

UNDERSTANDING SHARENTING PRACTICES AMONG POSTGRADUATE MOTHERS

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Abstract

The phenomenon of sharenting, the practice of parents sharing information about their children on social media, has become increasingly prominent in global discourses on child privacy, digital ethics, and online parenting. While previous studies have extensively addressed the risks of sharenting, there is limited research explaining how educated mothers transform knowledge about privacy, ethics, and digital parenting into everyday sharing practices, particularly in non-Western contexts. This study aims to understand how graduate students who are also mothers internalize knowledge about sharenting and translate it into concrete practices on social media. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, observation of Instagram posts, and documentation of six purposively selected informants. The results show that sharenting decisions tend to be reflective and negotiated through considerations of benefits, risks, emotions, social norms, and cultural and religious values. Informants displayed implicit forms of privacy literacy through strategies such as obscuring children's identities, limiting audiences, setting accounts to private, and delaying posts. These findings also demonstrate that subjective norms in sharenting practices are shaped not only by family and friends, but also by local values such as the concepts of 'ain and pamali. Theoretically, this study extends the Theory of Planned Behavior in the context of non-Western digital parenting and demonstrates that the transformation of knowledge within the Knowledge-to-Action framework is not always linear. Practically, these findings emphasize the importance of privacy literacy and digital ethics that are sensitive to cultural context. However, because this study only involved six informants from a single institution, the findings are contextual and not intended to be broadly generalized.

Keywords: Sharenting, student mothers, social media, privacy literacy, Knowledge-to-Action

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an essential part of contemporary family life, including parenting practices. One form of this is sharenting, the practice of parents sharing information, photos, videos, or stories about their children through digital platforms. Recent studies have shown that sharenting can provide benefits for parents, such as documenting their children's development, gaining social support, building networks, and exchanging parenting knowledge

(Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). However, these benefits are accompanied by concerns about privacy, digital footprints, exploitation, and the potential for a misalignment between parental interests and children's rights in the future (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Oswald et al., 2016).

Within the discourse on sharenting, academic attention has tended to focus on three main issues. First, the risks posed to children, particularly related to the exposure of personal data, digital identity, and the potential for misuse of content (Oswald et al., 2016). Second, parents' capacity to understand digital privacy and make responsible sharing decisions (Barnes & Potter, 2021). Third, the negotiation of privacy norms within families and communities, which are often not explicitly stated (Zhu et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, research also suggests that sharenting can shift toward child exploitation and the commodification of family life on social media (Fridha & Irawan, 2020; Sandika & Hapsari, 2025).

However, a significant research gap remains. Most sharenting studies focus on parents in general, family influencers, or the dynamics of children's rights, but little is known about how educated mothers translate knowledge about privacy, ethics, and digital parenting into everyday practice (Maryam & Kiran, 2024). This group is particularly interesting because it occupies a dual position: as mothers making parenting decisions and as graduate students with access to academic discourse on digital literacy, ethics, and privacy. The key issue is not simply whether they sharent, but rather how their existing knowledge is negotiated with emotional experiences, social pressures, and cultural values when they decide to share or withhold information about their children.

Building on this gap, this study focuses on graduate students who are also mothers. It asks two main questions: (1) how do graduate students internalize the concept of sharenting in the context of digital literacy, privacy, and ethics; and (2) what factors influence their decisions to sharent. To answer these questions, this study combines the Knowledge-to-Action Framework (Graham et al., 2006), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; 2011), and the concept of privacy literacy (Hartman-Caverly & Chisholm, 2020). Conceptually, this study contributes by demonstrating that the transformation of knowledge into practice in sharenting is contextual, not always linear, and is heavily influenced by the cultural norms and religious beliefs that informants live in their daily lives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to understand sharenting practices among millennial mothers who are postgraduate students at the University of Indonesia. This approach was chosen because the research seeks to explain the decision-making process, meaning, and value negotiation behind sharenting practices, rather than statistically measuring the frequency of the behavior.

Informants were selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) being a postgraduate student, (2) being a mother, and (3) actively using social media and having engaged in sharenting. The study involved six informants. This number was maintained because the focus of the research was on in-depth exploration of experiences within a relatively homogeneous group, allowing the researcher to explore the decision-making process in detail and compare thematic patterns across cases.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of Instagram posts, and documentation. Social media observations were conducted on posts related to sharenting

practices, paying attention to the type of content shared, the way children's identities are mentioned, indications of audience restrictions, and the presence of potentially sensitive information. Documentation was used to supplement field notes and link informants' narratives with their digital footprints.

Data analysis was conducted thematically. In the first stage, the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts and observation notes to identify initial issues emerging from the data. In the second stage, the researcher applied initial codes (open coding) to units of meaning related to sources of knowledge, sharing considerations, forms of control, and values influencing sharenting decisions. In the third stage, these codes were grouped into larger themes through a process of categorization and comparison between informants. In the fourth stage, these themes were interpreted using KTA, TPB, and privacy literacy as analytical lenses.

