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Sharenting In the Digital Age: Investigating Motives and Examining Consequences for Children

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Abstract: The rise of social media platforms has paved the way for a new parenting trend known as “sharenting”, or sharing parenting. The actual definition of this phenomenon is where parents actively share information about their children online, mainly on social media. The information they share can be images and videos containing personal data. This research aims to explore the motives behind sharenting practices and their impact on children. The method used in this research is a literature-based review employing related literature to highlight the primary factors of sharenting and the impact of it. This research finds that the motives of sharenting encompass various aspects, including the desire for social connection and validation from parents, parental pride, digital gallery, and support from online communities. Meanwhile, the consequences of sharenting on children can affect to the mental health and expose them to privacy risks. In conclusion, the importance of parental mindfulness and responsible online sharing is needed. Afterwards, this research also emphasizes the role of digital literacy for parents.

Keywords: sharenting, online sharing, children’s privacy, digital media, digital literacy

A. Introduction

Sharing is one of the phenomena that happens during the development of the digital age. Sharenting comes from the words 'sharing' and 'Parenting', which is the practice of sharing parenting methods between parents on social media (Lazard et al., 2019). In the sharing, parents commonly upload pictures and videos of their children while doing the activities. Those pictures are uploaded to various social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, depending on the parents' social media. Meanwhile, the term sharenting itself is gender neutral; it means it can be a father and a mother. However, according to Duggan et al. (2015), mothers tend to post frequently on social media, mainly pictures of their children and family photographs. Thus, it indicates that although sharing happens to both parents, the mother is the main character here. Another reason mothers are the first agents here is that mothers also symbolise their children's success (Athan & Reel, 2015). Therefore, it is common for mothers to post on social media to show their children's success stories.

According to Briazu et al. (2021), there are some benefits of conducting sharing for parents. However, as a part of its benefit, more risks can emerge due to this action, and this effect is not only happening to parents but also to children. Children can be a vulnerable subject in this phenomenon due to their lack of understanding about privacy (Livingstone et al., 2019), mainly children in underage. Therefore, all the information their parents post on social media, such as date of birth, location, and pictures, is without the children's consent

and can harm them with any digital crimes (Plunkett, 2020). In response to this case, the author planned to conduct research about this to gain further understanding of the motives of sharenting and its impacts on children. To answer these research questions, the researcher uses literature-based reviews, which are also a concern in this research. However, although there is some previous research which also focuses on this theme, most of them focus on specific social media (Briazu et al., 2021); hence to fill the gap, the researcher conducts a literature review of this theme based on various social media, which can be Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and also Facebook.

B. Methods

The method of this research is literature review, which collected various research articles about sharenting from various countries and social medias as the means of sharenting. However, the literature used in this research is limited on the sharenting phenomenon for children instead of teenagers or pre-teenagers aged. Afterwards, the researcher use Goole scholars, ERIC, and digital library of the University of Manchester to search the articles, and using specific keywords.

By using those keywords and related terms, the researcher was able to gain more than fifty related articles about sharenting across the world, and obtain the insight of sharenting factors, benefits, and downsides for both parents and children. The selected articles were critically analyzed to extract key findings related to the motives behind sharenting practices and the effects on children. The researchers focused on identifying common themes and patterns emerging from the literature, as well as any divergent perspectives. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and its implications for children's mental health and privacy.

However, in this article, the researcher focuses on the motives of sharenting from parents and the effects of it for children. The researcher also finds about the point of digital literacy for parents who conduct sharenting; but, It is also important to note that while the literature review provides valuable insights into the motives and effects of sharenting, further empirical research is needed to explore these aspects in greater detail. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of sharenting on children's well-being and privacy would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

C. Results and Discussion

After analysing the literature, there are some factors of parents conduct sharenting on their social media, which consist of searching for social connection from others, looking for validation from other parents, obtaining the community, and providing a digital gallery for themselves. Meanwhile, the effect of this phenomenon on children consists of mental health issues and the safety of children due to their digital privacy.

