CREATOR RISK INTELLIGENCE
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CREATOR RISK INTELLIGENCE

The Signal

Monthly intelligence on Creator Risk, regulatory change, and brand safety incidents. Issue 13 · January 2025

Ruby Franke had 2.5 million YouTube subscribers and 1 billion views. Her channel, 8 Passengers, ran for eight years. The warning signs were in her public content the entire time. Few in the brand community appeared to be watching them. This month the Signal examines what was visible, who missed it, and the wider category of risk that the case has brought into view.

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01 — THE SIGNALS IN THE FEED

Ruby Franke · 8 Passengers · YouTube · January 2025

In January 2025, Shari Franke — eldest daughter of YouTube creator Ruby Franke — published a memoir. *The House of My Mother: A Daughter's Quest for Freedom* became a New York Times bestseller within days of its release on 7 January. It detailed the physical and psychological abuse Shari had experienced growing up on camera on her mother's 8 Passengers channel, which at its peak had 2.5 million subscribers and over one billion views.

Ruby Franke had been arrested in August 2023, along with her business partner Jodi Hildebrandt, after one of her children escaped from Hildebrandt's property and approached a neighbour for help. The child was malnourished and had open wounds. Franke pleaded guilty to four counts of felony aggravated child abuse and was sentenced in February 2024 to between four and thirty years in prison.

What the public record had contained for years

Content-level signals	Multiple episodes of 8 Passengers contained explicit descriptions of punitive parenting practices — withholding meals, cancelling Christmas, making children sleep on bean bags for extended periods. These were not incidental moments. They were central to the content. Viewer concern had been documented in public comment sections and creator community forums for years before the arrest.
Community response	The channel had accumulated documented viewer concern about child welfare — questions in comment sections, discussion threads on Reddit, and commentary from other creators in the family vlogging community raising specific concerns about what was being shown. This was publicly accessible.
Platform signals	YouTube did not act on the channel until September 2023 — the day after the arrest. The channel had remained monetised throughout the period during which viewer concern was documented and public.

Brand partner exposure	Throughout the years that viewer concern was building in public, 8 Passengers carried active brand partnerships. The standard creator vetting process — follower count, engagement rate, content category — is not designed to surface child welfare signals. It assesses reach and brand fit. It does not assess what the content actually shows is happening to the children in it.

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The signals in the 8 Passengers case were not hidden. They were in the content. They were in the comment sections. They were in the community discussion. Standard vetting processes are not designed to look for them — because standard vetting processes were not designed with child welfare as an assessment dimension. The Ruby Franke case is not an outlier. It is a demonstration of a structural gap.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

For any partnership with a family content creator whose channel features children as central participants: add a community sentiment review to your standard vetting process. Comment sections and creator community forums are publicly accessible and frequently contain signals that do not appear in the content itself. Ask specifically: is there documented viewer concern about the treatment of the children in this content?

02 — THE CHILD CREATOR GOVERNANCE GAP

Family vlogging · Child labour law · January 2025

The Ruby Franke case prompted legislation. In January 2025, California expanded its Coogan Law — originally enacted in 1939 to protect child actors' earnings in film — to cover children featured in monetised online content. The expanded law requires that 30% of earnings from content featuring a minor be placed in a protected trust account. Illinois had already passed similar legislation in July 2024. Utah legislators are also considering similar protections, with the Franke case already being cited as part of the wider policy debate.

The legislative response reflects a structural reality that the Franke case made visible: children who appear in monetised family content have, until very recently, had essentially no legal protections. They are not contracted for their participation. They cannot consent in any meaningful legal sense. The revenue generated from content featuring them is controlled entirely by their parents. No child labour standards apply. No working hours are regulated. No welfare checks are mandated.

The brand partner dimension

Brands that sponsor family creator channels are commercial beneficiaries of content that features unprotected child participants. That is not a legal finding — in most markets it is not yet a legal question at all. But it is a governance question that no standard creator vetting process currently asks.

The same brands that apply child safety standards to their own advertising — age-appropriate content, parental permission for featuring minors, safeguarding policies for campaigns reaching young audiences — are activating partnerships with family creators where the children at the centre of the content have no equivalent protection. The governance gap does not sit with the creator alone. It sits with every commercial relationship that monetises that content.

Shari Franke told People magazine in January 2025: *"I've witnessed the damage of what happens when your life is put online. There's no ethical way to do it."* She also testified before the Utah legislature, calling for stronger protections for children in family vlogging. The legislative response is moving. Brand governance processes have not yet caught up.

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Family vlogging is a commercial category in which children are the primary content asset and have, until very recently, had no legal protection. Brands partnering with family creators are operating in a governance gap that legislators are now beginning to close. The questions that brand compliance teams do not currently ask — about children's consent, welfare, and financial protection — are exactly the questions that new legislation is beginning to require. Getting ahead of that requirement is materially easier than responding to it after an incident.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

For partnerships with family content creators where children appear regularly as participants: ask four questions that standard vetting does not. Are the children's earnings from this content legally protected? Does the content have documented welfare checks? Is the content subject to any child labour regulations in its jurisdiction of production? And does your own brand's safeguarding policy cover your commercial association with this creator's content? If any answer is unclear, the due diligence is incomplete.

03 — WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

Forward signals · January 2025

Three developments worth watching closely as 2025 begins.

Ferragni verdict	The fast-track criminal trial opened in September 2024 is expected to produce a verdict in the first half of 2025. Whatever the outcome, the verdict will set a precedent for how European prosecutors approach creator marketing fraud cases. We will cover this in full when it arrives.
DDL Beneficenza passage	Italy's Ferragni Law has been working through parliament since January 2024. A vote is expected in the first half of 2025. When it passes, the first full national influencer marketing law in Europe will be in force.
EU Digital Fairness Act	The European Commission's consultation on the Digital Fairness Act — which will cover influencer marketing obligations across all 27 member states — is expected to produce a legislative proposal in 2025. The scope is broad and the implications for brands running European creator programmes are significant.

04 — REGULATORY NOTE

Italy · France · USA · January 2025

Three significant regulatory developments opening 2025.

ITALY	Ferragni Law (DDL Beneficenza) enforcement expected imminently upon parliamentary passage. AGCOM Code of Conduct now formally in force for creators with 500k+ followers or 1M monthly views. Maximum fine €600,000. Italy has the most comprehensive creator regulatory architecture in Europe.
FRANCE	ARPP AI monitoring continues to scale. The ARPP's 2024 Annual Report confirmed a 222% increase in content reviewed year-on-year. Speech-to-text analysis now included in the monitoring system — verbal brand mentions in video content are detectable without on-screen disclosure. The compliance bar in France has moved significantly.

USA	FTC Consumer Reviews and Testimonials Rule in full effect. FTC enforcement activity against influencer marketing non-compliance has increased significantly since 2021, with brands — not individual creators — the primary targets of enforcement action. The dual liability standard is now the established norm. California's expanded Coogan Law, covering child creators in monetised online content, came into effect in January 2025.

The FTC's sustained increase in enforcement activity since 2021 reflects a deliberate agency decision to treat influencer marketing non-compliance as a priority enforcement area. The direction of travel is consistent and accelerating. Brands that have treated this as a peripheral compliance concern should reassess that position.

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The Signal is published monthly by Signal Intelligence. Each issue covers real Creator Risk incidents, regulatory developments, and the intelligence that brand-side teams need before they need it. Subscribe at signalintelligence.consulting — and if this issue was forwarded to you, make sure you're on the list for the next one.