

Exploring the Online Childhood and Family Dynamics in Egypt: Critical Analysis of the Sharenting Phenomenon in Egyptian Society

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of sharenting in Egypt, a practice whereby parents share images, videos, and personal moments of their children online. With the growing presence of digital technologies in Egyptian households, sharenting has become a mainstream part of parenting culture. While often motivated by affection and pride, this paper argues that sharenting can lead to significant privacy risks, emotional harm, and long-term consequences for children. Through qualitative interviews and a KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices) questionnaire targeting Egyptian parents and minors, the study offers insights into how digital behaviors intersect with family dynamics and children's rights. It examines local and international legal frameworks, applies theories of parent development and media gratification, and assesses the sociocultural dimensions that shape parental online behavior. The paper highlights gaps in Egyptian child protection mechanisms, calling for improved legal accountability, parental awareness, and digital literacy. Ultimately, it advocates for a cultural and regulatory shift that centers children's privacy, dignity, and consent in the digital age.

Keywords: Sharenting, Online Childhood, Digital Privacy, Children's Rights, Egypt.

Introduction

This paper, "Exploring the Online Childhood and Family Dynamics in Egypt: A Critical Analysis of the Sharenting Phenomenon in Egyptian Society," delves into the everyday reality of parents who share their children's lives online, a practice known as sharenting. In a world where moments of joy, pride, and milestones are often captured and posted online, this study looks at the unintended consequences and negative impacts that can arise from such actions.

Many parents in Egypt share photos and videos of their children to celebrate milestones or stay connected with extended family and friends. However, this practice, commonly known as sharenting, raises serious concerns related to children's digital privacy, autonomy, and emotional well-being. The increasing normalization of sharenting in Egyptian society reflects a broader global trend influenced by the widespread use of social media platforms. Yet, in Egypt, where protective legislation remains limited and enforcement

mechanisms are weak, sharenting presents unique risks to children.

Parents often share these glimpses of their children's lives out of love, a desire to connect with others, or to celebrate small victories. However, this paper reveals the risks that accompany these well-intentioned actions. The story of George, a young Egyptian boy, whose vulnerable moment of frustration while studying was shared publicly¹, serves as a poignant example of how something seemingly innocent can lead to long-term emotional harm, making children vulnerable to bullying, exploitation, and loss of control over their privacy.

Inside Egyptian society, where family bonds are strong and children are deeply cherished, the practice of sharenting introduces a new layer of complexity to these relationships. The study highlights how the lack of robust child protection services and an inadequate legal framework for the sharenting phenomenon in Egypt can leave children exposed to the darker side of the digital world. Even with laws that exist to protect children, they often fall short when it comes to safeguarding children's online presence.

This paper aims to examine the phenomenon of sharenting in Egypt, analyzing the social and psychological consequences it has on children and the extent to which parents understand and navigate these implications. To achieve this, the study utilizes a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with experts and a quantitative KAP questionnaire distributed to a sample of 55 Egyptian adults and minors.

The paper draws upon the "Parent Development Theory" and "Uses and Gratifications Theory" to explore parental motivations and emotional incentives behind sharenting. It also assesses the local and international legal frameworks governing children's rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Convention, (n.d.)), Egypt's Child Law No. 126 of 2008, and Egypt's Vision 2030. By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical perspectives, the paper identifies key areas of vulnerability in children's online representation and proposes recommendations for cultural, legal, and educational reforms to provide child participation, service provision, and protection of young people (Fayoyin, n.d.).

Background and Objectives

This paper aims to reveal the challenges and consequences faced by children by their caregivers by exposing their privacy, lives, identity, and weaknesses on social platforms. The paper tries to give insights and evidence-based recommendations. These recommendations are oriented towards assisting Egyptian parents to help provide better lives for their children, through the understanding of the concepts of online privacy and children's rights governance, and their importance for the best of the well-being of their children.

The paper specifically aims at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rreRJ_j7PEA

1. Conduct a scope analysis of the existing parental sharenting patterns and practices in Egypt.
2. Call attention to the consequences and negative impacts relevant to these parental sharenting practices.
3. Provide evidence-based recommendations to avoid the violations of the children's online privacy, prevent their potential exploitation, besides save their adult lives from the consequences of online childhood in the future.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This section presents the theoretical foundation and conceptual scope that inform the analysis of sharenting in Egypt.

