

## Intellectual Property In Everyday Life: What Do Young People Know About Copyright On Social Media?

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### Abstract:

**Background:** This study aims to investigate the level of knowledge young people possess regarding copyright in the context of digital content usage, with particular emphasis on social media platforms. Given the widespread presence of digital media in students' daily lives, understanding their awareness of legal and ethical considerations becomes crucial for fostering responsible digital behavior.

**Materials and Methods:** A structured questionnaire was administered to assess students' practices, perceptions, and potential knowledge gaps concerning copyright. The instrument was designed to identify both the frequency and manner in which they engage with digital content, including whether they attribute authorship, seek permission for use, or are aware of open licenses such as Creative Commons.

**Results:** The findings indicate that, although students frequently use digital content, a significant number lack awareness of the legal and ethical implications of their actions. Many are unfamiliar with essential practices such as crediting original authors, requesting usage permissions, or utilizing content under appropriate licensing terms.

**Conclusion:** Based on these observations, the study underscores the urgent need for educational initiatives aimed at cultivating a more conscious, ethical, and legally informed digital culture. Promoting respect for copyright should begin during school years to ensure the formation of responsible digital citizens.

**Key Word:** Social Media; Copyright; Intellectual Property; Digital Education.

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### I. Introduction

In a world characterized by hyperconnectivity, where information circulates rapidly and accessibly, social media platforms have become an integral part of everyday life. In this context, the advancement of digital technologies and the growing use of social networks by children and adolescents have significantly transformed the ways in which young people produce, share, and consume content. This digital protagonism has led this segment of the population to actively use platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to create and disseminate information—often without a clear understanding of the legal and ethical boundaries associated with the use of works protected by copyright.

Given this scenario, investigating young people's level of knowledge about copyright in social media emerges as a relevant and necessary endeavor. Understanding how such knowledge—or the lack thereof— influences students' digital practices may significantly contribute to the development of educational policies better aligned with the challenges of digital citizenship in the 21st century.

To guide the investigation, this study is based on the following research question: What is the relationship between basic education students' level of knowledge about copyright on social media and their practices of using and sharing digital content? Based on this central question, the general objective of this work is to investigate young people's knowledge of copyright and intellectual property in the context of social networks.

The structure of this article is organized into five sections in addition to this introduction. The next section presents a literature review on key concepts related to intellectual property and copyright in the digital context.

Subsequently, the methodological procedures adopted are described. The fourth section presents the findings obtained through the questionnaire, followed by analysis and discussion. Finally, the concluding remarks summarize the main results and point to directions for future research and educational practices.

## **II. Material And Methods**

This section describes the instruments employed, the profile of the participants, and the procedures adopted for data collection and analysis. In addition to the quantitative approach—which involved basic spreadsheet tools for statistical processing—the study also incorporated a qualitative dimension. This perspective was addressed through interpretative analysis of the open-ended question included in the questionnaire, with the aim of giving voice to the students regarding what young people need to know about copyright and intellectual property. The combination of these two approaches enabled a broader and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data collection was conducted through the administration of a structured questionnaire comprising 20 multiple-choice (closed-ended) questions and one open-ended question. The instrument was made available via the Google Forms platform. The choice of this tool is justified by its accessibility, ease of dissemination, and automatic systematization of responses, which facilitates the statistical analysis of the collected data.

The target population consisted of young individuals aged between 12 and 26 years. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used, as participants were invited to take part through digital channels such as email, social media, and school-related groups.

The questionnaire was organized into six main sections: (1) participant profile (gender, age, and educational background); (2) social media usage profile; (3) prior knowledge about copyright; (4) practical situations and ethical perceptions regarding online content usage; (5) the use of artificial intelligence and copyright; and (6) education and proposed training on the topic.

All participants were previously informed about the research objectives, and their participation was conditioned upon their agreement to the Informed Consent Form (ICF). Respondents' anonymity was ensured, and the data were used exclusively for academic purposes, in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human subjects established by Resolution No. 510/2016 of the Brazilian National Health Council.

