



“You don’t have to share every single small moment on social media”:

Exploring Tensions Between Parents and Children in Sharenting Practices

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Abstract

Sharenting – parents’ content sharing about their children on social media in the form of text, image, or video – is a widespread phenomenon internationally. However, research on sharenting is scarce in a Nordic context, especially from the perspective of children and adolescents. The objectives of this paper are to analyze sharenting practices in Norway, how sharenting-related tensions between parents and children manifest, and potential strategies for reducing tensions. The article draws on impression management and communication privacy management theory to analyze these objectives. To gain a profound insight into the complexities of parent-child perspectives related to sharenting, we conducted three focus group interviews with children, adolescents, and parents, alongside a workshop with five parents and their children. The findings show that the quality and quantity of content, as well as parents sharing without consent, are the main causes of tensions. In order to control their digital identities, children and adolescents wish to be asked for consent, while their parents do not always understand the importance of this. Finally, the article discusses children’s and adolescents’ suggestions on how to improve parents’ sharenting practices to ensure a better digital everyday life.

Keywords

sharenting, adolescents, children, social media, digital identity

Introduction

Norwegian children have an average of 1165 pictures of themselves on the internet by the time they reach the age of 12 (UNICEF Norway, 2020). It is predominantly their parents who share about them at this age and many continue to share as their children grow older. This may create tensions between parents and children, as their views on how the children should be presented online, and their attitudes toward privacy, may differ. Sharing information about one's children with family, friends, and acquaintances is not a new phenomenon. However, the ability to disseminate and store information in a digital world has changed the scope and added potential challenges associated with this practice (Steinberg, 2017).

Sharenting, a portmanteau word deriving from *sharing* and *parenting*, refers to parents sharing various content, including text, images, videos, and updates about their children on social media platforms (Jorge et al., 2022). Sharenting has become a widespread practice globally (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Elvestad et al., 2021; Jorge et al., 2022; Otero, 2017). In this article, we define sharenting as parents sharing content of their children on social media platforms, including content sharing within closed groups and private chats with a limited audience. We do this to highlight that the perceived safety of sharing more privately still comes with risks and limits young people's possibilities to manage their digital identities.

Sharenting occurs with or without the child's consent. Sharing information without a child's consent or without explaining who the information is being shared with, can lead to a variety of negative consequences, miscellaneous risks, and ethical issues. Content featuring children can be misused and spread on pornographic websites and within pedophile networks, exploited for kidnapping and other criminal activities, or sold to state or non-state actors to be used for future surveillance of the child (Steinberg, 2017).

Sharenting can also lead to problems when young individuals are forming their own digital identities, which may not align with what has been previously shared about them. This is further complicated by the fact that the content shared about them can receive negative comments and potentially be used to harass them (Marasli et al., 2016; Rolland, 2020). In other words, children are deprived of the opportunity to create and shape their digital traces and identities, making them vulnerable to negative reactions (Steinberg, 2017). This article aims to analyze children, adolescents, and parents' perspectives on sharenting, and how sharenting practices can lead to tensions between parents and their children.

The Nordic countries and the case of Norway provide an interesting context for studying sharenting, as citizens are avid users of internet-based services and generally display high digital competence (European Commission, 2022; Slettemeås, 2019). Moreover, as an interesting contrast to, for instance, Estonia, where parents are rather unconcerned about their underaged children's early uptake of digital media (Lipu & Siibak, 2019), Norwegian parents report being quite worried about their children's use of smartphones and gaming (Elvestad et al., 2021). These concerns involve both the amount of time children spend on such devices as well as any risks they may face in relation to the digital sphere. Despite parents expressing worry, Norway is one of the highest-ranking European countries both in terms of parents sharing content about their children without permission, and children being avid online users themselves (Elvestad et al., 2021; Medietilsynet, 2020; Smahel et al., 2020). Furthermore, Nordic societies are characterized by high levels of trust, both social trust between citizens and trust in institutions and governmental bodies (Direktoratet for forvaltning og økonomistyring, 2023; OECD, 2024). This may affect parents' sense of security and risk perception related to sharing about children online, which again impacts their sharenting practices (Elvestad et al., 2021). Parents' sharenting practices can be contextualized with what Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) describe as parents' digital everyday practices to negoti-

ate identity, values, and authority in individualized societies. Parents in Norway have close relations with their children based on mutual acceptance rather than authority (Aarseth, 2018; Bakken et al., 2021).

Sharenting is a relatively unexplored topic in a Nordic context. Some studies have explored why and how parents share about their children online (Bhroin et al., 2022; Damkjær, 2018), for instance making the connection between high levels of trust with frequent engagement in sharenting (Elvestad et al., 2021) and their concerns about privacy and potential misuse (Southerton et al., 2020). Others have also explored how influencer parents utilize their infants to build relationships between consumers and products (Ågren, 2023; Mäkinen, 2018), and how sharing online may be part of mothers' identity work (Kallioharju et al., 2023). Sarkadi and colleagues (2020) surveyed Swedish children and found that they had negative attitudes toward sharenting, highlighting that they wanted to be asked for permission to take pictures and share them, and to be heard when they say "no."

