

The Dangers of Oversharing: How Much Should Parents Post About Their Children

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ABSTRACT

Children should feel safest under the protection of their parents. However, in today's digital era, many parents overshare personal details about their children on social media without considering the long-term consequences. From prenatal ultrasound scans to daily milestones, children's personal information often enters the online sphere before they are even born. Such actions overlook the fact that parents do not fully control their children's digital footprints, potentially exposing them to privacy breaches, exploitation, or reputational harm. While laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) exist, enforcement gaps remain in family contexts. This paper examines the benefits and risks of parental sharing, the ethical implications of children's right to privacy, and the need for mindful online behavior. Recommendations are offered to balance parental freedom with child protection.

Keywords: Children's privacy; Parental sharing; Sharenting; Digital footprint; social media ethics; Online child protection; GDPR; Family privacy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Parenting in the digital age brings both opportunities and challenges. Social media enables parents to connect, share, and find support; however, it also blurs the boundaries between personal and public life. Oversharing, often referred to as sharenting, has become a growing concern as it creates permanent digital footprints for children, sometimes without their consent (Procentese et al., 2022). While many parents view posting online as harmless, research shows that excessive sharing can lead to identity theft, cyberbullying, and even grooming risks (Vigderman et al., 2022). Children, as digital citizens, have a right to privacy and agency over their personal data (Florida, 2025)

Research gap: Although previous studies have examined the effects of digital media on children's development and online safety, there is limited research focusing specifically on parents' own sharing behaviors and their ethical responsibilities in protecting children's digital identities. This paper addresses that gap by analyzing both risks and practical strategies for responsible digital parenting.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies highlight that children's exposure to the digital world begins prenatally when parents share sonogram images online (Gath et al., 2024). The concept of "digital birth" describes the creation of an online identity before a child's physical birth, raising concerns over consent and ownership (Holloway & Green, 2022).

Parental motivations for sharing include maintaining family ties, seeking validation, and documenting milestones (Tosuntas et al., 2024). However, oversharing can unintentionally reveal sensitive information, such as location data, school details, and daily routines, which can be exploited. Several international regulations, including the GDPR, address privacy, but few explicitly cover intra-family disputes over children's data. This regulatory gap leaves children vulnerable to digital harm.

Risks to privacy and safety have been repeatedly associated with oversharing. According to Flare (2022), malevolent actors may exploit posts that disclose personal information, such as a child's name, school, location, or daily routines. Children who experience excessive parental sharing are more susceptible to identity theft, cyberbullying, and online grooming. Digital footprints created by parents may later become sources of embarrassment or psychological distress for children, particularly during adolescence, when identity formation and peer perception become increasingly important.

Scholars highlight the psychological and social effects of sharing, in addition to the immediate safety issues. Children who are exposed to a lot of internet recording may find it difficult to draw boundaries between their private and public lives, according to Rowland et al. (2024). Children may feel exposed or resentful of parental decisions made on their behalf as they grow older and lose control over their own stories. Children should be recognised as digital citizens with rights, including the rights to privacy, dignity, and involvement in decisions that affect their online appearance.

The problem is further complicated by legal and regulatory viewpoints. Although international frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provide principles for consent and data protection, enforcement remains limited in family contexts (Milkaitė et al., 2025). The GDPR places a strong emphasis on data minimization, lawful processing, and the right to erasure; nonetheless, it does not explicitly address circumstances in which parents are the data controllers of their children's personal data. Similar laws, such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) in the US, are more concerned with business data collection than with parental disclosure. Despite growing recognition of digital rights, children are not adequately protected from intra-family privacy violations due to this legal vacuum.

Sharing patterns are also influenced by cultural factors. According to J, G & JOSH (2024), parental sharing practices differ across nations, with more collectivist cultures emphasising caution and family privacy, while Western environments frequently normalise public documentation of children's lives. These variations emphasize the need for standards that are sensitive to context, respect cultural traditions, and put child protection first. However, academics concur that cultural acceptance shouldn't take precedence over moral obligation, especially when it comes to the long-term welfare of children.

The literature that is now available tends to concentrate on platform responsibility, cyber hazards, or children's own media use rather than critically analyzing parents' roles as the major producers of children's digital identities, despite the fact that scholarly attention to children's online safety is growing. There is a substantial research deficit here. Fewer studies examine the moral obligations of parents as digital gatekeepers and decision-makers, despite earlier research acknowledging the dangers of sharing. As a result, there is little guidance on how parents should balance social interaction, self-expression, and child safety in online settings. This paper fills in these gaps by summarizing recent research to show the moral, legal, and psychological ramifications of parental internet sharing.