1. Parents' Motives of Sharenting

Most parents have their own reasons of conducting sharenting on their social media, but those reasons can be grouped into several majority factors. Those motives being the prominent urge for them to do so. The first motive is searching social connection with others, mainly to stay in touch with their family members and relatives who live far for them (Sukk

& Soo, 2018). By sharing their children's lives on social media, parents can bridge geographical distances and keep loved ones informed about their family's milestones and daily experiences. This form of digital sharing helps nurture and maintain relationships, ensuring a sense of social connection (Liao et al., 2019). Mainly, nowadays people are not only share their contact on WhatsApp or I-message, but they also change their social media to stay update with each other's. This action also happens among parents, who communicate with other family members through social media, thus the parents are not only update about themselves but also update the activities of their children, parents also update about the growing process of the children regularly (Duggan et al., 2015) and strengthening the relationship with the family members together, thus they can exchange the messages about their children indirectly. For instance, parents share the video of their children birthday on Facebook as the communication tool with their family members who cannot attend the birthday party. Thus, by this action, they can still feeling close to each other.

Another reason of doing sharenting is because parents want to look for validation from others for the way they raise their children (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). This action is done because they also want to prove that they can face and solve the challenge to take care of their children. Parents will feel so proud and contents if one of their followers notice about their parenting and give the praise for them, by doing that parents also have the opportunity to build an image of good parents for themselves (Davidson & Wall 2018). The image building process not only satisfies them for their capability in the parenting, but also to provide the signal of expertise about children's issues to their online followers. They also want to gain feedback and validation for their parenting choices (Larson, 2017). The likes, comments, and supportive messages received from friends, family, and acquaintances can boost parents' self-esteem and reinforce their belief in their parenting abilities.

Furthermore, parents often use social media as a reference point to compare their parenting practices with others (Katz & Crocker, 2015). By observing and seeking validation from their online connections, parents gain insights into different parenting approaches, trends, and techniques. This validation-seeking behavior serves as a means to benchmark their own parenting choices and ensure that they are meeting societal expectations and norms. However, with this motivation, it can also result a social pressure for themselves because they need to prove others about their ability in handling children. This kind of motivation can also stimulate others to create high expectations about their parenting process towards children. Likewise, it can also encourage parents to take their self-worth into others instead of themselves. Hence, it is important for parents to balance the validation motive with their understanding about self-worth, and they also need to realize that their online parenting cannot define their whole actual parenting for their children.

Furthermore, parents mainly mothers need a community as a place to share with people who have the same role, which is people who are in the process of nurturing their children. Another reason for parents to do sharenting is because they want to seek and get a community which can be a safest place of sharing (Duggan et al., 2015). By having a community, parents can share the knowledge and experiences of how taking care of the children (Tao & You, 2018). The lack of parenting experts who exist in parents' life also encourage them to find a community for them to support each other. Through sharing on social media about their children, they can easily find people who can relate with them. Thus, they can share and give

the comments to each other. For instance, most parents share the activities of their infants and toddlers in their social media, such as Facebook and Instagram to share the information about parenting topic, by that they can receive a lot of feedbacks and praise from others and they can create a community together. This phenomenon indicates that parents nowadays use social media to point out the similarity topic with others about parenting (Tao & You, 2018). Mainly, if parents have disability children, they tend to build support from parents who have the same experiences, hence they can draw good practice together (Kopecky et al., 2020). This motivation usually come up also from new parents, who share the pictures of their children in the early days of them becoming parents to gain a support from the advanced parents' experiences (Kopecky et al., 2020).

Afterwards, another reason for parents to do sharenting is because they want to collect precious memories with their children (Blum-Ross & Livingstone 2017). Parents have an innate inclination to capture and document the precious moments of their children's lives. By sharing these moments on social media, parents can create a digital record that can be revisited and cherished over time. According to Marwick & Boyd (2014), sharenting allows parents to curate a collection of memories and milestones, providing them with a convenient platform to capture and preserve their children's growth and development. Then, through collecting digital memories about children, parents can contribute to the digital storytelling of their family's history and identity. By sharing stories, traditions, and experiences, parents pass on their family's unique identity to future generations. According to Marwick and Boyd (2014), sharenting becomes a way for parents to construct and convey a narrative of their family's values, beliefs, and cultural heritage, allowing children to develop a sense of self and belonging. However, although sharenting offers benefits in terms of preserving memories digitally, it also raises ethical considerations regarding children's privacy and consent. Parents need to be mindful of the potential long-term consequences and impact on their children's digital footprint. Researchers like Livingstone et al., (2018) emphasize the importance of parental responsibility in safeguarding their children's privacy and well-being in the digital realm.