However, several studies internationally call for a better understanding of various positive and negative sharenting practices and any long-term effects sharenting may have on children (e.g., Bhroin et al., 2022; Smahel et al., 2020; Steinberg, 2017). Bhroin et al. (2022) outline a specific need for qualitative studies that can shed light on the relational aspects of sharenting practices, as well as the motivations and perceptions of risk among parents. They also note a lack of knowledge about how communication between children and parents can lead to good practices acknowledging children's views and privacy. Additionally, most studies focus on adults' experiences, opinions, and practices, with limited research done on children's perspectives, thoughts, and feelings regarding sharenting or combining them (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019). In sum, although granted some attention, the research on children's and adolescents' perspectives on sharenting is scarce (Steinberg, 2017; Verswijvel et al., 2019), as well as on potential tensions between parents and children and on sharenting within private groups. To address these research gaps, we ask: (1) How do tensions between parents and children manifest from sharenting practices? and (2) What are potential strategies for reducing such tensions?

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present previous literature on sharenting and expound on theoretical frameworks that underpin our research questions. Then, we introduce the qualitative methods used, consisting of three focus group interviews, which included children, adolescents, and parents, alongside a workshop with five parents and their children. All parents were recruited on the criteria that they shared content about their children on social media platforms and were not influencers. In the subsequent section, we present the findings. We describe parents' sharenting practices and explore the attitudes of children and adolescents toward them. The second part of our findings explores the tensions that can arise between parents and children in relation to sharenting. We provide an examination of these tensions and discuss strategies participants proposed to reduce them, and finally, we conclude.

Previous Research on Parents' Sharenting Practices

Research indicates that sharenting has become a prevalent and socially accepted practice over the last decade (Cino, 2022; Verswijvel et al., 2019). However, the content of sharing about children's lives varies, starting from before birth with ultrasound images, to everyday life, vacations, and special occasions such as birthdays, holidays, or the first day of kindergarten (Brosch, 2016; Cino et al., 2020; Marasli et al., 2016). Previous research shows that it is primarily images and videos that are shared, but it can also include status updates (Verswij-

vel et al., 2019). Parents share mostly happy and joyful images of their children and families, and it is less common to share images of their children in private moments such as when they cry or have tantrums (Brosch, 2016). Brosch (2016) categorizes happy images into three categories: (1) joyful images of everyday moments (e.g., mealtime pictures), (2) outings (e.g., pictures from vacations or trips), and (3) images from special occasions (e.g., when children start school or birthdays). However, studies have also shown that a significant number of parents share more serious and sensitive information about their children on social media platforms, such as their children's health situations or school challenges (Bhroin et al., 2022; Marasli et al., 2016).

Motivations for Sharenting

There are four primary motivations for sharenting in the literature: (1) connecting with parents in similar situations, (2) staying in touch with friends and family, (3) self-presentation, and (4) preserving memories (Bhroin et al., 2022; Donovan, 2020; Holiday et al., 2022; Verswijvel et al., 2019). The first motivation involves parents seeking to discuss parenting challenges with others facing similar situations, such as sleep issues, nutrition, behavior, and medical matters (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Social media serves as a support system, alleviating isolation in challenging parenting scenarios (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Ranzini, 2020). Parents also share experiences to provide insights for fellow parents (Duggan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, parents use social media to keep friends and family informed about significant family events (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Some may feel compelled to share, as not sharing can lead to generational conflicts (Damkjær, 2018; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015).

Third, parents use sharenting to portray themselves as good parents by sharing their children's achievements (Bhroin et al., 2022). They seek recognition not just for their children but also for themselves as parents (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Kumar and Schoenebeck's (2015) study found that mothers use Facebook to depict themselves as good mothers.

Last, sharenting serves as a digital scrapbook for parents, helping them organize and share memories of their children's upbringing (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Sociodemographic Factors and Digital Competence

Findings from previous research indicate that mothers are more inclined than fathers to share content about their children on social media platforms (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2018). Nevertheless, multiple studies also indicate that fathers engage in sharenting (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015; Cino & Subrahmanyam, 2021; Davis, 2012). A literature review conducted by Cino (2021) found that there is no correlation between parents' age and frequency of sharenting.

Additionally, parents with high digital competence are more inclined to share about their children, creating a privacy paradox where privacy concerns do not align in a straightforward manner with sharenting behaviors (Bhroin et al., 2022; Ranzini et al., 2020). Livingstone et al. (2018) discovered that British parents with higher privacy concerns tended to share more pictures and videos of their children compared to parents with fewer privacy worries. The authors proposed a possible explanation, suggesting that the positive advantages of sharenting, such as maintaining connections with friends and family, outweighed their privacy apprehensions. Moreover, Bhroin et al. (2022) suggest that digitally competent parents are better equipped to understand and manage sharenting risks.