The literature review lays the groundwork for understanding sharenting as a complex social practice rather than solely harmful or innocuous behaviour by examining both risks and reasons. This all-encompassing strategy, which emphasizes children's rights, parental responsibility, and long-term digital welfare, underscores the necessity of thoughtful and knowledgeable digital parenting.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

-To investigate parental internet sharing activities and their effects on children's digital privacy, this study employs a conceptual research design. For this study, a conceptual approach is especially appropriate, as it allows for the synthesis of current ideas, empirical findings, and policy issues related to child protection, digital footprints, and sharing. This design enables a critical and integrative investigation of the current literature rather than producing primary data, allowing the study to examine ethical, psychological, and legal aspects holistically. In communication and social science studies, conceptual research is frequently employed to define concepts, identify trends, and make well-informed recommendations based on current understanding. This method enables the study to be conceptually grounded while remaining responsive to current trends, since sharenting is a rapidly changing phenomenon shaped by social norms and technological innovation. Additionally, the design facilitates the identification of research gaps, particularly the scant attention paid to parents' ethical obligations in shaping their children's digital identities.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

To ensure academic integrity and thorough coverage, secondary data for this study were gathered through a systematic review of scholarly and authoritative sources from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. "Digital parenting," "sharenting," "parental online sharing," "children's online privacy," "digital footprint," and "ethical social media use" were among the search terms used. These terms were chosen to represent multidisciplinary viewpoints from the fields of psychology, law, communication studies, and digital ethics.

The study used precise inclusion and exclusion criteria to preserve rigor and relevance. Peer reviewed journal papers, scholarly publications, policy documents, and reports from respectable international organizations like UNICEF and data protection agencies were among the sources that were included. To ensure that the analysis reflects current discussions and recent empirical findings in a rapidly evolving digital environment, only articles from January 2020 to July 2025 were considered. Sources that lacked scholarly rigor, fell outside of the designated timeframe, or just addressed general social media use without addressing children, parental conduct, or privacy consequences were eliminated. This selection procedure increased the richness and currency of the literature base while ensuring that all resources directly contributed to the study's aims.

Analytical Approach

A thematic analysis was employed to analyze and interpret the selected literature. This method allows for the identification of recurring patterns, key arguments, and conceptual linkages across diverse sources. Initially, the literature was reviewed to generate preliminary codes, which captured major concerns related to parental sharing, privacy risks, ethical dilemmas, and regulatory limitations.

- Through an iterative process of comparison and refinement, these codes were consolidated into three dominant themes:
- Risks of oversharing, including privacy invasion, identity theft, cyberbullying, grooming, and long-term reputational harm.
- Ethical and legal considerations, focusing on children's rights, consent, parental accountability, and gaps in existing data protection frameworks.
- Strategies for mindful sharing, highlighting best practices, digital literacy, and protective measures for parents.

This analytical process enabled the study to move beyond descriptive summaries and toward critical interpretation, comparing findings across studies and drawing meaningful insights regarding responsible digital parenting

Ethical Considerations

There was no need for direct ethical approval because this study only used secondary data. However, precise citation, faithful reporting of original findings, and critical but respectful interpretation of previous work respected ethical standards. The report steers clear of sensationalism and gives children's rights and welfare top priority in every analysis. The study has a fair and academic tone by emphasizing ethical obligations rather than placing blame. This strategy promotes positive dialogue on parental awareness and internet responsibility while adhering to academic integrity standards.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while social media allows parents to share joyful moments, it can also create an irreversible digital record that follows the child into adulthood. Under Baumrind's authoritative parenting model, balanced and informed decision-making aligns with fostering trust and respect in the parent-child relationship (Levin et al., 2023). Bowlby's Attachment Theory reinforces the need for secure and protective caregiving, which extends into the digital realm. Parents who share, with privacy settings adjusted and identifiable details removed, model responsible digital citizenship (UNICEF et al., 2023).