## **III. Theoretical Framework**

To understand young people's relationship with copyright on social media, it is essential to examine key concepts related to the use of copyrighted content in digital environments.

### **The Rise of Social Media Usage Among Adolescents: The Common Practice of Remixing, Sharing, and Reusing Content**

Currently, communication is highly dependent on internet connectivity. The lives of users—particularly adolescents—have been significantly influenced by the introduction of new technologies in the late 20th century, especially the internet and, more recently, social media platforms (Fialho & Sousa, 2019). Since then, the internet has expanded beyond academic and professional contexts, becoming widely accessible. This shift has led to an increase in user-generated content, often created in domestic environments via smartphones and other digital devices.

The widespread dissemination of online content presents a growing challenge: the protection of copyright. Violations of these rights in the digital realm raise questions regarding civil liability (Martins, 2024). Examples of potential infringements include the remixing of works, the unauthorized commercial distribution of another creator's content, and the use of scripts or video concepts without proper credit.

Social media platforms themselves may take down content that violates intellectual property rights. However, in many cases, original creators are unaware their material has been copied, plagiarized, or misused, allowing infringers to monetize such content without restriction.

### **Legal and Ethical Issues Arising from the Misuse of Protected Content**

When an intellectual creation is not protected by intellectual property rights, it falls into the public domain and may be freely used. However, this exposes the work to potential misappropriation and may result in diminished market competitiveness, as unauthorized copies—sometimes of higher quality—can be produced without proper attribution to the original creator.

Therefore, registering intellectual property is crucial for safeguarding authorship and legally penalizing unauthorized use, particularly in digital environments that naturally foster innovative content creation, especially among younger populations.

Legal consequences for violating intellectual property rights may include lawsuits, fines, content takedowns, detention, community service, and search and seizure warrants. These are established by Brazilian legislation, such as Law No. 9.610/1998 (Copyright Law), Law No. 9.279/1996 (Industrial Property Law), and

Law No. 9.609/1998 (Software Law). Furthermore, the Brazilian Penal Code (Decree-Law No. 2.848/1940) includes provisions against copyright infringement.

Beyond legal and financial repercussions, violations can damage a person's reputation or brand, especially when such infractions are made public. This raises ethical concerns, as the misappropriation of ideas undermines credibility and erodes public trust in the cultural or commercial value of digital products. Consequently, it is essential to educate young people about licensing methods and the importance of respecting intellectual property rights.

### **Basic Concepts of Copyright and Their Application on the Internet**

What is copyright? Copyright refers to legal protections granted to original intellectual works, including texts, music, photographs, and videos. In Brazil, these protections are codified in Law No. 9.610/1998, which grants creators the exclusive right to determine how their work is used, distributed, adapted, and monetized.

With the advent of the internet, new challenges have emerged regarding the application of these rights. Even when content is publicly accessible online, it remains protected under copyright law. Given the broad definition of intellectual works and the optional nature of formal registration, questions arise about whether all digital creations qualify for protection. For example, social media posts—often composed of videos, photos, and written content—may or may not meet the legal criteria for protected works. Legal recognition depends on the context and originality of each creation.

A foundational understanding of copyright empowers users to navigate the digital environment responsibly. However, awareness of these concepts remains limited, even among adult learners. In a study involving graduate students in professional and technological education programs, Santos and Lemos (2024) found that students had minimal knowledge of intellectual property, whereas instructors demonstrated a greater familiarity with the topic and related procedures.

According to the authors, "EPT schools still have a long way to go in ensuring that teachers' knowledge of intellectual property" (p. 21) is effectively transferred to students in a way that extends beyond the classroom. In response to this challenge, recent studies have explored creative methodologies and innovative pedagogical strategies to enhance students' understanding of and respect for intellectual property.