Involvement of Children in Sharenting Practices

The lack of children's and adolescents' perspectives on experiences with parents' sharenting practices is notable considering the children are the subjects of sharenting (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). Nevertheless, the few studies that have investigated children's and adolescents' attitudes toward sharenting find that they desire their parents to seek permission before sharing posts about them on social media (Elvestad et al., 2021; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Sarkadi et al., 2020). It appears that children and adolescents understand their parents' wish to express pride in them by sharing joyful family photos, bragging about their achievements, and creating digital keepsakes (Moser et al., 2017; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). These portrayals are generally well received by children and adolescents and are seen as positive aspects of the sharenting phenomenon (Moser et al., 2017). On the other hand, children and adolescents dislike it when their parents share photos of them that they consider unflattering or inappropriate (Moser et al., 2017). Children and adolescents emphasize that inappropriate content can encompass, for instance, revealing images or private details about their lives (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). As such, sharenting practices may be a source of tension within families, which we will explore by drawing on impression management and communication privacy management theory.

Theoretical Framework

Sharenting and Impression Management

Impression management or self-presentation is about how people create a certain impression of themselves for others and perform their roles (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). People are concerned with how others see them, and sometimes aim to control others' perceptions and potentially adapt their practices (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). People engage in impression management to strengthen their identity and self-esteem, position themselves in social settings, gain rewards such as likes, and avoid negative sanctions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Norms and social expectations influence this dynamic process of impression management, which is also influenced by other people's performances (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Sharenting is a media practice that is part of a family's everyday digital lives and is performed in various ways depending on values, norms, and social contexts (Autenrieth, 2018; Southerton et al., 2020). Guardians can perform their role of being good parents by sharing about their children on social media platforms and fulfilling their need to belong (Cino et al., 2020; Jorge et al., 2022; Lazard et al., 2019). Children and adolescents become part of their parents' self-presentation and impression management (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019). As sharenting takes place on social media, it is influenced by the platforms' technological features, for instance making content searchable at a later stage (Southerton et al., 2020).

Impression management theory has been applied to conceptualize sharenting practices in previous research suggesting children and adolescents are concerned about how sharenting might influence their image and social relations (Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). This research identifies impression management as one of the main reasons why their parents share about them (Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Children's and Adolescents' Impression Management

Children and adolescents develop identities in both physical and digital spaces (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002; Davis, 2012; Moreno & Uhls, 2019) and increasingly seek their peers' validation and group belonging (Eek-Karlsson, 2021; Harris et al., 2021). Social media platforms allow them to explore their identities and senses of belonging (Eek-Karlsson, 2021; Seo et al., 2014). They create and perform digital identities by using technological features (Moreno & Uhls, 2019) and might feel upset when their parents share content about them that they consider unflattering and conflicting with their presentation of self (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). Therefore, they highlight the importance of consent and influence what their parents share about them (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Sarkadi et al., 2020).

Privacy and Sharenting

Communication privacy management theory conceptualizes the disclosure, management, and protection of private information which is difficult in everyday life (Petronio & Child, 2020). Privacy is about the dynamic creation and negotiation process of "privacy boundaries" in a metaphorical sense entailing to whom information is disclosed (Petronio & Child, 2020 p. 79; Walrave et al., 2022). Privacy boundaries vary among families and members, which can lead to tensions when a person feels their ownership over personal data is violated by others sharing without consent (Walrave et al., 2022). Petronio and Child (2020, p. 77) refer to these tensions as "privacy turbulence," which illustrates that people can make mistakes and might have different ideas regarding how to manage their and others' privacy.

Children and adolescents engage in various practices to protect their image and privacy online, for instance by managing access (De Wolf, 2020; Dennen et al., 2017). Yet, the content parents share about their children is not always accessible to children and adolescents (Lipu & Siibak, 2019). Further, parents' sharenting practices raise ethical questions about children and adolescents' right to privacy and the possibility of creating their digital identities (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Steinberg, 2017). Children and adolescents want to keep certain information private and hence voice discontent when parents share too much (Moser et al., 2017).

Methodology

To explore the main objective of this study, namely the tensions in sharenting practices between children and adults within private groups, this article is based on qualitative data from three focus groups and one workshop. The sample included adults, adolescents, and children living in Norway. Focus groups were chosen because they allow for dynamic interactions among participants that can lead to in-depth insights (Acocella, 2012; Smithson, 2000). Further, the method aligns with impression management theory, as participants perform during focus groups, according to Smithson (2000). Digital focus groups are cost and time-effective (Irani, 2019), and have the advantage of creating accessibility for participants (Flayelle et al., 2022), which suited the geographically diverse sample. However, reading participants' body language is more challenging in digital focus groups (Flayelle et al., 2022). Therefore, an in-person workshop was planned to supplement the focus groups. The workshop aimed to gain deeper insights into and understanding of topics raised during the focus groups.

