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Five years for Snapchat-facilitated child sexual offences in B.C., and what it signals for sentencing

By **Silvia Badea**

Law360 Canada (February 11, 2026, 10:33 AM EST) -- A recent Campbell River, B.C., case in which a 33-year-old Surrey, B.C., man received a five-year penitentiary sentence after pleading guilty to child sexual offences involving a youth he met on Snapchat is a reminder of how digital communications continue to increase in relevancy within the criminal justice system. It also shows how sentencing reasons are increasingly shaped by the realities of technology-facilitated offending, including the scale of access to youth, and the persistence of digital traces even when platforms promote ephemerality.

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Mykola Syvak: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Reporting indicates the accused began communicating with a youth on Snapchat in 2023, travelled to Campbell River in April 2024 and was arrested the same day authorities were notified. The matter proceeded by guilty pleas in January 2026. The sentencing package included ancillary orders such as registration under the *Sex Offender Information Registration Act* (SOIRA) and a DNA order.

For counsel handling similarly structured files, three lenses are consistently driving sentencing submissions and judicial analysis:

1. How courts assess harm and risk where social media is the vehicle
2. Trends in sentencing for technology-linked child abuse cases
3. Misconceptions about "private messaging" and criminal liability.

1) Harm and risk when social media is the vehicle

Harm is not confined to physical proximity

Sentencing law has moved away from assumptions that online private messaging or telecommunication-based contact with a youth reduces seriousness. In *R. v. Friesen*, [2020] 1 S.C.R. 424, the Supreme Court of Canada directed courts to apply updated baselines for child sexual offences that reflect a modern understanding of harm, and confirmed that significant penitentiary

sentences should not be unusual in appropriate cases.

In technology-facilitated files, the harm analysis often includes factors that are specific to digital environments, such as:

- Increased vulnerability created by anonymity, false identities and curated intimacy
- A perception of permanence risk, including fear of distribution or resurfacing
- Coercion vectors that can be easier to deploy online, including threats relating to images or disclosure
- The broader social impact of platforms that scale access to minors.

Risk is often framed as opportunity plus behaviour

Courts frequently assess risk by looking at patterns, planning, escalation, persistence and attempts to isolate or normalize boundary crossing. Technology is not treated only as "where it happened." It can be part of the risk architecture, particularly where the record supports grooming-like conduct or deliberate steps to move from online communication to in-person contact.

That risk framing also interacts with Parliament's direction that, when sentencing offences involving abuse of a person under 18, courts must give primary consideration to denunciation and deterrence (*Criminal Code*, s. 718.01).

2) Sentencing trends in technology-linked child abuse cases

Post-Friesen baselines continue to rise

The most visible trend remains the post-*Friesen* environment, where appellate courts have been instructed to avoid outdated baselines and to ensure sentencing ranges reflect Parliament's increases to maximum penalties and society's understanding of harm.

In practice, this has generally meant:

- Less tolerance for minimizing language about online conduct
- More frequent penitentiary outcomes even absent prior records, where aggravating features are present
- Tighter, more explicit reasoning on proportionality, parity and totality when multiple offences are sentenced together.

Discretion still matters, especially where content offences are present

Technology-linked cases often include "content offences" alongside "contact offences." Sentencing submissions increasingly parse moral blameworthiness with more granularity, rather than treating every case as if it fits the same worst-case fact pattern.

That nuance has become more prominent in the wake of litigation challenging mandatory minimums and emphasizing proportionality and individualized sentencing. One practical effect is that counsel are more likely to focus on the specific conduct proved, the offender's decision-making and the particular risk factors supported by the record, rather than relying on slogans about platforms or general social trends.

The broader context is real, even if it is not determinative

Courts do not sentence by statistics, but they sentence within the world they are trying to denounce and deter. Statistics Canada has reported marked growth in police-reported online child sexual exploitation over the last decade, which provides context for why denunciation and deterrence arguments have intensified.

3) 'Private messaging' misconceptions and criminal liability

A recurring misconception in platform-based cases is that private or disappearing messages reduce exposure. They do not.

Misconception: 'It was just DMs'

Several offences are drafted to capture telecommunications-based conduct. A central example is luring a child (*Criminal Code*, s. 172.1), which expressly targets using a computer system or telecommunication to facilitate sexual offences against minors. Even where luring is not charged, the communications can remain highly relevant to intent, planning, escalation and risk.

Misconception: 'Disappearing messages mean no proof'

From an evidentiary perspective, ephemerality does not mean the absence of evidence. Devices, screenshots, backups, recipient-side preservation and third-party reporting can all support investigations. The legal takeaway is straightforward: a platform feature does not create a defence, and arguments about concealment can sometimes cut against mitigation when the record supports deliberate steps to avoid detection.

Misconception: 'It only matters if it is public'

Criminal exposure often attaches to transmission and making available, not only public posting. The key point for legal audiences is that "private" does not equate to "lawful," and youth-related offences can engage especially serious consequences.

Bottom line

The five-year sentence in this B.C. Snapchat-facilitated case sits within a broader sentencing direction that treats technology-facilitated child sexual offences as fully serious, and often as uniquely aggravating where the platform dynamics amplify access, vulnerability, coercion or persistence risk. For counsel, the most persuasive submissions tend to be concrete and record-driven: identify the specific harm pathways supported by the evidence, articulate the risk indicators tied to the offender's behaviour, and situate proportionality within the modern post-*Friesen* framework and the statutory emphasis on denunciation and deterrence for offences against minors.

In short, "it happened in DMs" is not a mitigating narrative. Courts are measuring what the technology enabled, what the offender chose to do with that access, and what sentence is required to denounce the conduct and protect the public.

Prior to joining Stern Shapray Criminal Lawyers in 2021, Silvia Badea spent more than three years as a prosecutor and legal clerk at various district attorney's offices across Oregon, where she worked on complex domestic violence, firearms offences and manslaughter matters. Since returning to British Columbia, Badea has continued to focus on helping clients facing a wide range of serious criminal charges.

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