De Oliveira Silva and Oliveira Souza (2025) highlighted the difficulties the digital age poses for education in intellectual property and proposed playful activities as a means of fostering interest. Their study introduced a game-like task distribution method using a spinning wheel, culminating in a Copyright Fair and a published volume of student work. The authors concluded that documentation of the students' projects contributed to the development of ethical awareness and responsible attitudes toward intellectual property (p. 125).

Mateus et al. developed a similar approach, using an educational board game to teach basic intellectual property and innovation concepts. The results demonstrated that students found the game enjoyable, engaging, and pedagogically relevant.

Oliveira (2024) proposed the development of an electronic role-playing game (RPG) to disseminate knowledge about copyright and intellectual property. The project, titled *LUMINA*, was implemented at the Federal Institute of Paraíba (IFPB) and resulted in a registered software product, a user manual, branding materials, and a scientific article. Through hands-on experience—from conceptualization to registration—students were able to comprehend the importance of copyright while contributing to the development of new teaching tools.

### **Differences Between Personal, Educational, and Commercial Use**

Copyright is classified as movable property. As such, it forms part of an individual's or legal entity's assets and may be transferred, inherited, or negotiated. Therefore, protected works cannot be used, reproduced, or publicly shared without the explicit permission of the copyright holder, under penalty of legal sanction.

Nonetheless, Brazilian law provides specific exceptions. One of the most significant pertains to educational use. Article 46 of Law No. 9.610/1998 permits the use of copyrighted material within educational institutions, provided the purpose is didactic and non-commercial. This includes excerpts used in classroom teaching, academic presentations, or school research.

In addition to educational uses, personal use is also permitted. This refers to private, small-scale consumption without commercial intent. For example, listening to music or watching a video privately does not constitute infringement. However, the unauthorized commercial exploitation of such works—using them for profit or economic advantage—does constitute a copyright violation, which may result in fines and entitles the original creator to seek compensation.

### **Creative Commons and Other Licensing Models**

The digital era has redefined the ways in which cultural, artistic, and informational content is produced, disseminated, and appropriated. In this context, traditional copyright models based on strict proprietary control have been challenged by more flexible alternatives, such as the Creative Commons (CC) licensing system.

Established in 2001 by Lawrence Lessig, Creative Commons offers a standardized set of public licenses that allow for broader dissemination of creative works while safeguarding authorship rights (Lessig, 2004).

CC licenses consist of various combinations of permissions and restrictions, such as attribution requirements (BY), prohibitions on commercial use (NC), bans on derivative works (ND), and requirements for share-alike distribution (SA). These options enable authors to control how their works are reused, adapted, and redistributed.

Other licensing models coexist within the digital ecosystem. *Copyleft*, for instance, is widely used in free software communities, particularly through the GNU General Public License (GPL), which allows modification and redistribution of source code, provided that derivative works remain under the same license terms (Stallman, 2002).

Public domain works—those whose copyright has expired or has been voluntarily waived—may be used freely, without the need for permission or attribution. However, despite the clarity provided by licensing systems, copyright violations still occur frequently, often due to ignorance or negligence.

#### IV. Results

The data obtained through the questionnaire were organized and analyzed based on six thematic blocks. The quantitative analysis was conducted with the support of the Google Forms tool, which enabled basic statistical processing of the responses, as well as the identification of patterns and gaps in students' knowledge.

The sixth block (f), which included an open-ended question, also allowed for a qualitative reading, in which students' suggestions regarding the knowledge necessary for ethical and lawful use of digital content were taken into account. The results are presented below according to the thematic blocks and discussed in light of the relevant literature and current legislation on intellectual property and digital education.

##### Participants' Profile

A total of 115 respondents agreed to participate in the study, including 47 male participants (40.9%), 66 female participants (57.4%), and 2 individuals (1.7%) who chose not to disclose their gender. Regarding age distribution, 52 participants were between 12 and 15 years old, 55 were between 16 and 18 years old, 5 were between 19 and 22 years old, and 3 were between 23 and 26 years old.