The data was collected and analyzed during spring 2023 after gaining ethics approval from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt). The data was collected in two sequential phases: during the first phase, three digital focus groups were

conducted, and during the second phase, the physical workshop in Oslo was organized. To comply with research ethics, the participants, including the children's guardians, received written information about the project and signed a consent form. At the beginning of the focus groups and the workshop, information about the project and participants' rights was repeated, and oral consent was given to ensure voluntary participation.

Sample

The first focus group consisted of ten children aged 9–12, the second included seven adolescents aged 13–18, and the third group consisted of nine parents aged 34–57. All the parents in the focus group shared about their children on social media platforms, yet to varying degrees. To gain broader perspectives, the participants in the focus groups came from different households. The workshop included five parents aged 39–57 and one child each in the age group 10–17. The 36 participants were recruited via the recruitment agency Norstat¹, which was briefed to take into consideration diversity in terms of gender and geographic location. This created a diverse but not representative sample. To explore potential differences in sharenting practices among parents from cities and rural areas, participants' geographical spread was accounted for as a sampling criterion. Based on Acocella's (2012) point that participants in group discussions should not be too heterogeneous, as well as the limited scope of this study, we did not sample for further socioeconomic criteria.

Taken together, the mean age of the 22 children in the sample was 13 years (10 females, 12 males), while the mean age of the 14 parents was 46 years (9 females, 5 males).

Table 1. Overview of participants focus groups (self-reported data)

Assigned name	County	Age	Gender	(Parents) sharenting on social media
(1) Focus group: age 9–12				
Aksel	Vestlandet	11	Male	Yes
Emma	Trøndelag	9	Female	Yes
Emil	Innlandet	9	Male	No
Lea	Viken	12	Female	No
Lucas	Viken	12	Male	No
Nora	Vestland	12	Female	No
Noa	Viken	10	Male	Yes
Oscar	Trøndelag	9	Male	Yes
Olivia	Viken	10	Female	Yes
Sofie	Vestland	9	Female	No
(2) Focus group: age 13–18				
Ali	Oslo	17	Male	Yes
Jonathan	Vestland	18	Male	No
Jenny	Viken	17	Female	Yes
Lilli	Vestland	13	Female	No
Matilde	Oslo	17	Female	Yes
Victor	Viken	16	Male	No
Liam	Nordland	14	Male	No

Assigned name	County	Age	Gender	(Parents) sharenting on social media
(3) Focus group: age 39–57				
Dunja	Møre og Romsdal	45	Female	Yes
Halvard	Trøndelag	48	Male	Yes
Guro	Agder	47	Female	Yes
Thor	Viken	57	Male	Yes
Øystein	Innland	44	Male	Yes
Helle	Vestfold og Telemark	44	Female	Yes
Jacob	Vestlandet	34	Male	Yes
Sigrid	Rogaland	52	Female	Yes
Marie	Trøndelag	38	Male	Yes

Table 2. Overview of workshop participants (self-reported data)

Assigned name parent	Age	Gender	Assigned name child	Age	Gender
Mari	53	Female	Vårin	16	Female
Soju	39	Male	Amar	11	Male
Silje	43	Female	Aleksander	10	Male
Julie	51	Female	Celine	17	Female
Marianne	52	Female	Henning	13	Male

Focus Groups and Workshop

The focus groups were conducted online using the video conferencing tool Zoom, and lasted one and a half hours. Two semi-structured interview guides were developed, one for parents and one for children and adolescents, addressing the perspective of sharing or being shared. The focus groups touched on parents' sharenting practices, including motivations, and the children's perception of these practices. Further, suggestions for measures to better shape sharenting practices to adhere to children's and adolescents' interests were discussed. The researchers moderated the discussion to avoid single dominant participants and to ensure participants felt open to expressing their perspectives instead of stating what they considered as socially desirable. The focus groups included a photo-elicitation method to stimulate deeper engagement, as described by Harper (2002). This means that images of different influencers' use of their children in commercial and non-commercial settings were shown to bring forth the participants' reflections on similarities and differences and account for reflections of the ongoing public media debate at the time.

The workshop agenda was developed based on the findings from the focus groups. The aim was to deepen the understanding of differences between parents and their children that were highlighted during the focus groups. In addition, the workshop aimed at discussing suggested measures in depth. In the beginning, parents and adolescents were given different scenarios to consider. The adults had to place themselves in their children's situation, and the children and adolescents took on the role of parents engaging in sharenting. They then met for a plenary discussion on the reflections, and a dialogue emerged from having shifted

perspectives. This allowed for a discussion of different understandings, and motivations, and shed light on tensions between parents and their children. Then, all participants worked on two scenarios together, taking the role of a teacher and a policy maker. The researchers facilitated the session, allowing for critical considerations of the role these actors could and should play.

