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SHARENTING TRENDS IN MALAYSIA: A LESSON FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES

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Abstract:

This article explores the changing trend of sharenting in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the lessons and insights acquired from analyzing sharenting patterns in other countries. Sharenting, the act of parents disseminating information about their children on social media sites, has become progressively widespread worldwide. This research intends to discover major similarities, differences, obstacles, and best practices by analyzing sharenting practices in Malaysia in comparison to Western countries and other locations. The article examines the categories of content that parents share, the frequency and platforms they use for sharing, and the underlying motivations behind their sharenting practices. The article examines the impact of cultural factors on sharenting habits, specifically focusing on how society norms, values, and attitudes towards privacy and digital communication influence parenting actions on the internet. Furthermore, the study examines the legal and ethical guidelines that regulate sharenting, encompassing concerns of children's privacy, consent, data protection, and the potential impact of sharenting on children's welfare. This article enhances parental awareness, promotes responsible online sharing activities, and fosters a safer digital environment for children in Malaysia by drawing lessons and insights from other countries.

Keywords:

Sharenting, Social Media, Information, Children's Privacy, Children's Welfare

Introduction

Originally, this study seeks to examine the sharenting patterns prevalent in Malaysia. Sharenting is derived from the combination of the words "share" and "parenting". The term "sharenting" refers to the act of parents sharing their children's information online, essentially establishing a digital footprint for their children. Research indicates that parents often post over 1,300 images and 300 videos of their children by the time they reach the age of 13. In contemporary society, parents predominantly utilize social media platforms to disseminate information among their family, friends, and acquaintances. A study discovered that a minimum of 17-18 percent of parents actively utilize social media platforms to disseminate information about their children. This indicates that sharenting has become a prevalent concept, although parents have not yet acknowledged this practice. Unknown to them, divulging their children's details online can have detrimental consequences for the youngsters themselves (Wen et al., 2022).

Sharenting has emerged as a notable issue in Malaysia, namely concerning the privacy rights of children. It prompts inquiries on the safeguarding of personal information, confidentiality, and privacy. Inadequate parenting techniques can violate children's right to privacy and subject them to potential future humiliation. This matter emphasizes the necessity for explicit laws and parental consciousness for the proper dissemination of children's information on the internet. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of maintaining a delicate equilibrium between the freedom of parents to share moments with their children and the need to uphold children's rights to privacy in the era of digital technology (Teng & Dhanapal, 2022).

Studying sharenting in different countries is of the utmost importance because to the varying cultural and environmental influences it can have. While the act of sharing children's information on social media remains consistent, the impact can differ. In Malaysia, a country known for its multiculturalism, the society holds varying viewpoints on the practice of sharenting. In present times, parents in Malaysia engage in the practice of not only disclosing their children's personal information but also exploiting them for promotional purposes by producing movies and capturing photographs of the youngsters. Sharenting can exert detrimental impacts on youngsters. Research indicates that sharenting has five detrimental effects on children, with the final consequence being the potential to adversely impact their future. This is due to the fact that children may experience feelings of embarrassment and unhappiness as a result of having their early existence chronicled without their consent. This research is highly intriguing when compared to research conducted in foreign nations (Hashim et al., 2021.) Sharenting, the act of parents revealing their children's personal information on social media, has received much scrutiny in Western nations but remains relatively understudied in Malaysia.

Literature Review

The global prevalence of parents sharing an excessive amount of information about their children on the internet has become a widespread practice. This approach, referred to as digital parenting, involves routinely utilizing social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to publish pictures and stories about their children. Parents inevitably feel driven to upload every adorable moment their child encounters. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that this conduct has the potential to result in unfavourable outcomes for the children affected. Research findings indicate that by the age of five, young children may appear

in around 1,000 images on the internet, which could have adverse effects on their future welfare (Kopecky et al., 2020).