From those factors, it can be known that the majority of parents for doing sharenting can be different, but most of the motives is due to the seeking similarity with others and validate their own actions that something which they do for their children is right. Those motives do not fully wrong, but it is also important for parents to consider all the consequences of their sharenting actions, because it will not only harm them, but also harm their own children.

2. The Downsides of Sharenting for Children

As a vulnerable subject, due to their understanding about consent (Livingstone et al., 2019), children becomes the main target of the sharenting downside. This action not only affect their mental health when they grow older, but also impact to their safety in their real life and their social lives problems in the future. Although this phenomenon as a consequence process if the children who have been raised in the digital age (Willson, 2018: 1), but the concern for their safety life still matter.

The datafication process of the children is started even before children born and start their life, it happens because most parents share the content about their children since the children in the womb, thus it creates a digital shadows for them (Leaver 2015: 150).

According to AVG survey (2010) in the various European countries, more than 81% of children under the age of two years have digital footprints of their pictures and video created by their parents on social media. The contents of the children images can be a birthday party, family gathering, and spontaneous activities (Brosch 2016) which indeed affect to the children privacy.

One of the key effects of sharenting on children's privacy is the long-term impact of their digital footprint. The extensive sharing of personal information and images without children's consent can contribute to the creation of a comprehensive online presence from an early age. This digital footprint may include sensitive details about a child's life, which can be challenging to control or erase once shared on public platforms. As children grow older, their digital footprint may have implications for their personal and professional lives, potentially affecting their reputation and privacy.

Sharenting also exposes children to privacy risks and vulnerabilities. The public sharing of personal information and images increases the likelihood of unauthorized access, cyberbullying, and even identity theft (Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017). Children may become targets for online predators or face potential harm when their personal information is readily available to a wide audience. It is crucial for parents to be aware of these risks and take steps to safeguard their children's privacy by carefully considering what they share and with whom.

Furthermore, sharenting can impact a child's autonomy and sense of self. The constant sharing of their personal lives without their consent can infringe upon their right to control their digital presence and shape their own identity (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2021). Children may feel a loss of agency over their online presence and may struggle to establish boundaries between their public and private lives. This blurring of boundaries can have psychological and emotional implications, potentially affecting their self-esteem and sense of privacy.

Additionally, the potential permanence of shared content can have unintended consequences for children's privacy. Even if parents later decide to remove certain posts or images, they may have already been saved, shared, or accessed by others, making complete deletion or control over the content challenging. This lack of control over their digital footprint can create a sense of vulnerability and diminish children's privacy rights. The oversharing of personal information and images through sharenting increases the risk of online harassment. Shared content can be manipulated, repurposed, or fall into the wrong hands, potentially leading to cyberbullying incidents. Children who become targets of online harassment may suffer emotional distress, anxiety, and other negative psychological effects (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018).

To mitigate the potential negative effects of sharenting on children's privacy, it is essential for parents to adopt responsible sharing practices. This includes considering the long-term implications of their posts, respecting children's consent as they grow older, and being mindful of the privacy risks associated with sharing personal information (Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2021). Educating parents about online privacy and providing guidelines for responsible sharenting can help strike a balance between sharing family moments and protecting children's privacy.

The second downside for doing sharenting for children is it can affect to their mental health in the future. While sharenting offers parents a way to connect and share their

parenting experiences, it raises concerns about the potential impact on children's mental health. Sharenting exposes children to constant social comparisons and pressures. When parents share highlights and achievements of their children, it can create an environment of competition and unrealistic expectations. Children may feel pressured to live up to these portrayals, leading to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and a negative impact on their mental health (Barry et al., 2017; Coyne et al., 2018). Then, the oversharing of personal information and images through sharenting increases the risk of online bullying and stigmatization for children. Shared content can be used by others to mock, criticize, or exclude children from social circles. Online bullying has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation among children (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Parents should be aware of the potential risks and take steps to protect their children from online harm.