In line with Mast et al. (2025), the analysis emphasises how children who overshare are vulnerable to identity theft, privacy violations, and online exploitation. However, this study makes an additional contribution by presenting these risks as relational and ethical issues arising from parental decision-making rather than merely as technological dangers. Sharing puts parents in the position of data creators and gatekeepers, highlighting their responsibilities in shaping children's digital identities, in contrast to the risks posed by outside actors or platforms.

Baumrind's Parenting Styles Theory offers a useful framework for analyzing parental internet use. Mindful sharing methods are strongly aligned with authoritative parenting, which is defined by informed judgment, attentiveness, and balanced control. Authoritative digital parenting is demonstrated by parents who carefully examine what to post, modify privacy settings, and refrain from disclosing personally identifiable information (Kerr & Peña, 2022). Permissive or neglectful digital behaviors, on the other hand, may inadvertently put parental expression ahead of kid protection when content is shared rashly or without thought. This

interpretation expands Baumrind's theory into the digital sphere, arguing that parenting approaches are equally represented in online behavior as they are in offline interactions.

The claim that parental oversharing has consequences beyond privacy issues is further supported by Bowlby's Attachment Theory. When kids believe their caregivers are trustworthy and protective, they develop a secure attachment. Oversharing private or sensitive information online, especially without the child's permission, might eventually erode the child's sense of security and independence. Previously posted content may cause discomfort, humiliation, or anger as kids become older and become conscious of their online presence, which could negatively impact the parent-child bond. By acknowledging digital surroundings as a component of the caring context, where emotional safety includes protection from online harm, this expands on Bowlby's idea.

In contrast, while Florida (2025) highlights children's rights as digital citizens, much of the research now available focuses more on children's online activities than on their parents' actions. By emphasizing parents as the main designers of their children's early digital identities, this study attempts to rectify that disparity.

The results imply that parental disclosures made long before children can exercise agency or consent are often the primary source of children's online vulnerability, rather than their own media consumption. By moving accountability upstream from platform regulation alone to family-level digital ethics, this viewpoint advances academic discourse. Significant gaps in safeguarding children from intra-family data use are highlighted by legal discussions in the literature, especially those pertaining to the GDPR (Milkaite et al., 2025). Although the GDPR acknowledges children as a vulnerable population, its implementation in family settings is still unclear. This study offers a critical interpretation of this restriction, contending that ethical digital parenting cannot be ensured by legal compliance alone. Even when parental sharing does not violate formal regulations, it may still compromise children's dignity and long-term privacy. Thus, ethical responsibility must complement legal frameworks, reinforcing the need for parental awareness and moral accountability.

Additionally, by incorporating environmental and cultural factors, this debate builds upon previous research. Tosuntas et al. (2024) point out that while sharing habits differ throughout countries, platform standardisation and globalisation have normalised public sharing across cultural divides. This study makes a contribution by emphasizing that moral judgment should always take precedence over cultural acceptance, especially when it comes to children's future autonomy. The permanence and searchability of digital content present universal risks, regardless of cultural standards.

The study's emphasis on mindful digital parenting as a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach to harm is another indication of its scholarly value. This study emphasizes prevention through educated decision-making, consent-seeking where appropriate, and digital literacy, whereas earlier research frequently focused on the aftermath of privacy breaches. The study bridges the gap between abstract ethical ideals and ordinary parenting behavior by connecting theoretical frameworks with practical ramifications. Overall, the conversation shows that oversharing is a spectrum of responsibility rather than a binary right-or-wrong question. Given that digital traces made now may influence their children's identities in the future, parents must balance the need for self-expression with the need to protect their children. By providing a sophisticated, theory-driven analysis of sharenting and highlighting that protecting children in the digital age requires not only technological solutions but also ethical thought and parental accountability, this study contributes to the expanding body of literature.

The long-term identity formation of children who grow up with large digital footprints left by their parents is a significant factor that deserves further attention. Although sharenting has been linked to reputational issues in the past, this study deepens the conversation by highlighting the potential long-term effects of early internet exposure on social identity and self-perception. Previously shared content, which was evolved often produced without the children's knowledge, may clash with their changing self-image as they enter adolescence and adulthood. Arguments that digital identity should be viewed as an extension of human autonomy are strengthened by this misalignment, which can cause discomfort, a loss of control, or a perceived invasion of personal boundaries (Rowland et al., 2024).