It focuses on the interrelated concepts of online childhood, digital privacy, and the sharenting phenomenon, examining how these dynamics impact children's rights and reshape family practices in the digital age.

Special attention is given to how the tension between child participation and protection unfolds in modern parenting, particularly within the Egyptian social and legal context. The research draws upon **Parent Development Theory** (Hanna, 2016), which highlights how parental identities and responsibilities evolve throughout a child's life.

This theory is especially useful for understanding how parents navigate digital decision-making and representations of their children online. Additionally, **Uses and Gratifications Theory** (Dhir, Chen, et al, 2015) is employed to unpack the emotional, psychological, and social motivations behind sharenting, i.e. such as the need for validation, connection, or public affirmation of parenthood (Bhandari & Nikolopoulos, 2020). These theoretical frameworks guide the interpretation of findings from qualitative interviews and **KAP surveys** conducted with Egyptian parents and youth to access opinions, attitudes, and behaviors quantitatively. Together, they help explain not only why parents share content but also how this behavior contributes to broader trends in digital parenting and self-presentation.

According to (Kopecky, n.d.), Sharenting encompasses various forms of information concerning children, this includes text, photographs, or videos depicting the child or activities associated with their upbringing. Sharenting can be viewed positively, where parents express their love and pride for their children by sharing aspects of their lives.

Accordingly, Sharenting is considered a current phenomenon of online communication, which is related to the sharing of images of the youngest members of the family (often minors) by parents or relatives, mainly on social networks. However, this constitutes a series of consequences that compromise privacy and may put the child at risk.

This framework also considers the legal and policy structures that frame children's digital rights. Instruments like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); which is widely regarded as the most important advocacy tool

for children's rights globally. It creates an international legal framework for the protection and promotion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons under the age of 18 and incorporates the full range of human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. (Gillett-Swan, n.d.). Egypt's Child Law No. 126 of 2008, (Egypt Vision 2030, n.d.) are reviewed to assess the current protections and limitations regarding children's online exposure.

The analysis highlights that while such instruments recognize children's rights to privacy, consent, and protection from harm, enforcement in Egypt remains limited and fragmented. To illustrate how sharenting operates in everyday digital life, the paper references emerging typologies such as the Polished, Promotional, and Intimate styles of parental posting on social media (Holiday N. &., 2022). These categories demonstrate how children are often framed to enhance parental identity, promote commercial interests, or capture emotionally raw moments. When viewed through the lens of gratification theory and rights-based governance, these behaviors reveal complex trade-offs between familial affection, personal branding, and child privacy.

Rather than serving as a collection of definitions, this framework provides a critical foundation for understanding how digital culture, legal structures, and parenting ideologies intersect to shape ("COPPA"), (n.d.) children's online lives in Egypt. It supports the study aim of generating culturally relevant insights and highlighting the need for deeper reflection on the ethical and social implications of sharenting.

The following concepts and categories were discussed in-depth and have been integrated into the analysis: Sharenting is defined as parents sharing information about their children online (UNICEF, (n.d.)) which can include images, videos, or text that expose children to privacy risks or future digital consequences. The typologies of sharenting (Holiday N. &., 2022). include: (1) **Polished**: idealized representations for social validation; (2) **Promotional**: children used in brand-related content. It is about using children, whether consciously or unconsciously, in consumer brand-building (Evolv, 2023), and (3) **Intimate**: authentic but potentially privacy-violating moments. Experts such as (UNICEF, n.d.) raise concerns about cyberbullying, exploitation, consent violation, and permanent digital footprints. Other scholars outline the risks of excessive sharenting, creation of digital profiles without consent, child branding, and long-term psychological and reputational impacts. These ideas support the ethical lens through which this research is conducted."

Practical Framework

Online Questionnaire

Process

An online questionnaire was formed on Google Forms with open access to facilitate the access and availability processes. Adult participants were informed

throughout the form that filling out the questionnaire is considered implicit consent for the use of the information provided for scientific purposes, while minor respondents were informed that filling out the form is considered obtaining their supervisors' or parents' consent. None of the personal information of the respondents was used other than for research purposes. Data collection took place from 14 July 2024 to 11 August 2024. The data collected was based on probability sampling (random sample) of adults (parents or not) and minors (under 18 years old). The questionnaire was distributed on Facebook pages, parents' Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn.

The survey questions measured the frequency of sharing children's photos and/or videos on social media, explored the reasons for sharing children's photos and videos online, the platforms used in the sharenting process, privacy settings on social media platforms, and the awareness of potential risks associated with sharenting. The questionnaire included questions specifically addressing minors to find out how satisfied they are with their parents sharing photos of them on social media.