With respect to educational level, the data are organized in Table 1:

**Table 1 – Educational Level of Respondents**

LEVELS	Quantity	Percentage
Incomplete Primary Education	30	26.1%
Completed Primary Education	7	6.1%
Incomplete Secondary Education	60	52.2%
Completed Secondary Education	9	7.8%
Incomplete Higher Education	7	6.1%
Completed Higher Education	1	0.9%
Postgraduate Education	1	0.9%

Source: Data collected by the researchers.

The invitation to participate in the study was initially extended to adolescents affiliated with the school where the researchers study and/or work professionally, which explains the predominance of basic education students among the respondents.

##### Social Media Usage Profile

Among the 115 respondents, the most frequently used social media platforms were Instagram (79.1%), YouTube (74.8%), and TikTok (46.1%). Platform X (formerly Twitter) was mentioned by 14.8% of participants. Other platforms, such as WhatsApp, Discord, and Pinterest, appeared with very low frequency: WhatsApp was mentioned 5 times, Pinterest by 2 respondents, and Discord received only 1 mention. Notably, Facebook was not mentioned by any participant. The predominance of visually and audiovisually oriented platforms underscores the relevance of addressing copyright issues in such environments, where protected works circulate extensively.

The second question in this block examined how frequently participants publish or share content on social media. The results are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2 – Frequency of Posts and/or Shares**

Categories	Quantity	Percentage
Every day	15	13%
A few times per week	41	35.7%
Rarely	46	40%
Never	13	11.3%

Source: Data collected by the researchers.

Most respondents reported sharing content on social media infrequently, followed by those who do so a few times per week. Only a small portion publishes content daily. Among the 46 participants who rarely share content, the majority are between 12 and 18 years of age (25 are between 12 and 15 years old, and 18 are between 16 and 18). Similarly, the 13 participants who reported never sharing content also fall within this age group. No participant over the age of 18 selected this option.

These findings suggest that younger adolescents tend to be more reserved in their social media use, which may be associated with parental supervision, concerns about online exposure, or a lack of understanding regarding the ethical and legal implications of content sharing.

### Knowledge of Copyright Law

This section explored participants' understanding of copyright and the use of protected content. The majority of respondents (78.3%) stated they were familiar with the concept of copyright, although 20.9% expressed uncertainty. Additionally, comprehension of the term *Creative Commons* appeared to be limited, and data on knowledge regarding types of copyrighted content revealed that nearly half of the participants (55%) were unsure or unfamiliar with the topic. Only 45.2% indicated they felt confident in their understanding of the subject.

With respect to third-party content use, 59.1% reported having heard of the difference between “fair use” and “misuse,” indicating that more specific aspects of copyright legislation remain poorly understood. Regarding the practice of attribution, 30.4% of participants reported always crediting the original creator; 32.2% do so occasionally; 16.5% never provide attribution; and 20.9% were unsure whether attribution is necessary.

Finally, 69.6% of respondents had never experienced content blocks or takedowns on social media platforms due to copyright infringement, while 17.4% reported having faced such issues. These findings suggest that, although there is initial awareness of copyright, there remains a considerable gap in practical, ethical, and normative understanding regarding the use and attribution of digital content.

The data reinforce the need for educational initiatives aimed at fostering critical and ethical digital literacy among youth. The lack of familiarity with foundational concepts such as *fair use* and *Creative Commons* licenses reveals important gaps in digital education, particularly concerning the appropriation and circulation of protected content. The low frequency of attribution practices also signals a weakness in recognizing authorship, which may undermine both ethical standards and legal compliance in online interactions. Furthermore, the fact that a significant number of participants have never experienced content blocks or removals may lead to a false perception that such practices are not monitored or penalized on digital platforms. This may contribute to the normalization of unauthorized use of protected works, especially among younger individuals who often lack formal guidance on intellectual property.