Also, a general desensitization to children's privacy is facilitated by the normalcy of sharing in online forums. Social validation may take precedence over ethical consideration when parental sharing is socially rewarded through likes, comments, and engagement. This is consistent with the finding that platform affordances promote regular sharing and gently influence parental behaviour. This study makes a contribution by emphasizing that such normalization increases the necessity for deliberate decision-making in digital parenting rather than diminishing ethical responsibilities. As a result, parents must balance social expectations with the long-term interests of their children. Lastly, by presenting sharenting as a dynamic ethical practice rather than a static risk factor, this additional discussion enhances the study's scholarly contribution. The study stresses levels of responsibility, awareness, and intentionality rather than classifying parental sharing as intrinsically detrimental or appropriate. By encouraging future research to shift from binary assessments to context-sensitive evaluations of digital parenting practices, this nuanced knowledge enriches the body of existing literature.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Before publishing anything online, parents should first get their kids' permission when it's age-appropriate. Involving children in choices about their online portrayal respects their autonomy and agency as they mature and gain emotional and cognitive awareness. This approach is consistent with frameworks for children's rights that prioritize their involvement in issues that impact their lives (UNICEF, 2024). Parents can take a thoughtful approach by considering whether the shared content could later cause discomfort or reputational harm, even when children are too young to fully understand consent. Promoting consent-seeking behavior also aids in the early development of children's digital literacy and privacy awareness.

Second, when sharing anything online, parents are encouraged to keep identifiable information such as school names, home addresses, locations, and daily schedules to a minimum. Oversharing personal information raises the danger of identity theft, cyberstalking, and online grooming, according to numerous studies (Saldana et al., 2025). Reducing identifiable data improves internet safety and lessens the traceability of kids' digital traces. Additionally, parents should frequently check the privacy settings on social media sites to ensure that only audiences they trust can see the posted content. These safety precautions are consistent with authoritative parenting techniques and demonstrate appropriate digital gatekeeping.

Third, parents must be informed about the rules governing digital privacy, their ethical obligations, and the possible long-term dangers of sharing. Even though rules like the GDPR provide a foundation for data privacy, many parents remain unaware of how family-based sharing habits are affected by these requirements. Public campaigns, workshops, and awareness campaigns can all be vital in closing this knowledge gap. By empowering parents to

make educated choices, social media use can be transformed from routine posting to thoughtful digital involvement that puts children's rights and welfare first.

Lastly, parental awareness prompts should be incorporated into social media platforms prior to the publishing of anything pertaining to children. Reminders concerning privacy dangers, consent issues, or recommendations for anonymizing identifiable information are a few examples of these prompts. Platform-level interventions can act as ethical cues in real time, encouraging parents to think things through before sharing. Technology businesses can help promote safer online environments for children by incorporating child-protection principles into platform design. This recommendation upholds the more general idea that families, platforms, and legislators must work together to protect children's digital identities.

Taken as a whole, these suggestions highlight that safeguarding children in digital environments is both a moral and a legal duty. In order to ensure that children's digital footprints do not jeopardize their future privacy, dignity, or wellness, parents can strike a balance between self-expression and child protection by implementing mindful sharing habits, raising awareness, and utilizing platform support. To encourage ethical digital parenting, a more comprehensive ecosystem strategy is required in addition to individual parental acts. Educational institutions, healthcare professionals, and community organizations can all contribute significantly to raising awareness of children's digital privacy. Sharing hazards and ethical issues can be discussed in parenting workshops, prenatal classes, and school-based digital literacy programs, allowing parents to consider online conduct from the very beginning of raising a child. Before oversharing habits develop, early exposure to these conversations helps mainstream privacy-conscious behaviors.

Furthermore, strengthening child-centered digital protection procedures requires cooperation between legislators and IT firms. Supportive digital environments can promote safer sharing practices, even while parents continue to make the majority of decisions. Parents may be able to make more thoughtful decisions with the help of features like delayed publishing alternatives, anonymization tools, or reminders emphasizing content's long-term visibility. Instead of limiting parental voice, these policies encourage thoughtful participation that is in the best interests of the children.

Crucially, suggestions must be presented as empowerment tactics rather than limitations. Parents are better able to strike a balance between child protection and personal expression when they have the necessary information, resources, and ethical awareness. By encouraging voluntary compliance and reducing resistance, this strategy fosters a culture of responsible sharing rather than fear-driven avoidance. The idea that children's privacy is a shared duty that extends beyond individual houses to digital platforms and society at large is ultimately reinforced by incorporating these behaviors into regular digital routines.

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