The questions were grouped into multiple-choice questions and Likert Scale questions (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree), dichotomous (yes/ no) questions, and ordinal questions (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, and Always).

Data Collection

For data collection, the paper employs purposive sampling techniques to recruit participants, ensuring representation across various demographic factors, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location, allowing for the identification of prominent patterns and themes concerning child-parenting violations on social media. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, incorporating validated scales to assess dimensions such as exposure to online harassment, psychological well-being, and media literacy. Moreover, conducting interviews with stakeholders from local and international organizations work to protect and promote the rights of children. Additionally, a systematic content analysis will be conducted on relevant literature and sources including relevant published studies, news articles, television programs, and social media content. This analysis aims to discern prevailing themes and discourses regarding online harassment and parental practices, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Sharenting in Egypt.

The questionnaire was designed to explore the perspectives of both parents and minors on the subject of sharing children's photos and information online. The data was collected through an online survey, consisting of multiple Likert scale, ordinal questions, and dichotomous (Yes/ No) questions. The responses were analyzed using an Excel sheet to measure the reliability of the questionnaire questions. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha,

which is a statistic tool that assesses the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Survey Sample

Reliability Analysis Using Cronbach's Alpha Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. This statistic is commonly used to measure the internal consistency or reliability of a set of scale or test items.

The reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.82, which indicates good internal consistency of the survey items.

Cronbach's alpha: 0.82

Cronbach's alpha calculation

Number of items (questions): 9 (only the ordinal and Likert scale questions are considered here) Number of respondents: 55

The formula for Cronbach's alpha is:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Where;

N is the number of items (questions of the Likert scale and ordinal questions only)

\bar{c} : is the average inter-item covariance among the items, and

\bar{v} : is the average variance of each item.

Result: After conducting the analysis, Cronbach's alpha for the survey was found to be 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. A value above 0.7 is generally considered acceptable, and values above 0.8 are considered good, meaning that the questions in the survey are reliably measuring the same underlying concept.

Explanation:

Calculating average Variance \bar{v} : This involves finding the average/ mean response (for each item/question) by adding up all responses divided by number of all responses for each item/ question, subtracting this average from each response to find the deviations, squaring these deviations, and then averaging these squared deviations, finally adding up all variances to get average Variance \bar{v} .

Calculating inter-item Covariance \bar{c} : It measures how two items/ questions change together (both questions have to be of the same type; for instance, both are Likert scale or ordinal).

Covariance is calculated by getting the Mean of each pair of questions, then getting the Deviations of responses from the Mean of each question, and then multiplying the Deviations for each pair of responses. Covariance is the Average of the resulting products (the added-up multiplied Deviations divided by the

number of responses). The average inter-item covariance is found by summing all the pairwise covariances and dividing by the number of pairs of questions.

Result

Cronbach's alpha equals **0.82**, indicating good Reliability of the questionnaire.

Detailed Qualitative Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

1. Parental Behavior in Sharing Children's Photos:

A significant portion of respondents (51.9%) rarely share photos or videos of children on social media, with 36.5% never engaged in this practice. This behavior suggests a cautious and possibly protective approach among many parents regarding their children's online presence. This trend might reflect an increasing awareness of the potential risks associated with sharing personal content on social media, such as privacy breaches or misuse of images.

However, a small percentage (7.7%) of parents still share content occasionally, while 3.8% do so weekly. The absence of daily sharers could indicate that even more frequent users recognize some level of risk or prefer to limit their children's exposure online.

2. Consent from Children:

The responses reveal a divide in how parents handle consent. While 27.3% of parents always take their children's consent before sharing their photos or information online, a notable 31.8% never do so. This divide highlights varying levels of awareness and sensitivity among parents regarding their children's autonomy and privacy rights.

Minors' responses further underscore this gap. Only 29.4% of minors strongly agreed that their parents seek their permission before sharing photos, with a significant portion remaining neutral or disagreeing. This discrepancy suggests a potential communication gap between parents and children or a lack of understanding from minors about what constitutes consent. It raises concerns about the extent to which children's voices are considered in decisions that impact their digital presence.

3. Awareness of Privacy Risks:

Many parents (50.9%) strongly agree that they are aware of the potential privacy risks associated with sharing children's photos online, indicating a positive trend in parental awareness. This is a crucial finding as it reflects that many parents recognize the long-term implications of digital sharing and the possible exposure to privacy threats.