Data credibility was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing interview results, observations of social media posts, and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher kept analytical notes throughout the coding process to maintain traceability of theme formation and minimize premature or confirmatory readings. This research does not focus on the direct impact of sharenting on children, but rather on how mothers, as decision-makers, understand, negotiate, and implement these sharing practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transforming Knowledge into Sharenting Practice

The research results show that the transformation of knowledge into sharenting practices does not occur automatically. Informants acquire knowledge about parenting, privacy, and digital sharing from various sources, but this knowledge does not immediately translate into uniform actions. In this context, social media becomes a primary source of practical knowledge. One informant stated, "I mainly use social media to find information, especially about parenting" (R1). This statement demonstrates that social media serves a dual function: as a space for information consumption and a potential space for sharing.

Interestingly, not all informants sharenting sharenting. Some admitted to being unfamiliar with the term, as evidenced by the statement, "Honestly, I didn't know what sharenting was at first" (R3, R4, R6). This finding is important because it demonstrates that sharenting practices can occur without mastery of the academic terminology that underpins it. In other words, access to higher education does not automatically lead informants to use the same conceptual language as scientific discourse.

Within the KTA framework, the knowledge inquiry stage is evident in information-seeking activities through social media, personal experiences, and the surrounding environment. The knowledge synthesis stage is evident when informants filter their knowledge through personal, family, religious, and emotional comfort considerations. One informant emphasized, "In my opinion, not everything should be posted, especially if it's too personal" (R5). Meanwhile, the knowledge tools/products stage is reflected in the concrete strategies they employ, such as private accounts, audience selection, concealing children's identities, and delaying upload times. As informants expressed, "I usually keep my account private, and only certain people see it" (R3, R5, R6).

These findings demonstrate that the transformation of knowledge into practice is situational and not entirely linear. On the one hand, informants demonstrated reflection on risk. On the other hand, sharing practices remained within boundaries they deemed safe. This has

the theoretical implication that KTA in the context of sharenting not only reflects knowledge transfer but also the negotiation of knowledge with everyday affection, experience, and morality.

Factors Influencing Sharenting Behavior

Based on the TPB, sharenting behavior in this study was influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, these three components did not appear uniformly across all informants.

In terms of attitudes, some informants viewed sharenting as an activity that provides emotional satisfaction, documentation of memories, and a space for self-expression. One informant stated, "I'm happy to be able to share moments with my children, it's like a sense of pride" (R4). However, this attitude was not entirely positive. Other informants expressed concerns about content misuse, for example: "Sometimes I'm afraid my photos will be misused by others" (R2). This variation suggests that sharenting is viewed as both a source of benefits and a source of vulnerability.

In terms of subjective norms, family, friends, and social circles act as both enablers and barriers. Social support is evident when informants feel their experiences are considered beneficial to others, as reflected in the statement, "My friends often ask me to share my experiences, so I just post them" (R6). Conversely, experiencing strange or uncomfortable comments made some informants more cautious. One informant stated, "I once received a rather strange response, so now I'm more careful" (R1, R3).

In the perceived behavioral control dimension, the majority of informants felt they still had control over their sharenting practices because they could limit the type of content, choose the audience, and determine when to post. However, this control was perceptual, not absolute. This means that a sense of security was constructed more through practical mitigation strategies than through objective assurances that risks were completely eliminated. This is important because it highlights the gap between perceived control and actual digital conditions.

Compared to the classic TPB model, the findings of this study indicate that the formation of sharenting intentions stems not only from individual calculations but also from continuously negotiated social experiences. The TPB remains relevant, but needs to be read contextually within digital parenting practices.

Privacy Awareness and Sharing Ethics

The concept of privacy literacy was used to assess the extent to which informants understood and implemented privacy protections in sharenting practices. The findings indicate that although informants did not explicitly use the term privacy literacy, their actions indicated a practical and implicit form of privacy literacy.

In the identity dimension, informants demonstrated caution in sharing information deemed sensitive. One informant stated, "I never mention my child's school or details on social media" (R2). This suggests that a child's identity is treated as information that needs to be restricted, especially when it could potentially reveal too much detail.

In the interaction dimension, informants selectively determine who can access content. One informant explained, "I'm also selective about who can see it, not everything" (R1, R2, R3, R4). This strategy demonstrates that the boundaries between private and public space are not understood in a binary manner, but are managed through flexible audience controls.

However, informants' privacy literacy is not always consistent. Some still view sharenting as a normal activity as long as it doesn't cause direct harm. This finding highlights a gap between awareness of risks and the comprehensive application of privacy protection principles. This is where this research's contribution to digital literacy becomes important: privacy literacy is not always presented as a formal concept, but often emerges as situational knowledge shaped by experience, vigilance, and individual safe limits. *The Influence of Cultural and Religious Values*

One of the most striking findings in this study is the strong influence of cultural and religious values in shaping sharenting decisions. For informants, sharing considerations relate not only to digital security in a technical sense, but also to moral, spiritual, and cultural dimensions.