The issues arise because of technological developments that make it easier for parents to document their children's life events and share them on social media. They may share photos, videos, or even blog about their children. This may seem like an innocent act, but there are many consequences for the children. According to many things shared on the internet cannot be deleted and could potentially affect the children if they find out about it in the future (Hashim et al., 2021).

This is due to the public or electronic footprints that will never disappear from the internet. Most parents, without realizing it, are creating a digital identity for their children, which others can use to judge or identify them. This will greatly affect the children's lives in the future when someone uses their digital identity to search for their past (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020). At the same time, it will make the children feel stressed, embarrassed, or angry because of the invasion of their privacy. This is because what is shared by their parents is not necessarily what they want. Some of the information or media that is shared could be misinterpreted by the public and create a wrong image of the children (Adawiah & Rachmawati, 2021).

Nowadays, social media has become a part of human daily life. This has popularized the concept of sharing while parenting, also known as sharenting. It is a way for parents to learn about good parenting by sharing their experiences of educating and raising their children in the network society (Yegen & Mondal, 2021).

However, many parents do not realize that they are sharing a lot of their children's privacy with the public, which can easily impact their children. The growing media interest in sharenting practices has raised concerns about its potential criminogenic potential, especially in relation to perceived crime risks (Lavorgna et al., 2023). According to Ferrara et al. (2023), sharenting exposes children to various risks, including privacy violation, sexual exploitation, emotional harm, unlawful metadata access, online persistence, and digital kidnapping.

It is important for us to study the sharenting trend in other countries, particularly in western countries, due to the massive usage of social media. Later on, we can compare this trend with Malaysia. Malaysia is a developing country, so it may take some time for the trend from western countries to follow here. However, there is a possibility that it could affect children's privacy in Malaysia.

Methodology

The methodology employed is entirely qualitative, utilizing typical documentation methods and incorporating a systematic examination of philosophical perspectives inside academia. Hence, this study is not based on empirical evidence but rather focuses on the analysis of materials sourced from the library. The secondary data are collected from textbooks, references, journals, previous research studies, and written pieces pertaining to the topic of Sharenting in Malaysia and other countries. In addition, data sources include Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Open Access Journal. The data was evaluated using content analysis. Thus, this study employs conventional documentation research procedures to acquire findings on the provided subject.

Result and Discussion

Parents nowadays are more open to share their children's images to the public through social media. As sharenting develops into a kind of social currency, parents may publish tales or images of their kids online in an effort to win over others' acceptance, attention, or praise, sometimes to the dismay or discomfort of their kids. According to a study conducted on young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, some of them were well aware that they appeared in embarrassing or unpleasant photos online, but they felt helpless to get these images taken down due to concerns from their parents (Livingston et al., 2020). Growing up in a time of extensive sharenting, contemporary children might perceive themselves as being labeled based on our perception of them, rather than their own (Lasén et al., 2021).

Parents in the United States tend to publish double the amount of online narratives about their own lives compared to the number of stories they share about their offspring. This phenomenon highlights the fact that, for a significant number of parents, sharenting involves constructing a digital identity that incorporates their children rather than solely disclosing their children's experiences (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Livingstone and Brake have also argued that storytelling about one's children is an ancient and universal parental practice, but in the age of social media, it is increasingly difficult for children and teenagers to control who gets to tell their stories, what those stories are, and who gets to hear them.

In the United States, the act of "sharenting" is more commonly practiced rather than being an exception. American parents are adept at sharing various aspects of their children's lives online, starting from posting ultrasound pictures of their unborn babies, to providing detailed accounts of the childbirth process, and diligently documenting every milestone and phase of their children's development (Amon et al. 2022). As per a survey carried out by AVG, an Internet security company, a majority of 55% American parents tend to share photographs of their children online even before they are born. Although some individuals do this with the intention of staying connected with loved ones, studies indicate that a significant portion of American parents engage in sharenting unconsciously, leading to potential consequences that have both positive and negative aspects (Amon et al., 2022).

