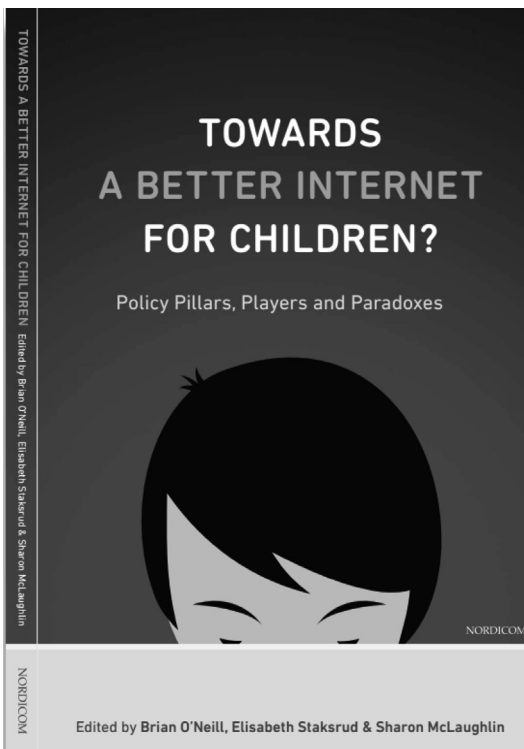# Towards a Better Internet for Children? Policy Pillars, Players and Paradoxes

Brian O'Neill, Elisabeth Staksrud, Sharon McLaughlin, 2013

This book, entitled *Towards a Better Internet for Children? Policy Pillars, Players and Paradoxes* is a major contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the need to develop internet safety policies for children. The authors of the book strive to inform policy decisions on internet safety against young people's online experiences as examined by the European Union (EU) Kids Online II project conducted during the years 2009 and 2011. Additionally, the authors determine in this book how successful online policies are in protecting young people from risks, such as giving out personal information. Although children are main focus of the book, the book might be interesting to a wide variety of audiences, including Public Administration students and scholars who respectively study and participate as role-players in policy-making processes. The nature, scope and interpretation of online risks, the degree of children's internet literacy and the effectiveness of parental regulation are some of the aspects that are examined to ignite policy-making discussions.

The authors of this book are all members of the EU Kids Online network. The book focuses on ongoing dilemmas within the field of internet safety. The contributors established a participatory model of policy making by building their arguments on investigations and reliable data. Public Administration scholars will value the assumption that public participation during policy-making processes is likely to produce sustainable solutions.

The book is divided into three parts. The need to revisit and enforce existing legislation is highlighted in Part I – *Policy Pillars*. This part focuses on the prevention of illegal content on the internet through modernised legislation and self-regulatory systems. It aims to support internet users and parents by encouraging the use of filtering and rating systems. Part II – *Policy Players* focuses on multi-stakeholder involvement during policy making and, importantly, it focuses on the importance of the role of conducting research to inform internet safety. Through the use of examples, Brian O'Neill deliberates on the changing role of the EU Media Regulator in a fast-moving technology environment. By introducing independent regulatory authorities as designated regulatory authorities, O'Neil makes Public Administration scholars aware of alternative role-players during policy making, in addition to direct government control. Different perspectives and privacy-related risks are discussed in Part III – *Policy Paradoxes* in order to find a balance between protecting young people's needs for and their right to privacy. Although the scope of the book is limited to EU countries, it would be interesting to know whether the findings arrived at in this book could be helpful to other countries, especially to the developing and underdeveloped countries where access to the internet by young people is growing rapidly. Regrettably, no reference is made to countries in these categories, especially to Africa, the continent where increasing access to the internet needs to be accompanied by awareness to risks associated with such access and efforts to mitigate severe impacts relating to it.

With regard to the writing style, unfortunately, the paragraphs often become too technical, an aspect that could make it hard for average readers or those from other disciplines to comprehend. Readers could easily get frustrated when trying to decipher the author's meaning due to complicated technical information. Where applicable, explanations of the technical information or references to tables or charts could have been given. A review of literature of young people's online experiences and risks, revealed very little research. Above all, this book is indeed a key contribution to online safety in Europe and sets an example for similar projects in other countries. It is not just a compilation of facts based on EU research projects, but an excellent illustration of the involvement of different role-players during policy revision and development. The book exposes integrated policy formation processes close to the heart of many Public Administration scholars and academics. It has an abundance

of researched data and empirical information used in the European online policy formation process, and successfully addresses a universal concern through a public participative approach. Although the policy-making process referred to in this book is limited to the European landscape, any Public Administration scholar interested in policy making will indeed find it interesting and useful.

Corlia Alers
Lecturer, Department Public Administration and Management
Unisa
alersc@unisa.ac.za