### Practical Situations and Ethical Perception of Content Use on the Internet

The findings from this section reveal a complex and multifaceted landscape regarding young people's knowledge and attitudes toward copyright in digital environments. Although 78.3% of respondents claim to be familiar with the concept of copyright, this figure does not necessarily reflect in-depth knowledge. The uncertainty rate (20.9%) and the fact that nearly half of the participants have a limited understanding of protected content types indicate that their knowledge is often superficial or restricted to the basic idea of “ownership of a work or idea.”

Only 45.2% of participants feel confident about their knowledge of copyright, while 7.8% admit they do not know what the term means. This lack of confidence becomes even more apparent when analyzing the data on *Creative Commons* and *fair use*—two fundamental concepts for ethical and lawful authorship in digital spaces. Notably, 40.9% of participants had never heard of fair use, indicating a serious gap in critical digital education. Practical behaviors regarding authorship also reflect this deficiency: only 30.4% always credit the original author, while a significant portion (32.2%) does so sporadically, and 16.5% never do. More concerning, 20.9% do not know whether attribution is necessary—revealing not only legal ignorance but also a potential absence of ethical discussions about authorship in educational and familial settings.

The low incidence of content blocks or takedowns (69.6% never experienced them) may foster a false sense of impunity or irrelevance. On the other hand, the 13% who report avoiding content with potential copyright

risks suggest a minority that is more cautious—although this caution is not necessarily grounded in formal knowledge. From an ethical standpoint, the data show a concerning divide: 33% view the unauthorized use of protected works as illegal; 42.6% recognize it as wrong but do not refer to it as unlawful; and 17.4% see it as a common practice. This last group represents a significant challenge, as it normalizes copyright violations—a likely reflection of a digital culture that prioritizes speed of sharing over authorship and respect for intellectual labor.

Despite this scenario, there are promising signs: 84.3% of participants believe that digital platforms should play an educational role in this process, and 89% recognize the importance of deepening their knowledge on the subject. This indicates that while there is a formative gap, there is also openness to learning and genuine interest among young people—representing a valuable opportunity for pedagogical intervention.

### Artificial Intelligence Use and Copyright Law

This section addressed the intersection between the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools for content creation and copyright law. The data reveal a divided scenario: 46.1% of participants have used AI to create content on social media, while 53.9% have never done so. Among AI users, 55% believe the content generated is subject to copyright protection, whereas 45% remain uncertain.

In terms of legal concerns, 52.2% reported having questioned the copyright implications of using AI, while 47.8% expressed a lack of knowledge or interest on the topic. When asked about the risk of takedown due to improper use, 40.2% believe AI-generated content could be removed for copyright infringement, whereas 23.7% either disagreed or were unable to form an opinion.

Finally, 76.3% of respondents support stricter regulation of AI tools in order to safeguard the rights of human creators. This data reflects a critical and ethical stance toward technological advancement. However, the results also indicate that gaps remain in both understanding and the practical implications of copyright law in AI-driven content creation.

### Education and Proposals for Training on the Topic

The final section focused specifically on knowledge related to copyright and intellectual property. The first question explored how information about these topics is typically acquired. The data are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3 – Use of AI, Copyright, and Content Blocking**

Means of Acquiring Information About Copyright	Percentage
Internet search	67.8%
Courses	1.7%
Friends or classmates	5.2%
I have never sought information on this topic	25.2%

Source: Data collected by the researchers.

Most participants reported seeking information on copyright through internet searches, indicating a predominantly self-directed and informal learning process—albeit potentially superficial. Only 1.7% cited formal courses as a source of knowledge, revealing a significant gap in structured education on this topic. Additionally, 25.2% of respondents stated they had never sought information on copyright, pointing to a concerning level of misinformation or disinterest.

School-based education also appears insufficient: only 20% of participants reported having learned in school about the legal use of digital content, while 60.9% stated that this topic was never addressed during their academic journey. Despite this scenario, a strong interest in learning more stands out: 60% of respondents expressed a desire to better understand how to use protected content appropriately on social media platforms.

These data highlight the urgent need for educational initiatives that promote the ethical, responsible, and lawful use of digital content. Such initiatives should align with the interest already expressed by young people and be integrated into the pedagogical practices of educational institutions.

