides. In some cases, parents broadcast their children’s worst moments to increase engagement and appear relatable. This can have negative effects on children down the line.

Societal norms surrounding family channels are already changing. Some content creators and news outlets will censor the faces of minor children as a way to protect their likeness. The legalese surrounding this will likely change to fit labor laws, but until then, the debate will continue.