As the phenomenon of sharenting has spread globally in the networked society, the United Kingdom has also witnessed a significant increase in sharenting practices. The United Kingdom serves as an illustration of how the digital landscape has influenced parenting behaviors, specifically in terms of sharing images of their children online. Currently, there are no explicit regulations in the United Kingdom pertaining to sharenting, despite growing worries regarding the privacy and data security of children (Haley, 2020).

A study conducted by Ofcom in 2012 reported that 52% of parents originally posted pictures of their children online, and around 34% of them posted it at least once a week (Alotaibi, 2020). Several parents engaged in the act for the purpose of upholding their relationships, particularly with relatives and intimate acquaintances. However, there were also those who did so solely to form connections with individuals on the internet. A recent investigation carried out in London has uncovered a novel pattern wherein mothers who blog meticulously chronicle each aspect of their parenting experience. Blogging and social media platforms have gained considerable sway in disseminating fashionable practices and knowledge in contemporary society, thereby simplifying the process of influencing other parents to involve themselves more in the practice of sharenting.

In the foreseeable future, as time elapses and their offspring mature, there is a great likelihood that this present cohort of children will cultivate a prominent digital footprint and may encounter the online material that their parents have published regarding them. The recent course of action pursued by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in the United Kingdom, wherein they have issued instructions to parents on how to restrict the extent of information they disclose about their children, signifies the genuine concern placed on the matter of online confidentiality for minors and infants in the UK (Dempsey et al., 2022). The research conducted by Pooler, which involved interviewing numerous parents in the United Kingdom, also serves as evidence that the sharenting trend in the UK is progressing towards a potential compromise to children's privacy in the days to come (Dempsey et al., 2022).

Japan is the initial foreign country to address the matter of sharenting through the implementation of legal measures (Fineberg et al., 2022). Japan has enacted legislation to safeguard the privacy of children. An incident that stirred controversy in Japan back in 2008 involved a mother who posted on her personal blog, "I dislike my father because of his poor dental hygiene." When the father became aware of this post, he adamantly denied being the subject. However, the media hastily drew conclusions and divulged all the intricate aspects of the family. This incident significantly influenced the perception of sharenting among Japanese society, leading to a crackdown on the family's reputation and causing distress to the children.

Consequently, new regulations regarding sharenting were introduced, incorporating a privacy feature to shield children's identities online. The enforcement of these laws took effect on May 14th, 2012 (Stephenson et al., 2024). This law aims to assist in protecting the children's identity and increasing global competitiveness by encouraging the wise use of social media. Parent bloggers must disclose whether they have obtained consent from their children or a third party before sharing personal information. Failing to comply with these regulations may lead to penalties, including fines or imprisonment for up to one year. It is important to note that children today possess a greater understanding of information technology. If they become aware of their personal information being shared, they hold the right to request the removal of such content or pursue legal action against their parents for future compensation. This occurrence serves as an instructive incident for Malaysia, highlighting the need to prevent the repetition of similar cases in the future (Plunkett, 2020).

Although there are positive effects of sharenting, it can also have adverse consequences on the privacy of children. Parents often fail to realize the negative impact that sharing their child's personal information online can have on the child, the family, society, and even themselves. In today's digital age, children are exposed to the online world from a very young age, with parents frequently boasting about their children on social media platforms. Unfortunately, children have little control over what information is being shared, who has access to it, how long it remains public, and what purposes it may serve. Consequently, there is a high risk of the child's digital identity being stolen. This includes not only basic information such as their name, date of birth, and location, but potentially even more sensitive details. The theft of a child's identity can go unnoticed for years, making it particularly valuable to criminals (Power, 2020). The primary reason for this concern is the difficulty in overseeing individuals who capture, store, or distribute shared information, along with the perpetual nature of digital data. Consequently, there is no ability to regulate the duration of information's presence on the internet. In the occurrence of identity theft, the expenses associated with rectifying the situation are significant,

and the procedure itself is intricate, encompassing the removal of the pilfered information. Ultimately, this detrimental situation could adversely impact the child's future, potentially leading to rejection from programs or job opportunities due to a false background check resulting from the identity thief's use of the child's personal data. Children also might become victims of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. They might be teased with information parents shared, leading to cyberbullying, being isolated from certain groups, and worst-case scenario, getting stalked (Wen et al., 2022). This will affect their social life, development, and mental health (Jean-Baptiste, 2021).