On the other hand, the responses from minors show that only 31.4% strongly agree they understand these risks, with a significant portion (42.9%) agreeing, but not strongly. This indicates a gap in knowledge transfer between parents and children. While parents might be aware, minors may not fully comprehend the gravity of online privacy risks, suggesting a need for better education and discussion about online safety within families.

4. Importance of Teaching Consent:

A substantial majority of parents (60.4%) strongly agree on the importance of teaching children about consent regarding their online presence. This strong consensus reflects a growing recognition of the importance of consent as a fundamental right and a crucial life skill in the digital age.

Among minors, 52.9% agreed that they understood the concept of consent, with 29.4% strongly agreeing. While these figures are encouraging, they also indicate that there is room for improvement. The responses suggest that efforts to teach children about consent are somewhat effective, but these lessons may not be fully internalized by all children. This could be due to the complex nature of consent, especially in digital contexts, or variability in how this topic is taught and discussed at home or in educational settings.

5. Long-Term Impact of Sharenting:

Parents' responses show a significant concern about the long-term effects of sharing children's information online, with most respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that such actions could impact their children's digital footprint and future adult life. This awareness indicates a forward-thinking approach among parents who recognize the enduring nature of online data and its potential implications on their children's identity, reputation, and opportunities later in life.

6. Reasons for Sharing and Platform Preferences:

When asked about their reasons for sharing children's photos online, 27.5% of respondents indicated that they do so to share moments with family and friends, and 25.5% to document milestones. These responses suggest that many parents view social media as a tool for maintaining social connections and preserving memories. However, 23.5% of respondents don't share children's photos at all. A smaller percentage shares for fun (7.8%) or are unsure of their reasons (15.7%).

Regarding platforms, Facebook (46%) and WhatsApp (38%) are the most used for sharing children's photos, likely due to their privacy settings and user demographics.

7. Privacy Settings and Concerns About Harmful Content:

Most respondents (65.4%) have their social media privacy settings limited to "Friends," which reflects a cautious approach to controlling who can view shared content. However, 19.2% of respondents have their profiles set to "Public," indicating a potential risk area where personal content is more exposed. 25% of respondents have deleted content due to concerns about its potential to embarrass or harm children, indicating an awareness of the long-term impact of the Sharenting phenomenon, though the majority (73.1%) have not encountered this issue.

8. Children's Perception of Parental Sharing Behavior:

Among minors, 71.4% responded that their parents do not share their

photos or videos on social media. However, the 22.9% who reported that their parents do share content on digital platforms may reflect a subset where parents are less cautious or where there is less emphasis on consent and privacy.

General comments on the questionnaire responses

A significant portion of adult respondents (51.9%) reported that they share photos of children on social media, while 48.1% do not, reflecting a growing awareness among Egyptian families of the potential risks associated with this practice. However, among those who do share, there are concerns about the type of content being posted. Some parents share photos that capture moments of vulnerability for their children, which could negatively impact their self-esteem and affect them later in life, as such content cannot be easily removed from the internet—similar to the well-known case of the child George. Additionally, parents may inadvertently compromise their children's privacy by posting information like home or school addresses, potentially exposing them to exploitation.

Furthermore, a considerable percentage of parents (31.8%) do not seek their children's consent before sharing their photos, and 19.2% of parents leave the privacy settings on their social media accounts public. This lack of privacy protection raises further concerns.

On the other hand, 29.3% of the minor respondents expressed disagreement or were neutral about permitting their photos or videos to be shared online. This statistic suggests that a substantial portion of Egyptian families may not fully understand or prioritize the importance of obtaining children's consent for their online presence, highlighting the need for increased community and family awareness around these concepts.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability of this questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, is 0.82. This indicates a high level of internal consistency among the items in the questionnaire, meaning that the questions are likely to measure related aspects of parental behavior and attitudes toward children's online presence. This reliability score supports the validity of the findings, although it does not address potential biases or limitations in the sample.

Limitations of the Research:

Sample Size and Representation:

The questionnaire responses are limited to a specific group of 52 respondents, which may not represent the broader population. Additionally, the difference in the number of responses per question indicates variability in engagement, possibly affecting the reliability of the findings.

Exclusion of Internet-Inactive Individuals:

The research excludes parents and children who are not active on social media, potentially skewing the results toward those more engaged with online platforms.