Analysis

The focus groups and the workshop were transcribed verbatim using the transcription program F4. All identifying factors were anonymized and participants were assigned new names. The authors conducted a thematic analysis starting with familiarizing themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Three researchers coded the material using the collaboration mode of the analysis software program Nvivo12. During the analysis, the group dynamics, particularly during the workshop, were accounted for. The codebook comprised twelve main codes, such as digital competence, motivation, risk, and consent, of which ten had subcodes. The coding was done iteratively, as new codes were added during the coding process; for instance, deepfakes, mobbing, and hacking were created as subcodes under the code on risk. The researchers met frequently during this process, discussing, comparing, and grouping the codes and developing and testing themes to ensure a rigorous analysis.

Results and Discussion

The objectives of this paper are to analyze how children's, adolescents', and parents' perspectives on and practices of sharenting may lead to tensions between them, and potential strategies for reducing such tensions based on participants' suggestions. First, we address parents' sharenting practices and children's attitudes toward them. Second, we explore the tensions between parents and children, focusing on disagreement on the quality and quantity of content shared, and parents sharing without children's consent. Last, the paper discusses participants' suggestions on how to improve sharenting to reduce these tensions.

Sharenting Practices

To explore how tensions manifest, we first need to establish parents' sharenting practices and the children's and adolescents' perspectives on them. Initially, most parents expressed that they did not share a lot about their children on social media. However, throughout the focus group and workshop, it became evident that most participants were referring to a shift in their sharenting practices from sharing a lot of content publicly or with a wider audience to more selective sharing with fewer people such as close friends and family, and in more closed groups, often using Messenger or Snapchat. Some of the parents who only shared content in such closed groups stated that they did not share about their children on social media. This indicates that the parents did not define sharing within these closed groups as sharenting. When the parents shared with a wider audience, they usually shared content from special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, the first day at school, and confirmations.

These findings indicate that parents' sharenting practices have evolved over time and that parents' awareness of the risks associated with sharenting practices has changed. Moreover, the parents in the study also highlighted the significance of the children's age for their sharenting practices regarding the frequency of sharing. Halvard, 48 years old, reflected on this:

I have two girls aged 15 and 19 and even if I am allowed to post things, they need to be very happy with the photo [...]. There can be many objections to the pictures. It's not like in the old days when we published the first and best picture [laughs]. It's no longer like that and that's probably a good thing too.²

This trend aligns with prior research, which indicates that parents tend to share less content about their children on social media as they enter their teenage years while sharing more about younger children (Cino, 2021; Livingstone et al., 2018). Moreover, some of the parents in the study reported having different sharing practices depending on the age of their children. In cases where the children were young, parents did not always ask for consent or inform them about the content that was shared. For instance, a 43-year-old mother mentioned that she had shared a funny picture of her son that she did not get consent for, as he was too young:

I posted a picture of Aleksander and if you scroll long enough down in my feed it's still there. He had found my mascara and painted it all over himself. And he's just standing there in his diaper with the mascara. And it was funny at the time. I don't know what he thinks, he doesn't know that it's still there because he was so little back then, he was wearing diapers. I haven't shown it to him.

Most of the parents in the study used the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram to share content from special occasions, and Snapchat mostly to share pictures from everyday moments. Mari, a 38-year-old, stated, "I feel like on Instagram and a bit on Facebook it's more about birthdays, holidays, and those kinds of highlights, while Snapchat is more about the everyday stuff."

The practice of seeking consent before posting about their children varied among the parents in the study. Some of the parents consistently asked for consent, while others indicated that they only asked sometimes. However, the parents expected their children to let them know if they disliked the content they shared about them. This means that the parents expect their children to actively engage with their sharenting practices, which might be challenging in cases where children and adolescents do not know which content is online and when parents share without asking for consent. This aligns with findings by Petronio and Child (2020) of different privacy management strategies among families.

The motivations for sharing were consistent with previous research. Parents shared content because they took pride in their children's achievements, to stay connected with friends and family, and to gather memories. Vårin, a 16-year-old, said that sharenting is an opportunity for parents to share "memories and very nice things and that others can see what a lovely time you are having." Nine-year-old Oscar mentioned that parents share about their children "to become popular." In other words, sharenting allows parents to form their own digital identity, which can lead to a positive perception by others, and which aligns with the literature on privacy management (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and motivations for sharenting (Kumar & Schoenebeck; Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Moreover, the parents perceived that there were few risks associated with their sharenting practices. They believed that what they shared would not have adverse consequences for their children and were more concerned about what children share among themselves on social media. In contrast, the children and adolescents in the study mentioned some risks related to sharing about children on social media. Among these were kidnapping, deepfakes, bullying, and negative consequences for the children's future. This indicates different privacy concerns as described by Petronio & Child (2020) among children and their parents regarding sharenting.

