

The Awareness of Child Privacy of Thai Parents on Social Media

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Abstract

Protecting the privacy of young children should be considered crucial since they are inexperienced. However, despite potential negative consequences, many Thai parents still engage in the act of “sharenting”—the disclosure of personal information about children on social media. In this research the aim was to investigate the level of awareness among Thai parents regarding child privacy, with a focus on identifying areas that required improvement. A survey utilizing a four-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to 96 Thai parents. The results revealed that respondents displayed a moderate level of awareness concerning the negative effects of sharenting, while demonstrating a high level of awareness regarding laws and regulations pertaining to child privacy. It is suggested that the moderate awareness of negative effects may stem from parents' belief in their right to freedom of speech when discussing their children on social media. Furthermore, the high awareness of laws and regulations might be influenced by the lack of specific child privacy laws in Thailand, leading parents to perceive the necessity for more explicit legal provisions.

Keywords: *Sharenting, social media, privacy laws, freedom speech*

Introduction

Child privacy is crucial because children are young and innocent. Sharing a child's personal details on social media can lead to the creation of a digital record of the child's online presence, while also promoting a culture of constant observation and monitoring (Leaver & Highfield, 2018, p. 44). Recognizing this concern, some countries have legislation on child privacy to protect children's rights. However, in Thailand, it remains an ongoing controversial topic. Additionally, children's content is still being widely shared on social media. For example, many Thai parents feature their children on social media with discoverable hashtags such as #เด็กน้อยน่ารัก (Cute baby), #เด็กตลก (Funny baby), and #เด็กอ้วน (Chubby baby). This behavior is known as “sharenting.” The term sharenting refers to the practice of parents sharing information and experiences related to their children on social media, created by blending the words “sharing” and “parenting” (Marasli et al., 2016).

Several studies have been conducted to indicate the negative effects of sharenting. For example, Kongrit (2021) found that oversharing information may impact a child's identity development. Regardless of whether the comments are negative or positive, children might become dependent and addicted to their online identity built by their parents and seek affirmations or positive reinforcements, such as likes, which could impact their identity and personality development. Additionally, Archaphet et al. (2021) suggested that sharenting may expose children to physical risks as strangers could know their location. Finally, according to Levy's research (2017), sharing children's content on social media without their permission frequently causes dissatisfaction, anger, and embarrassment towards parents, which could affect family relationships and trust.

Although the negative effects of sharenting on violating a child's privacy have been found in several studies (e.g., Archaphet et al., 2021; Keskin et al., 2023; Amon et al., 2022), research on whether parents are aware of these issues is not easily found, especially with Thai parents. In addition, most parents often possess a misconception regarding the ownership of information and may lack the awareness of their children's rights to co-own that information. Furthermore, various factors, such as comments from audiences, privacy perceptions of family members, and cultural values can influence their behavior of sharenting (Zhao, 2023). Given these considerations,

protecting child privacy becomes a significant concern that requires investigation to enhance awareness among Thai parents. This study sought to address the following research question: Are Thai parents conscious of child privacy considerations when sharing on social media?

Child Privacy

Child privacy has a broad definition and scope (Nairn & Monkogol, 2007). According to UNICEF Thailand, a “child” is someone under the age of 18 and “privacy” is the right of a person, group, or organization to control how, when, and what level of information about them is allowed to be shared with others (Westin, 1967). Child privacy refers to the right of someone who is under the age of 18, to limit how and to what extent information about them could be disclosed to others. In addition, parents often disclose information about their children online without the child’s approval because they believe that it is their right to have the freedom of speech and to decide how their children should be raised (Steinberg, 2017). Nonetheless, if they do so, they are violating their child’s privacy.

Parents’ Intentions of Sharenting

Parents have different reasons for sharing their children's information on social network platforms. One of the main purposes, perhaps the most significant, is to seek a response or reaction from various individuals, including family members, friends, and other parents (Kravchuk, 2021, cited in Andersson & Nilsson, 2022). When families are separated by distance, sharing children's photos or videos online helps parents maintain relationships with their extended family. Additionally, it allows them to share important events in their lives with everyone simultaneously. Other motives in sharing their child’s information include the desire to gain validation and social support, showcase their competence in child-rearing, actively participate in social interactions, and document their parenting journey (Latipah et al., 2020). By sharing their parenting experiences online, parents can seek reassurance and affirmation from others that they are doing a good job as parents. In addition, by sharing stories, achievements, and milestones of their children, they demonstrate their abilities and expertise as parents. This can boost their self-esteem and provide a sense of belonging within their social networks.

Negative Effects of Sharenting

Despite positive effects on the parental side, sharenting may result in certain negative effects on the children. Sharing information about their children online can also lead to negative consequences, including violations of privacy rights, exposure to cyberbullying, and potential distrust between children and their parents (Archaphet et al., 2020). The study by Siibak and Traks (2019) indicated that it could lead to distress among family members. In their study, interviews conducted among 14 children in Estonia revealed that children frequently feel annoyed and dissatisfied when their parents shared information or photos without their permission. Additionally, sharenting behavior could increase the opportunity for cyber identity theft, since parents might disclose personal data of their children that could be taken online by fraudsters (Coughlan, 2018). Microsoft's own research revealed that 66% of the sample respondents had fallen victim to cyber risk at least once (Beauchere, 2019). There was also a case in Thailand when a fraudster stole a child's identity from pictures posted by his mother to ask for money donation for medical reasons (Thairath Online, 2021). To avoid the problems and negative effects mentioned, it is essential that the parents have an awareness when sharing information about their child on social media platforms.