The concept of taboo emerged as a framework of meaning influencing informants' caution. One informant stated, "I'm also afraid if I post too often, I'll get 'ain' like that" (R1, R2). In this context, excessive attention from others is understood as potentially harmful, making limiting posts a form of protection that is not only rational but also spiritual.

Furthermore, the concept of taboo also functions as a culturally based control mechanism. Informants linked the practice of reducing children's exposure to social media to advice, prohibitions, or experiences passed down through generations. This is evident in the statement, "I was told not to post too often, or something will happen to my child, so now I'm more careful" (R3, R4, R6).

This finding broadens the understanding of subjective norms in the TPB. In the context of this research, subjective norms originate not only from family or friends as a source of direct social pressure, but also from the collective value systems embedded in culture and religion. This study shows that in non-Western societies, digital communication decisions often operate within a broader normative field than assumed in classical TPB formulations.

Discussion

Overall, this research demonstrates that sharenting practices among graduate students are not simply personal sharing activities, but rather the result of negotiations between knowledge, emotional experiences, social expectations, and cultural values. Compared with studies that primarily position sharenting as a matter of child privacy risks, this research highlights the internal mechanisms that lead parents to continue sharing despite awareness of potential harms.

First, from a KTA perspective, this research demonstrates that knowledge does not move linearly from knowing to action. Knowledge about privacy and digital ethics may be accepted but only partially adopted after being negotiated with local experiences, emotional needs, and values. This finding is important because it suggests that the knowledge translation model needs to be interpreted as a dialogic and situational process when applied to everyday digital practices.

Second, from a TPB perspective, this research demonstrates that subjective norms in the Indonesian sharenting context have strong cultural and symbolic dimensions. The concepts of 'ain and pamali (prohibited behavior) do not function simply as additional beliefs but as concrete moral references for decision-making. This research offers a conceptual enrichment to the TPB in the study of digital communication and digital parenting in non-Western societies.

Third, from a privacy literacy perspective, this study demonstrates that privacy literacy can develop without formal knowledge articulated in academic terms. Strategies such as

audience limitation, identity masking, and content selection mark forms of privacy literacy that are evident in practice. However, because their implementation is not always consistent, this study also demonstrates a tension between privacy awareness and the normalization of sharing on social media.

This study remains limited. The limited number of informants and the specific context of one institution make the findings contextual. Furthermore, the study focuses on the perspective of mothers as decision-makers and does not include the perspectives of children or partners. Nevertheless, this study still makes an important analytical contribution to understanding how sharenting is implemented, negotiated, and constrained in the Indonesian socio-cultural context.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that sharenting practices among postgraduate student mothers are the result of a reflective, situational, and contextual decision-making process. Sharing practices do not arise solely from social media habits, but from negotiations between the benefits of documentation, emotional needs, perceived risks, social pressures, and the cultural and religious values internalized by the informants.

Theoretically, this research makes three main contributions. First, it demonstrates that knowledge transformation within the Knowledge-to-Action framework does not always occur linearly, as knowledge about privacy and digital ethics must first be negotiated with everyday life experiences. Second, this research expands the Theory of Planned Behavior by demonstrating that subjective norms in Indonesian sharenting are shaped not only by interpersonal pressures but also by collective value systems such as 'ain (Islamic law) and pamali (Islamic custom). Third, this research confirms that privacy literacy can emerge implicitly as a situational privacy protection practice, although it is not always conceptually articulated by the informants.

Practically, these findings underscore the importance of developing digital literacy and privacy programs that focus not only on technical aspects but also on ethical, relational, and cultural considerations. Educational institutions, family communities, and digital platform providers need to promote education that helps parents understand the safe boundaries of sharing information about their children in digital spaces.

This study is limited by the limited number of informants and the specific research context. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants, compare different social contexts, and incorporate the perspectives of children and partners to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of sharenting.

SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, the researchers recommend that digital literacy and privacy programs be developed in a more contextual manner, focusing not only on technical aspects but also incorporating ethical, relational, and cultural considerations. Educational institutions, family communities, and digital platform providers need to promote education that helps parents understand the safe boundaries of sharing information about children in digital spaces. In this regard, it is also important to recognize local values, such as the concepts of 'ain and pamali, as valid privacy protection mechanisms, not simply beliefs that exist outside of formal digital literacy discourse.

Future research is recommended to involve a wider range of participants from various institutions and social backgrounds to enable broader comparative analysis. Furthermore, including the perspectives of children and partners would enrich understanding of the dynamics of sharenting, given that sharing decisions are rarely unilateral. Longitudinal studies and larger-scale surveys are also needed to examine whether patterns of knowledge-to-practice transformation in digital parenting are consistent over time or shift with changing platform norms and socio-cultural pressures.

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