Sharenting and Tensions Between Parents and Their Children

As shown in the previous section, children and adolescents expressed an understanding of why and how their parents engaged in sharenting, but were also concerned about potential risks and negative consequences. From our material, we find that tensions between parents and children were based on contrasting ideas about quality and quantity, lacking consent, and digital competence. These can be conceptualized as differences in understandings and practices of managing privacy boundaries and self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) leading to tensions or “privacy turbulences” (Petronio & Child, 2020, p. 79).

Quality and Quantity of Shared Content

A major concern expressed by children and adolescents was that their parents had different perspectives regarding what they defined as “appropriate” content, especially concerning the appearance of children and adolescents in the pictures they shared on social media. Children and adolescents wanted to curate their image by ensuring they looked their best. They reflected on parents having an overly positive view of their children, whereas the children and adolescents were more critical of their appearance and self-presentation. They pointed out that their parents lacked an understanding of how they wanted to present themselves, as explained by Jenny, a 17-year-old:

I think many parents don't understand why you don't want that picture or something like that. So, when I told my parents that they should maybe ask me first and then post, they were like: “Why? You look so nice in all the pictures we post about you.” They may not quite understand what you mean and what you are thinking.

Within the youngest participant group, there were discussions around parents sharing potentially embarrassing content, particularly related to the children's playful interactions with technology. This included silly selfies taken for fun and pictures and videos that were taken when they were playing with their friends. Further, children and adolescents highlighted that the technological features of social media with content, for instance, being searchable and accessible for many people, made them feel uncomfortable about their parents' sharenting practices. Participants reflected on the importance of their appearance on social media, as exemplified by 17-year-old Jenny:

I would say that it is a bit important for me at least when I have frizzy hair or when I'm smiling weirdly or something like that. I don't want the picture to be open for everyone to see. It is a bit uncomfortable to know that everyone has access to that picture.

The data revealed that parents and children had different ideas about sharing everyday moments. Parents felt it could be inspiring to share unpolished everyday moments and expressed concerns about the curated and edited content on social media platforms that did not match the more messy reality of everyday life. During the workshop, 52-year-old Marianne said, “I think it can be quite harmful; I think it's harmful to constantly have this positive [presentation on social media]”. She advocated for also sharing the imperfect everyday life on social media. However, 17-year-old Celine pointed out the potential negative consequences of sharing less perfect pictures of young people: “We talked a bit about the unfortunate moments and we concluded that they should not be shared because if they go astray it's very awkward for the teenager sitting at home who has a very unfortunate picture that their friends suddenly have.” As such, parents and adolescents and children express different ideas

of what content is appropriate, especially what a “nice” picture is, as well as different ideas of the potential consequences of sharing and risk.

Another issue that was raised by children and adolescents was that they disliked their parents sharing too much content. Fourteen-year-old Liam stated, “You don’t always have to share pictures,” answering the question about what he would advise parents considering sharenting.

As delineated, parents’ and children’s ideas about the quality and quantity of content did not always align, which led to tensions based on different wishes for privacy boundaries (Petronio & Child, 2020). The young participants explained how their parents’ sharing about them could decrease their control over creating their own digital identities leading to “privacy turbulences” in the forms of tensions (Petronio & Child, 2020). They perceived this as particularly problematic when their self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) did not align with their parents’ sharenting practices. This can be conceptualized as conflicting forms of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Although not stated explicitly by the parents in this study, adults’ sharenting practices can also be part of their own identity work and impression management (Bhroin et al., 2022; Kallioharju et al. 2023; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2014; Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Sharenting without Consent

Some parents mentioned they could receive criticism if they shared without their children’s knowledge. Children and adolescents pointed out that their parents did not always reflect on their sharenting practices. This was exemplified by 16-year-old Vårin as follows: “It happens quickly, they are your children so you might not think that it’s actually [pause]. You might think that you don’t share the worst pictures. So, you think that it’s okay so it can suddenly happen that your parents post a picture of you on Facebook that you actually don’t know is out there or you haven’t approved.” The children and the adolescents in the study clearly disliked their parents sharing about them without their consent, and this could cause tensions. Vårin echoes the notion that parents are not capable of evaluating images of their children in a way that the children find satisfying. Moreover, sharing about children without their consent neglects their autonomy and right to decide what information about them is made available to others. According to a general comment to the UN’s Convention of the Rights of the Child, children are entitled to privacy (United Nations, 2021). This includes the digital sphere, and data collection processing through sharenting may pose a threat to children’s rights. Moreover, it is at odds with the common parenting style today, characterized by negotiation and involving the child in various decisions and processes (Ulvund, 2023). As such, our data indicates that some parents do not take their children’s perspectives on sharenting seriously enough. However, today’s parents and children have a friendly relationship (Aarseth, 2018), which may explain why children and adolescents are not afraid to speak up if they want something to be removed.

