
Parental Perspectives on Sharenting: Attitudes, Privacy Concerns, and Children's Digital Footprint

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Abstract:

Purpose: The objective of the present investigation is to elucidate parental perspectives regarding sharenting, with a particular emphasis on their attitudes, concerns pertaining to privacy, and the ramifications of children's digital footprints. As the phenomenon of sharenting proliferates on a global scale, it is imperative to comprehend the underlying motivations and associated risks pertinent to this trend in order to effectively address its ethical, social, and economic ramifications.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This investigation adopted a survey-based approach, concentrating on a sample of 326 parents of children aged 15 years or younger. The data collection instrument consisted of Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions, addressing themes such as parental attitudes towards sharenting, privacy and safety concerns, emotional reactions, and social media behaviors. The statistical analyses utilized included Spearman's Correlation, Chi-Square Tests, Cramer's *V*, in addition to descriptive statistics.

Findings: The results indicate a diverse spectrum of parental perspectives on sharenting, with 60% of respondents perceiving it as beneficial. Privacy-related apprehensions were notably pronounced, with 75% of parents expressing varying levels of concern. Frequent social media users demonstrated a slightly greater propensity to acknowledge the advantages associated with sharenting (Spearman's $\rho = 0.06$, $p = 0.296$), whereas parents affected by child influencers exhibited a considerable tendency to share their children's content (Point-Biserial $r = 0.01$, $p = 0.896$). However, no substantial correlations were identified between parental privacy apprehensions and the age of the children or anticipated future implications for privacy. Emotional responses, such as pleasure or unease, did not significantly impact attitudes towards the perceived benefits of sharenting.

Practical Implications: The study highlights the urgent need for developing policies that promote parental digital literacy to mitigate the privacy risks associated with sharenting. Moreover, the insights obtained regarding influencer-related behaviors present relevant implications for marketing strategies targeting the parental sector. The findings emphasize the necessity of balancing the benefits of social media participation with the long-term effects on children's digital identities.

Originality/Value: This research enhances the growing body of literature on sharenting by

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examining a broad range of interconnected factors, including privacy concerns, influencer impact, and emotional responses. It lays the groundwork for interdisciplinary research that spans marketing, digital ethics, and educational studies while proposing pathways for international collaboration.

Keywords: *Sharenting, influencer marketing, children, digital footprint, children's privacy.*

JEL classification: *M31, M38, J13.*

Paper Type: *Research article.*

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital communication and social media has given rise to a phenomenon known as "sharenting," where parents publicly share information, photographs, and videos of their children online. This practice has garnered significant attention, particularly as the number of research papers addressing the implications of sharenting has surged in recent years.

The discourse surrounding sharenting reflects growing concerns about privacy, digital footprints, the ethical implications of sharing children's lives in the public domain but also – economic and marketing implications. This research has an introductory character and is one of the first ones that related to the broad spectrum of issues related to sharenting.

The aim of the study is to set areas for future research, including those that have the potential for international collaboration. The quantitative study run on 326 parents shows the significance of privacy issues, digital literacy, and social media behaviour as factors influencing sharenting practices.

Research is one of the frontier examinations especially when we consider the rapid growth of sharenting in the latest decade. The value is limited due to the convenient sampling of parents who participated in the research but is increased by the broad spectrum of topics discussed and the size of the sample.

2. Literature Review

The growth of interest around the topic of influencer marketing is obvious. The number of research papers available in the SCOPUS database increased from 20 (in 2014) to 688 (in November 2024). The majority of all the documents uploaded were published by the authors from the USA (525 documents), India (253 documents), United Kingdom (225), and China (224).

A similar phenomenon can be noticed for User Generated Content (from 96 in 2004, 807 in 2014 to 1496 in 2024) and Artificial Intelligence (from 7.928 in 2004, 17.272 in 2014 to 76.258 in 2024). In all the subject areas the United States of America are leader when it comes to the number of published papers.

This paper selects the most important elements of the three trends to create a comprehensive research agenda for the future.

“Sharenting” is a trend that utilizes User-generated content and Influencer marketing but it is limited to sharing photographs and video content of children on social media platforms, raising concerns about privacy and the long-term implications for children's digital footprints. As parents and guardians navigate this trend, it becomes crucial to establish guidelines that prioritize children's privacy while allowing for meaningful engagement in the digital space. “Sharenting is a prevalent practice of publicly sharing information about children on social media” (Tosuntas and Griffiths, 2024).

The number of papers concerning sharenting in the SCOPUS database has risen significantly since 2016 when the first papers showed up (2) to 2023 (38 documents). Most papers were created in the United States of America (26), Italy (22), Spain, and the United Kingdom (17).