The final question in this thematic block was open-ended: *"In your opinion, what do young people need to know about this topic?"* From the participants' responses, six recurring thematic axes were identified:

#### a) Understanding Copyright

The majority of students emphasized the importance of young people understanding what copyright is, its purposes, and when it applies. There was a clear concern with knowing the basics of the law, the consequences of unauthorized use, and the importance of respecting the original creator of a work.

Examples:

*"They need to understand how copyright works."*  
*"Young people should know what it means."*  
*"To know what copyright is, when and how it applies."*

#### **b) Ethics and Respect for Creative Work**

Numerous comments stressed the need to value the work of artists, authors, and content creators. Using material without credit or permission was viewed as a form of disrespect and a deterrent to artistic production.

Examples:

*"They need to learn the importance of respecting others' work."*  
*"Giving credit is important to help creators grow."*  
*"Posting something without permission, even if harmless, is strictly wrong."*

#### **c) Conscious Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Responses also revealed a significant concern about the use of generative AI, especially in creating images, music, and texts. Many participants recognized that these tools rely on pre-existing works to generate new content, which may constitute copyright infringement and contribute to the devaluation of human artistic creation.

This critical perspective shows that, although conceptual gaps remain regarding the legal aspects of AI use, there is a growing awareness among youth of the ethical and cultural impacts of creative automation. The concern that AI could appropriate human creations without proper attribution or compensation reflects a legitimate worry about preserving authorship, originality, and the symbolic value of intellectual production.

This context reinforces the importance of expanding discussions on the limits and responsibilities associated with generative technologies, particularly within educational settings. Integrating topics such as copyright, digital ethics, and AI into school curricula can contribute not only to digital literacy but also to the formation of individuals who are conscious of their roles as content producers and consumers in the contemporary digital ecosystem.

Examples:

*"With the rise of AI, it's important to know how to use it without replacing true human art."*  
*"AI searches existing content, which may violate copyright."*  
*"Discussing ethics and the limits of AI is essential."*

#### **d) Safe and Lawful Practices on Social Media**

A significant number of responses focused on safe digital behavior, such as knowing when and how to share images, videos, and music on social networks, avoiding violations and understanding legal risks.

Examples:

*"Knowing how to share photos and images without the risk of violating copyright."*  
*"Avoid posting content without permission to prevent legal issues."*

#### **e) Awareness and Education**

Students pointed out that many young people are unfamiliar with the topic due to the lack of adequate approaches in formal education. In this sense, they emphasized the importance of structured, accessible, and systematic teaching about copyright, preferably embedded within the school curriculum.

Examples:

*"It's very common for users to simply not know or have had any education about this."*  
*"Awareness and reflection are essential for responsible choices."*

#### **f) Knowledge of Legal Alternatives**

Some students demonstrated knowledge of—or interest in learning about—alternatives such as *Creative Commons* licenses and the ethical use of public domain content.

Examples:

*"There are legal alternatives, like image and music libraries with free licenses."*  
*"They should know what fair use is and how it applies."*

## V. Conclusion

In concluding this study, this section offers a synthesis of the main findings, highlighting the most relevant aspects concerning young people's knowledge of intellectual property on social media platforms. The analysis of participants' responses reveals a strong concern with respecting copyright, the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and the need for more comprehensive education on the subject, aiming to foster responsible and informed digital practices.

The findings underscore the importance of educational initiatives directed toward the development of critical awareness regarding the responsible use of digital content, promoting respect for authorship and compliance with current legislation. The integration of intellectual property themes into the daily practices of schools is both urgent and essential. It calls for pedagogical strategies that connect intellectual property concepts to students' lived experiences, contributing to the formation of conscious, ethical, and responsible digital citizens.

Ultimately, understanding copyright is fundamental for acting ethically and lawfully in digital environments. Whether creating content, completing a school assignment, or sharing an image, it is essential to respect the original author and the associated permissions for use. After all, every creator deserves recognition for their work.

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