Young people’s increasing self-awareness would sometimes influence sharenting practices. For instance, 53-year-old mother Mari said during the workshop, “I used to post but then I was strictly told not to do so” to which her 16-year-old daughter Vårin added, “You were forced to.” Drawing on Petronio and Child (2020, p. 79), this illustrates a form of “privacy turbulence,” with parents and their children having different ideas about sharenting, leading to tensions that were managed through dialogue.

Digital Competence

Many children and adolescents were further skeptical about their parents' digital competence and addressed concerns regarding the scale and safety of sharenting practices. They worried about content going astray and for potential negative consequences for them in both the short and long term. This can be understood as concerns about how their parents safeguard their privacy (Petronio & Child, 2020). The children and adolescents considered their level of digital competence to be higher than their parents. Seventeen-year-old Celine outlined:

I think I am good at using social media and I don't click on any links and all that, but I know that parents have a tendency to do that. So, it could easily happen that pictures end up astray. Therefore, I would think a bit ahead: Would it be a crisis if I were hacked and this picture gets shared?

A study found that although many adults deem their digital competence to be satisfactory, they do not place specific value on their personal data, and are therefore not particularly concerned about the digital footprints they leave online (Sletteameås et al., 2022). This may thus conflict with the wishes and needs of their children and adolescents.

As we have demonstrated, sharenting-related tensions between parents and children arise from conflicting ideas of privacy and impression management through quality and quantity of the content posted, lacking consent, and the (perceived) digital competence of parents. Overall, tensions arise from children and adolescents wanting more control than the parents afford them. The next section will discuss measures to reduce such tensions.

Measures to Reduce Tensions: Children's and Adolescents' Perspectives

As detailed above, sharenting may be an important part of parents' online identity formation, which conflicts with their children's needs to manage their own digital footprints. It is thus necessary to facilitate a safer environment for content sharing and encourage more dialogue between parents and children. The following sections discuss potential measures to reduce generational tensions rather than prevent sharenting altogether. Specifically, we bring forth children's and adolescents' perspectives on how sharenting could be attuned to their right to privacy and participation.

The Role of Consent

The participants highlighted that the best way to improve sharenting is for parents to ask for consent. Instead of expecting children to ask parents to remove published content they disapprove of – and thereby placing the largest responsibility on children – parents ought to ask for permission to share content before they post. Sixteen-year-old Victor firmly stated, “Whatever you are going to post, just ask first.” This echoes findings from the Swedish study by Sarkadi et al. (2020) revealing that children and adolescents want to give their consent before their caregivers share about them. They want to be in control and manage their (digital) identities and traces, which aligns with impression management theory (Goffman, 1959).

Further, children and adolescents emphasized that adults must accept and respect their opinions on what is okay to share about them or not. Seventeen-year-old Mathilde stated:

It is important to talk about it [sharenting] and ask before you share. And if you get a no, you have to actually listen and set boundaries about what is and is not okay to share. And one [the child or adolescent] can participate in deciding which pictures could be posted and which information should not.

In other words, children and adolescents want their parents to take them seriously and respect their privacy boundaries, as conceptualized by Petronio and Child (2020). In addition, children and adolescents also highlighted that parents should consider the quantity of their sharing. They expressed that sharing mundane everyday moments is not a necessity. Rather, content sharing should be limited to special occasions such as birthdays and confirmations.

The children and adolescents wished for their parents to think beyond the immediate moment and consider the potential negative consequences that may arise from the persistence of content. Parents could also involve their children in finding pictures they feel comfortable sharing, allowing them to actively participate in their self-representation. This could potentially avoid uncomfortable situations for young people and allow for a dialogue where the parents' need for self-representation and the children and adolescents' need for privacy can be balanced. Eighteen-year-old Jonathan points out:

I think that they could perhaps think a bit ahead in time and if the image could be awkward yes and if it is necessary to post it. [...] Could I find something else to post? Do I need to post at all?

Children's and adolescents' focus on dialogue and active engagement in their parents' sharenting practices highlights their interest in creating and discussing their privacy boundaries (Petronio & Child, 2020) and managing their digital identities (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). When they are being shared without being granted an active role, their right to participation is challenged. This underscores the importance of considering children's and adolescents' perspectives when scrutinizing sharenting practices (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Improving Parents' Digital Competence

Children and adolescents explained that one way to improve sharenting practices for children and adolescents is by improving parents' level of digital competence in managing privacy on social media and considering potential risks. This is a general wish among many Norwegian youth (Reich et al., 2022). Improving parents' level of digital skills could contribute to bringing parents', children's, and adolescents' ideas about what Petronio and Child (2020) describe as privacy boundaries closer, and has not been previously discussed within the sharenting literature. Such a dialogue between generations might be beneficial in terms of reducing tensions and fostering greater understanding of their differing perspectives on sharenting. Further, this addresses children's and adolescents' concerns about privacy tied to some parents having a low degree of digital competence. One participant suggested that media channels such as newspapers and social media platforms could be used to build knowledge and improve parents' digital competence levels. There is a challenge with the lack of shared arenas where children and parents can come together in understanding. Media campaigns tailored specifically to children and parents through machine learning algorithms might be useful tools for raising awareness of the tensions surrounding sharenting practices.