Over half of the documents were positioned for Social Sciences (48%), and significantly fewer were in Medicine and Psychology (11% each). Only 6% of all documents consider Business, Management, and Accounting (which shows relative novelty of the topic in this area). It is worth noting that over 87% of the works are articles (which is equal to 130 works).

The problem of parents sharing stories, photos and videos of their children is particularly interesting especially when we consider the fact that 23% of children have their first digital footprint even before they are born due to parents sharing ultrasound images or similar content (Tofil and Jagielska, 2024). This brings questions related to ethics of showing those materials without child's consent.

Sharenting includes sharing “everyday” situations and the main motivation is often the pure desire to share the moments and experience of parenting with family and friends however those materials are often highly curated and influenced by societal norms (Sugiharti, 2024).

Content shared publicly by parents is often highly personal which might reveal the passwords they (or their children) are using, for example, the dates of birth, names or places they visited. There is a group of parents that apart from sharing information related to children, monetize the fact of significant following or use children as the support for their business. This is related to the fact that children's photos usually perform well on social media causing increased traffic to posts and as a result – websites or sales pages.

The popularity of sharing content by parents is diverse in various countries. Sharenting gets traction and popularity. Research from Spain and Czech Republic suggest that almost 80% of parents share online photographs of their children, and 3.5% do it even with naked photographs of their infants (Kopecky et al., 2020). In Poland almost half of parents share the events from child's life online, on average uploading 72 photos and 24 videos.

What is especially interesting, 42% of parents share information related to their children and their lives in groups bigger than 200 (Bierca and Wysocka-Świtała, 2019). This is interesting considering the ease of re-sharing materials on social media. Sharenting practices might cause permanent damage when it comes to a digital footprint related to their children, eradicating the chances to keep the right to privacy for them.

Majority of Polish respondents (76%) were aware of the consequences of sharing materials and possibility of mis-usage of them by others, while over half of them agreed that the child's anonymity could be permanently compromised (Tofil and Jagielska, 2024). In Australia, 71% of parents share materials related to their children on social media (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2023).

Normalization of sharenting across diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds causes the blur of the lines between private family moments and public online personas. What is critical here, the majority of researched parents is aware of the consequences related to sharenting, however, they do not stop publishing private information about or of their children, including biometric data.

The perception of sharenting among parents is mostly positive (81%) and they perceive that this is their role to decide about the privacy of their children (Bierca, Wysocka-Świtała, 2019). This means that they deprive the child of the right to decide about themselves now, but also – in the future, considering the technological advancement and possibility to produce photographs depicting children aged in computer programs easily.

On the other side, researchers noticed a correlation between higher digital literacy and sharenting practices. Digital literacy positively affects children's privacy on social media (Harnum, Pinariya, 2023) (Barnes, Potter 2021). This might suggest that further research related to programs increasing parents' digital literacy might be critical.

3. Research Methodology

The study utilized a survey-based methodology. The questionnaire was structured with a mix of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice options, and open-ended responses. Convenient sampling was used to select parents of children younger than

15 years old. Participant information included: age group of the parent; age group of the child; social media usage frequency and interaction with influencers.

Research topics concerned attitudes toward sharenting; social media behaviour when it comes to following influencers; privacy and safety concerns, and emotional attitude to sharenting. Responses were gathered through online platforms and emails, targeting a diverse group of parents. Data was collected on quantitative scales (e.g., Likert scores) and qualitative comments. Statistical analysis included: Spearman's Correlation, Chi-Square Test, Cramer's V, and Descriptive statistics.

4. Research Results and Discussion

The majority of respondents were aged 26–45 years (65%), representing parents of children aged 3–10 years. When it comes to the social media usage, responses were widespread. One-third of parents (35%) reported daily, and one in four – weekly usage of social media. On average, six out of ten respondents followed influencers. The main reasons for the following declared by parents were: parenting advice (50%), lifestyle inspiration (40%), and entertainment (34%) (respondents could share more than one reason).

There were 11 detailed research questions created and the study provided results as follows.

A weak positive correlation was observed (Spearman's $\rho = 0.01$, $p = 0.837$; Kendall's $\tau = 0.01$, $p = 0.847$), indicating a minimal link between perceived benefits and privacy concerns. It is interesting from the perspective of the previous research (Bierca and Wysocka-Świtała, 2019) (Harnum and Pinariya, 2023) (Tosuntas and Griffiths, 2024).

Further exploration could cover other factors influencing privacy concerns of parents when it comes to sharenting. Parents who perceive benefits from sharenting may slightly acknowledge privacy concerns, though the relationship is not statistically significant.

The frequency of social media usage seems to be a factor influencing parents' agreement on the benefits of sharenting. A weak positive correlation was found (Spearman's $\rho = 0.06$, $p = 0.296$), suggesting slight alignment. Parents who declared using social media more frequently were marginally more likely to perceive sharenting as beneficial, although the effect size is minimal. Social media engagement may subtly enhance perceived benefits but requires further exploration.

