Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Ong, L Lin, Fox, Alexa, Cook, Laurel, Bessant, Claire, Gan, Pingping, Hoy, Mariea, Nottingham, Emma, Pereira, Beatriz and Steinberg, Stacey (2022) Sharenting in an Evolving Digital World: Increasing Online Connection and Consumer Vulnerability. In: 2022 AMA Marketing and Public Policy Conference: The Role of Marketing in Imagining a Better Post-Pandemic World: Addressing Structural Disparities, Sustainability and Social Change. American Marketing Association, United States, pp. 237-239. ISBN 9780877570134

Published by: American Marketing Association

URL: https://www.ama.org/events/academic/2022-ama-marke... <https://www.ama.org/events/academic/2022-ama-marketing-and-public-policy-conference/>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link: https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/50718/

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)

Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE® CSE UniversityLibrary

SHARENTING IN AN EVOLVING DIGITAL WORLD:

INCREASING ONLINE CONNECTION AND CONSUMER VULNERABILITY

L. Lin Ong, Cal Poly Pomona

Alexa K. Fox, The University of Akron

Laurel Aynne Cook, University of West Virginia

Claire Bessant, Northumbria University

Pingping Gan, Iowa State University

Mariea Grubbs Hoy, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Emma Nottingham, University of Winchester

Beatriz Pereira, Iowa State University

Stacey Barell Steinberg, University of Florida

For further information, please contact: L. Lin Ong, Assistant Professor of International Business and Marketing, Cal Poly Pomona, lueilinong@cpp.edu

Keywords: sharenting, online privacy, social media, children's rights, consumer vulnerability, personally identifiable information (PII).

Description: Conceptual paper which establishes a framework to define different types of sharenting (active, passive, invisible), develops an ecosystem view of key stakeholders impacting information being sharented, and provides a research agenda for policymakers and consumer welfare researchers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Sharenting (using social media to share content about one's child) is a progressively common phenomenon enabled by society's increased connection to digital technology. Although it can facilitate positive connections among internet users, it also leads to concerns related to children's online privacy and well-being. This paper establishes boundaries and terminology related to sharenting in an evolving digital world. First, while much of the prior sharenting research focuses on the parent-child dyad, we apply consumer vulnerability theory to conceptualize a modern sharenting ecosystem involving key stakeholders (parents, children, community, commercial institutions, and policymakers). This expanded ecosystem extends the sharenting literature to better define the complex dynamism inherent in sharenting as part of our increasingly virtual society. Next, we expand the characterization of sharenting by introducing a spectrum of awareness that categorizes types of sharenting (active, passive, and invisible). These definitions help researchers explore how and why personally identifiable information (PII) may be (un)intentionally shared in different contexts. Finally, using the conceptual structures developed in this paper, we provide a research agenda for policymakers and consumer welfare researchers.

Research Question

Digital technology's pervasiveness in everyday life is increasingly changing childhood, raising concerns about children's digital privacy from global organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF. This already accelerating trend was put into sharp relief during the pandemic, where children saw their daily educational and social routines moved online, increasing

children's vulnerability as their digital footprint expanded. Parents are legally considered the owners of their children's information, authorizing access and co-ownership of their child's data. Many parents choose to sharent, or share information about their children on social media, which may result in unintended audience(s) gaining access to their child's personally identifiable information (PII). While sharenting often comes from the desires of a parent, it can also be encouraged by an ecosystem of stakeholders who may encourage sharenting for personal, commercial, or public gain. Similarly, with the development of increasingly complex digital platforms, a tech-burdened parent may be unaware of who the end consumers of sharented content might be. This research seeks to define the sharenting ecosystem in an evolving digital world and establish a framework of sharenting awareness to provide a structure for researchers, parents, and policymakers.

Method and Data

Our conceptual development of sharenting in today's digital landscape is based on an extensive, interdisciplinary literature review, including: marketing, law, communications, and privacy. While the sharenting literature often focuses on the parent/child dyad, we argue that a richer conceptualization of the context, developed within an increasingly connected and complex digital world, will aid understanding of how stakeholders make decisions and encourage information sharing. These stakeholders are not isolated entities, but instead interact and share data in a complex set of connections that can make accountability difficult. Our conceptual framework reflects a theoretical synthesis using a multi-disciplinary lens.

Summary of Findings

We identify an ecosystem of sharenting stakeholders that interact to create, disseminate, and encourage sharented content. The sharenting ecosystem includes parents, children, audience/community, commercial interests, and policymakers. These categories provide a clear framework for researchers, parents, and policymakers to analyze specific sharenting situations. While it is commonly parents who authorize and become co-owners of their child's information, there is a larger network of parties who may be involved in sharenting.

We develop a spectrum of sharenting awareness that categorizes three types of sharenting: active, passive, and invisible. First, active sharenting is intentional, where parents are *aware* of their posting, however they may or may not *understand* its implications. Thus, parents who believe they are sharing information may actually be surrendering it, increasing their vulnerability. Second, passive sharenting occurs as a feeling of resignation, in that sharenting may be perceived as unavoidable in modern society. Finally, invisible sharenting occurs when parents do not recognize their sharenting. This additional, covert layer of sharenting occurs after a parent shares information; it is often initiated by commercial interests and may be a byproduct of a company taking advantage of a parents' lack of digital literacy.

Key Contributions

Major changes in online communication have occurred since the pandemic began, broadening a digital landscape ripe for vulnerability and sharenting. Sharenting continues to evolve in the dynamic interaction of technology and culture. While parents and children have thus far been the most frequently researched stakeholders due to their common vulnerabilities, a systems view delivers the necessary structure to incorporate other marketplace actors into our understanding.

Our road map for evaluating the five key stakeholders (parents, children, community, policymakers, and commercial institutions) and three different types of sharenting (active, passive, and invisible) highlight the importance of understanding the scope of sharenting in an ever-increasing digital world. Finally, this framework facilitates an integrated approach for expanding sharenting research and related public policy. We propose a research agenda by each of the five stakeholders, including suggestions for translating research into guidance that can be used by parents, identify areas of need for research to explore the depth of understanding of key issues, and to develop useful partnerships and policies that may impact current privacy practices.

References available upon request.