Another consequence of it is the content shared through sharenting becomes a permanent digital record that may have long-term consequences for children's mental health. As children grow older, they may experience embarrassment, regret, or distress due to past shared content that no longer reflects their current identity or aspirations. The fear of judgment, scrutiny, or social repercussions can cause heightened anxiety and stress among children (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Parents should consider the potential long-term impact before sharing content that may affect their child's well-being in the future. Sharenting also can influence parent-child relationships and trust dynamics. Children may perceive sharenting as a breach of trust and invasion of their personal boundaries. They may develop concerns about their parents' motives and question their parents' respect for their privacy. This strained relationship can impact the child's emotional well-being and overall mental health. Open communication and mutual respect between parents and children are crucial to maintaining trust and fostering healthy relationships. Another significant downside is sharenting can contribute to the cultivation of external validation-seeking behavior in children. When parents consistently share their children's achievements and seek approval from others, children may become reliant on external validation for their self-worth. This reliance can hinder the development of a strong internal sense of self and contribute to issues such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and self-comparison (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2018). Parents should prioritize fostering intrinsic motivation and self-esteem in their children.

Therefore the practice of parents sharing personal information and images of their children on social media, raises concerns about the impact on children's mental health. The consequences include social comparisons, online bullying, violations of privacy and autonomy, long-term repercussions, strained parent-child relationships, and the cultivation of external validation-seeking behavior. It is crucial for parents to be mindful of these potential risks and adopt responsible sharenting practices that prioritize children's well-being and mental health. Balancing the desire to share parenting experiences with protecting children's mental health and privacy is essential in the digital age.

However, to prevent the downsides from the sharenting phenomenon, it is necessary for parents to improve their digital literacy skill. Digital literacy equips parents with the knowledge and awareness of the concept of digital footprints. They learn about the lasting implications of sharing personal information and images of their children online. With digital literacy, parents understand that the information shared can be accessible to a wide audience

and may have implications for their children's privacy and security (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). This understanding encourages parents to be more mindful of their sharenting practices. Then, the digital literacy enables parents to critically evaluate the content they share about their children. They develop skills to assess the potential impact of their posts on their children's well-being and privacy. Parents learn to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate content, considering factors such as age appropriateness, consent, and the long-term consequences of their posts (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Digital literacy empowers parents to make responsible decisions regarding the content they share and its potential effects. Through the capability in literacy, it can emphasize the importance of consent and autonomy in sharenting practices. Parents who possess digital literacy skills understand the significance of obtaining informed consent from their children before sharing their personal information online. They recognize that children have the right to make decisions about their digital presence and respect their autonomy. Digital literacy promotes a culture of open communication and respect within families. Parents can also take proactive steps to protect their children from potential harm, such as educating them about online safety, setting strong passwords, and teaching them about responsible online behaviour (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018)

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the practice of sharenting has become increasingly prevalent in today's digital era. Parents are motivated by various factors, such as the desire for social connection, validation, parental pride, and the need for support from online communities. However, the consequences of sharenting on children's mental health and privacy cannot be ignored. Sharenting may expose children to privacy risks and compromise their autonomy as their personal information is shared without their consent.

To mitigate the potential negative effects of sharenting, parents need to exercise mindfulness and responsibility in their online sharing practices. This involves considering the long-term implications of sharing personal information about their children and respecting their children's privacy and autonomy. Parents should also be aware of the potential impact on their children's mental health, as excessive exposure and scrutiny on social media can contribute to feelings of anxiety, self-esteem issues, and the blurring of boundaries between public and private life. Digital literacy plays a crucial role in empowering parents to navigate the sharenting phenomenon responsibly. By enhancing their digital literacy skills, parents can develop a deeper understanding of the risks and challenges associated with online sharing. They can learn to critically evaluate the content they share, make informed decisions about privacy settings, and engage in open dialogues with their children about their digital presence.

Promoting digital literacy among parents is essential in raising awareness about the potential consequences of sharenting and equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect their children's privacy and well-being. Educational programs, workshops, and resources focused on digital literacy can help parents develop a thoughtful and responsible approach to sharenting.

Ultimately, striking a balance between sharing moments of joy and pride in parenting while respecting children's privacy and well-being is key. By cultivating a mindful and

responsible online presence, parents can create a positive digital environment for their children, ensuring their mental health and privacy are safeguarded in the era of sharenting.

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