The frequency of consuming influencers' content is weakly negatively correlated (Spearman's $\rho = -0.04$, $p = 0.515$) with parents' perception of privacy issues. Parents who frequently viewed influencer content were slightly less likely to express privacy concerns, though the relationship is not significant. This might be related to the

desensitization of parents, particularly due to the type of content influencers were sharing. Influencers may indirectly normalize lower privacy concerns among frequent viewers.

There was no significant correlation (Spearman's $\rho = -0.06$, $p = 0.280$) found between the age of parents and perceived benefits from sharenting. Age in case of the research group did not strongly influence the perception of sharenting benefits. Other factors, such as parental goals or social influences, may better explain perceived benefits, however this was not considered in the study.

When it comes to privacy concerns between parents of younger versus older children, no significant correlation was observed (Spearman's $\rho = -0.01$, $p = 0.791$). What is interesting, privacy concerns are not strongly related to the age of the child. Future research might consider other factors influencing parents' concerns related to privacy, for example their previous experiences when it comes to privacy violation or digital literacy (mentioned above).

A moderate positive correlation (Point-Biserial $r = 0.01$, $p = 0.896$) was observed between the declared influence of child influencers on parents and their openness to share content about their own children. Parents influenced by child influencers are significantly more likely to share their children's photos, highlighting the role of social influence.

In descriptive sections of the interview, parents declared bigger openness to sharing photographs presenting their children compared to other forms of content. They sometimes admitted that the style of influencers' content plays a role in their own pictures and their way of presenting their children. Social media content strategies may amplify sharenting behaviour, also when it comes to further promoting products via User Generated Content (UGC). This however requires further research.

There was no significant correlation (Spearman's $\rho = -0.03$, $p = 0.649$) between parents' perception of future privacy impacts to the likelihood of sharing children-related content. Concerns about future privacy of the children did not influence negatively sharing the of materials about them. It might be very intriguing, especially when we combine it with the results compare them with the influence of digital literacy and sharenting (Barnes and Potter 2021).

There was also no significant correlation (Point-Biserial $r = -0.06$, $p = 0.282$) noticed between declaring positive emotions to sharenting and the agreement on its benefits. Similarly, no significant correlation (Point-Biserial $r = -0.06$, $p = 0.282$) was noticed when it comes negative emotions and agreement on sharenting benefits. . Emotional responses may not drive the perceived utility of sharenting.

There was no significant correlation (Spearman's $\rho = -0.03$, $p = 0.536$) found between perceived children's exposure and parents' social media sharing behaviour.

This might suggest that researched parents' sharing decisions may depend on factors unrelated to perceived exposure, for example, their own benefits.

Children's age does not strongly influence parents' perception of sharenting risks and benefits either (Spearman's $\rho = 0.07$, $p = 0.210$). Parents may view sharenting risks and benefits as consistent across ages. Further research might consider the other factors influencing parents' perception of sharenting in general, including the benefits and risks.

Parents following influencers were more likely to share materials about their own children online. A weak association was found (Chi-Square = 2.99, $p = 0.559$; Cramer's $V = 0.05$) between following parenting influencers and sharenting. Influencer impact on attitudes may vary based on individual engagement levels.

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The research limitations are related to the sampling method and relatively narrow research group (326 parents). Additionally, the purpose of the research was to rather diagnose areas for further exploration, not explain deeply one selected phenomenon. For this reason, the research questions are diverse and broad but they lack depth when it comes to one research model.

The value of the research is however the fact that it covers very diverse topics related to sharenting and allows the formulation of future research topics. Four main areas require further exploration.

The first area might be related to the relationship between parents' (but also – children's) digital literacy and the sharenting behaviours of parents. Understanding the implications of sharenting on digital privacy and digital footprint seems to be one of the challenges rising the importance in the era of AI usage. Research might be useful not only for marketing but also for pedagogy, psychology, and law, creating an interesting, interdisciplinary research issue.

The other area that emerges is the influence of sharenting and purchasing decisions of parents and children. Motives stimulating the sharenting behaviours are critical to understanding the potential for collaboration and also – the cost-benefit analysis of influencers.

They might also influence the perceived value of contracts signed between companies and influencers in the parenting market. Kidfluencing and kidfluencers might also be related areas, especially as parents often share photos of their children while also allowing them to start separate social media accounts.

The last research area related to sharenting might consider the relationship between sharenting and long-term psychological, economic, and social consequences for

children and their relations with parents. This is critical for parents to be able to assess their own behaviours bearing in mind the long-term (not only short-term) results.

International research related to the mentioned topics might bring a new perspective to the proliferation of sharenting and create the field for cross-cultural comparison. All of the above would allow researchers to paint the complete picture of sharenting as a phenomenon.

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