Parental Control: Ethical, Legal and Technological Aspects
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Abstract. Children are the heart of our society. As Internet natives, they are born and raised inside an environment where Internet and digital technologies are omnipresent. The universal broadband penetration in most OECD countries, in concert with the advent of smart, mobile devices with touchscreen and networking capabilities, have also changed the cyber society our young children live in. A characteristic example is the exponential growth rate of online social networking (OSN) penetration among children, starting from early adolescence. The potential beneficial impact of (balanced) use of the Internet and digital technologies into the psychosocial well being, creativity, cognitive skills and academic performance of children has been already noted in the literature. As most things in life have dual aspects, children's exposure to the Internet can also be seen from a different, more negative theoresis. Specifically, children may be exposed to a number of threats such as, among others, inadequate content and/or contacts, addiction or other psychosocial deviation, loss of personal and/or sensitive data. In this paper we assess the threats and risks that children are exposed to as a by-product of their Internet experience. In our assessment we examine the problem from an ethical, legal and technological point of view. We also review solutions for mitigating the risks from all available angles and exhibit why parental control software has a long road ahead in meeting some (intrinsically) minimum goals for the quality and effectiveness of their filtering subsystem. We explore the challenges that law, ethos and technology must overcome towards Internet safety for children, and describe some possible limits and intrinsic contradictions that may hinder the ability of our society to adapt.