The current state of sharenting in Malaysia fails to generate substantial public attention. Local resources pertaining to sharenting are notably scarce in comparison to foreign nations. The vast majority of articles addressing sharenting are opinion-based pieces sourced from uninvolved parties. While there have been a few noteworthy instances in Malaysia where legal actions were taken regarding sharenting, this serves as a valuable opportunity for Malaysian parents to garner wisdom from the errors of others (Wen et al., 2022). The lack of popularity of sharenting in Malaysia can be attributed to the country's slow adoption of new trends, particularly those originating from other countries. Malaysians tend to embrace trends only once they have become well-established. Additionally, Malaysians generally value their privacy and hold more conservative beliefs compared to other nations. They place a high importance on social norms, taboos, and customs, which creates difficulty for parents who wish to engage in sharenting. The fine line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, based on local cultural norms, poses a challenge for parents, who may unknowingly violate customs when sharing their experiences of parenthood. Consequently, public interest in sharenting is relatively low in Malaysia, as the topic often stirs tension between traditional parenting practices and modern approaches (Teng & Dhanapal, 2022).

The phenomenon of sharenting has been witnessed across the globe in diverse manners. Nations in the Western hemisphere have experienced a significant prevalence of sharenting practices, owing to the widespread adoption of social media platforms (Boghosian, 2021). While in Japan, the act of sharenting is widely embraced by parents and children, as it is viewed as an integral part of their lifestyle. By creating online documentation of their future child's journey through blog entries, parents are able to preserve precious memories and facilitate recollection in the future. This practice is especially valuable for those who are new to parenting. Japan, although not at the same level as South Korea, is considered to be one of the leading nations in terms of technological advancements. Consequently, the inclination to share experiences, particularly on various social media platforms, is prevalent in Japanese society. It is worth noting that while privacy rights and legal implications have been extensively studied in Western countries, this area of concern remains relatively unexplored in Japan. Japanese sharenting customs extend beyond popular social media platforms like Facebook, and also encompass the usage of Mixi, a Japanese equivalent, as well as Line, a widely-used social media application in Japan and Southeast Asia (Stephenson et al., 2024).

There is no record of sharenting trends in Malaysia, mainly due to the fact that Malaysia is a developing country with low technological literacy. It is undeniable that the practice of sharenting will experience growth in the foreseeable future, as evidenced by the patterns observed in neighbouring Asian countries. Research has demonstrated a clear link between the rise in technology usage and social media engagement. As Malaysia advances in terms of

technology, it is inevitable that sharenting will become an integral aspect of parenting in the coming years.

Conclusion

The comparison of sharenting trends between Malaysia and other nations highlights a number of important factors. It emphasizes how common sharenting is among parents in a variety of cultural situations and how global in nature. Analysing sharenting activities in Western nations and other areas offers important information into the kinds of content shared, the channels parents utilize, and the underlying reasons behind their actions.

The study also highlights the significance of comprehending cultural impacts on sharenting, acknowledging that parental activities online are greatly influenced by societal norms, beliefs, and attitudes toward privacy. This knowledge is essential for creating situation-specific plans that uphold children's right to privacy while encouraging appropriate sharing behaviours. The study also emphasizes the necessity of strong ethical and regulatory frameworks that regulate sharenting and address concerns about parental permission, data security, and the possible negative effects of sharenting on children's wellbeing. This study aims to raise awareness among Malaysian parents, policymakers, and stakeholders about the challenges of sharenting and the significance of responsible digital parenting by examining lessons learned from other nations. In ultimately, encouraging children to share content in a safer and more thoughtful manner is crucial to creating a healthy digital environment for kids in Malaysia and elsewhere.

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