The participants discussed that schools could be another arena for increasing both children's and parents' awareness around sharenting. The children and adolescents in this study

proposed that teachers could discuss and collect children and adolescents' perspectives in class and then address and bring forth issues during parent meetings. During the workshops, the parents agreed that schools could be a mutual arena to reach all parents, yet also acknowledged the lack of capacity schools have in addressing this issue. Methodologically, they discussed that a scenario workshop method could be fruitful in reflecting on sharenting, raising critical awareness, and opening a dialogue about family privacy boundaries and children's legal rights. This method could enhance cross-generational learning and contribute to accessing positive aspects of sharenting and potential risks.

The children and adolescents conferred that legal enforcement of limiting sharenting among their parents would be challenging and undesirable. This would be a legal imposition into the private sphere of families and their everyday practices. Instead, a participant suggested that guidelines could be developed as a resource for parents to reduce risks for their children and make good decisions³. The children and adolescents considered this especially valuable for parents with small children who cannot understand the potential consequences and associated risks of sharenting. These measures illustrate that children and adolescents in Norway wish for soft measures to improve sharenting in a way that reduces negative consequences for them. Seventeen-year-old Celine said:

I think a law about this would be difficult, but parents who are unsure could have guidelines; if they are unsure, they could go through them and check if something could be shared. Because when children are small, they can't assess the risk themselves regarding the picture that is being shared.

Conclusion

This article has examined sharenting practices and discussed tensions that can emerge as a result of these practices from the perspective of parents, children, and adolescents. Sharenting is a common phenomenon, yet morally charged and entangled with what it means to be a "good" parent. Parents' sharenting practices have changed over time, from posting publicly on a feed that can be open for anyone to see, to more private sharing only visible for chosen audiences, or in smaller catered groups through messaging features. This trend has emerged along with parents' increasing awareness of privacy online and with their children's emerging wishes to manage their identities as they become adolescents.

However, while the findings suggest an increasing awareness among parents regarding children's desires and the risks related to sharenting, there are still tensions. These arise mainly between parents and children related to parents' degree of digital competence and "acceptable" sharenting in terms of quality and quantity, which have been conceptualized as different wishes for self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Tensions also arise from parents sharing without consent. Children and adolescents want to have a say in what is shared with whom in order to manage their selves and their privacy, which can be understood as a privacy boundary (Petronio & Child, 2020). Children and adolescents want to participate in this process from an early age and they would like their parents to reduce the quantity of sharing. When parents engage in sharenting in ways their children disapprove of, this can be considered a form of privacy turbulence (Petronio & Child, 2020) as different ideas and norms of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and privacy collide.

As this article is limited in scope and has focused on a small sample of parents who share content about their children, future research could include representative samples and

explore the motivations of parents who chose *not* to share. This study has demonstrated that parents need more education on the consequences of sharenting and the significance it holds for children. Consequently, there is a need for further research on how this can be implemented in practice and to what extent various educational measures affect parents' sharenting practices. There has also been limited research on Snapchat, which is frequently used for sharing everyday moments. Previous research has focused on more public forms of sharenting, while our study highlights the importance of also investigating more private spaces that services like Snapchat can provide. Moreover, Snapchat as a platform may provide a false sense of security as images are only available for a set amount of time and senders are alerted if someone screenshots their image, but it is still possible to bypass these functions in order to store and spread shared content. Additionally, the casual atmosphere as well as the ease and rapidness of sending an image on Snapchat could lead to further mistakes when choosing the degree of publicness, and could preclude the thought process and the involvement of children and adolescents that was called for in this study.

Furthermore, we have found that attitudes toward what is acceptable to share on social media change over time. This gives rise to a need for studies that include a long-term perspective on sharenting practices. Influencer sharenting should also be further investigated, considering commercial aspects of sharenting and influencer children's perspective on it.

Notes

- 1 Norstat is a data collector with a diverse panel of users that engage in a variety of studies. Norstat facilitated the recruitment process by finding users who wished to talk about sharenting in the different age groups and sampling based on gender and geographic location. Norstat provided the participants with the time and location so they could meet up online for the focus groups and in person for the workshop.
- 2 All quotes translated from Norwegian to English by the authors.
- 3 In collaboration with Tenk materials for a parent's meeting were developed for Norwegian schools. Freely available in Norwegian [Foreldremøte om billedeling på sosiale medier | Tenk \(faktisk.no\)](https://www.tenk.no/foreldremote-om-billedeling-pa-sosiale-medier).

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Conflicts of interest

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