Complexity of the Subject Matter:

Concepts like consent and privacy risks may be complex for both parents and children to fully understand and articulate, especially for younger respondents, leading to potential misinterpretations or oversimplified answers.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of sharenting in Egypt, while driven by affection and social connectivity, poses significant ethical and legal challenges. Parents may be motivated by love, pride, or the desire to connect with others, but this practice often occurs without the child's consent and can result in exploitation, cyberbullying, long-term emotional harm, and violations of digital privacy.

The study shed light on excessive sharenting which can lead to:

-Long-term implications: presumed that exploitation in digital spaces is a significant concern in the context of children's rights. Some literature suggests that sharing images or videos of children in vulnerable states, such as when they are crying or when parents highlight negative parenting experiences, could have long-term implications for the child. For instance, this exposure may impact their prospects, including their ability to gain admission to a reputable college. Admissions counsellors might review social media profiles and other online content as part of their decision-making process, potentially disadvantaging children who have been publicly portrayed in a negative light (Webb, 2013).

- The distress of being immortalized online: The internet has a long memory, retaining all content and making it nearly impossible to remove published or shared materials, particularly when they have been widely disseminated across multiple platforms. As children mature and encounter these photos or videos, even into adulthood, they may be forced to relive the associated trauma (Jorge, 2021).

One of the study's key examples involves a young Egyptian boy, George, whose vulnerable moment was posted online by his mother. This event, though perceived as harmless by the parent, sparked concern over the emotional impact and social consequences the child could face. The research also highlights expert insights, through **online interviews** with child experts, such as **Shereen Louis**, Psychological and Educational Consultant for Parents and Children & Founder of the "Raising Good Children" Initiative. Louis said that it is according to UNICEF, children in Egypt face the highest rates of domestic violence. Louis points out that sharing children's photos without their consent constitutes a form of violence, emphasizing that it strips children of their autonomy and exposes them to various risks such as cyberbullying, competitive online environments, and long-term digital footprints. This aligns with the paper's approach that while sharenting often stems from parental pride and love, it can lead to unintended harm, including emotional distress and privacy violations.

Passant Sakana, a Specialist in Capacity Building and Development Programs for Children and Youth in an Egyptian Civil Society Organization,

also emphasizes, through an online interview, the need for responsible online behavior and awareness and advocates for using the internet itself as a tool for awareness, particularly through credible pages, quality content, and educational television programs. At the very least, parents should be made aware of the need to filter what they share and what they choose not to share. Additionally, the importance of avoiding the documentation of embarrassing moments, not seeking parenting advice by sharing children's behaviors, and refraining from photographing them during early childhood stages, especially if done regularly or frequently, was underscored.

The situation of children in Egypt remains critically challenged by a lack of preventive and responsive child protection services and an inadequate juvenile justice system. While key legislative achievements, such as amendments to the penal code criminalizing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the Child Law, signify progress, these efforts have not been matched by the necessary implementation measures or resources, especially when it comes to child online privacy violations. The absence of a well-trained and accountable cadre of social workers to manage child protection cases represents a significant gap that demands urgent attention (UNICEF, 2019).

Survey findings underscore that while many Egyptian parents are increasingly aware of online risks, a significant number do not seek their children's consent before sharing content. Children themselves are often unaware of their digital footprint or the potential consequences of oversharing. The commercialization of children's images by "mummy influencers" further complicates the issue, suggesting a shift from private parenting to public branding.

The paper also examines international and Egyptian legal frameworks and concludes that current laws are inadequate to fully safeguard children's online rights. Despite legislative strides, such as the UNCRC and Egypt's Child Law, enforcement remains weak, and accountability for caregivers is limited. This gap leaves children vulnerable and their rights insufficiently protected.

To mitigate these risks, a multipronged strategy is essential:

- Legislative reforms to hold caregivers accountable and set clear digital content boundaries.
- Educational campaigns that promote digital literacy, children's rights, and informed consent.
- Culturally relevant parenting resources that prioritize privacy and emotional well-being.
- Encouraging the use of private, secure sharing platforms when family documentation is necessary.
- Teaching children, the importance of consent and digital safety from an early age.

By aligning with global child protection standards and addressing Egypt's

unique socio-cultural context, this study advocates for a paradigm shift—from digital pride to digital protection. Only through collaborative efforts among parents, educators, policymakers, and civil society can children's rights, dignity, and futures be safeguarded in an increasingly online world.

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