Laws and Regulations regarding Child Privacy

In order to address the potential risks faced by children, legal measures and regulations have been implemented to safeguard their privacy. The European Commission’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of 2016 has been implemented in the European Union to grant individuals the right to manage their personal data (Donovan, 2020). For instance, Recital 38 of the GDPR

emphasizes the need for special protection for children's personal data as they may not fully understand the potential risks, consequences, and safeguards associated with the processing of their personal data or their rights in relation to it. This recognition of children's vulnerability underscores the importance of ensuring that their personal data is processed in a transparent, fair, and privacy-protective manner (Donovan, 2020).

Moreover, Article 17 of this Regulation establishes the principle of the "Right to be forgotten," which is the right of the informant to command others to delete their personal information published online (General Data Protection Regulation, 2016). In Thailand, the law that protects children's information resides in the 2003 Act of Parliament, which applies to children under 18 years old (Tamangraksat, 2019). Section 27 of this Act prohibits anyone from advertising or disseminating children's personal information through mass media with the intention to cause damage to their mind, reputation, dignity, or benefits for oneself. However, the Act does not cover the consent from children for the collection of their personal information (Tamangraksat, 2019).

To date, there have been no suggestions regarding the appropriate age when children can fully understand their own privileges relating to the privacy of data. One could argue that once a child becomes more mature, they are then able to evaluate the information shared by their parents, and determine whether it is harmful to them (Steinberg, 2017). A study into children's perception of the risk to their privacy online revealed that children under the age of 11 may have difficulty perceiving the risks that may occur on account of online privacy violation (Zhao et al., 2019). Therefore, parents may need to take the age of their children into account when sharing their information online, and at least ask for their children's permission before doing so.

Parental Awareness Regarding Child Privacy

Previous studies have explored parents' awareness of child privacy in posting on social media. According to a survey by Levy (2017), 71.3% of 1,000 UK children aged between 12–16 years old believed they did not receive respect from their parents regarding online privacy. Additionally, the findings of a study by Brosch (2016), which involved 168 Polish parents using Facebook, indicated that the respondents regularly posted child content on Facebook. Furthermore, a survey conducted by Lipu and Siibak (2019), involving 14 mothers from Estonia, revealed that some of them neglected to seek their child's consent before sharing content on Facebook. All of these findings suggest that many parents still lack an awareness of their child's privacy in posting on social media. Additionally, the cause of low or high awareness regarding a child's privacy among parents could be due to the different attitudes, which vary based on a person's past experiences (Albarracín & Wyer, 2000).

Even though there are negative consequences, previous research from other countries suggest that a significant number of parents may have limited awareness regarding their child's privacy. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the awareness of child privacy among Thai parents, especially considering the absence of specific laws in Thailand to safeguard children's online information. Additionally, examining the awareness of Thai parents can offer valuable insights into their unique perspectives on child privacy, which may differ from parents of other nationalities.

Methodology

Participants

The study included 96 Thai parents with children ranging in age from 1 to 18 years old. Of the participants, 61 were female parents (63.5%) and 35 were male parents (36.5%). The age distribution of the parents was as follows: 7% ($n = 7$) were under 20 years old, 18.6% ($n = 18$) were between 21 and 30 years old, 21.10% ($n = 26$) were between 31 and 40 years old, 28.10% ($n = 27$) were between 41 and 50 years old, 16.6% ($n = 16$) were between 51 and 60 years old, and 2.1% ($n = 2$) were over 60 years old. The majority of participants fell within the 31–50 years age group, comprising 44.7% of the total.

The educational levels of the participants were also recorded. The results showed that the majority of participants held a bachelor's degree ($n = 46$ or 47.9%). Others had obtained

vocational/high vocational certificates ($n = 18$ or 18.7%), diplomas ($n = 16$ or 16.7%), or had completed postgraduate studies ($n = 16$ or 16.7%).

The children of the participating parents spanned various age groups: Under 3 years old ($n = 31$ or 32.3%), 4–6 years old ($n = 11$ or 11.5%), 7–9 years old ($n = 15$ or 15.6%), 10–12 years old ($n = 7$ or 7.3%), 13–15 years old ($n = 6$ or 6.3%), and over 15 years old ($n = 26$ or 27.1%).

Instrument

In this study a quantitative method was utilized through a descriptive survey to explore the tendency of the current situation. The questionnaire for the study was constructed using data from a pilot study carried out with 30 Thai parents through snowball sampling. The open-ended questionnaire in Google Form was distributed to parents and was sent to other parents until 30 responses were received. The aim of open-ended questions was to gather input from the respondents about their perspectives on the negative effects of posting photos of their children on social media. Thematic analysis was then used to analyze the responses and categorize them into eight categories, including misconceptions of children's identity, cyberbullying, distress among family members, cyber identity theft, embarrassment, physical risk, digital footprint, and confidence.

Since there was no mention of the laws and regulations relating to sharenting found from the pilot study, one more section relating to laws and regulations was also added. The last section was developed based on the concepts of the General Data Protection Regulation (2016) and Thai laws (Act of Parliament, 2003, Section 27) related to child privacy. Thus, the self-developed questionnaire consisted of two sections: (a) parents' awareness of negative effects of sharenting, and (b) parents' awareness of laws and regulations relating to sharenting.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and a four-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Agree* (4) to *Strongly Disagree* (1), was used. Additionally, demographic data such as gender, age, educational level, and children's ages were also collected.

Data Collection Process

Convenience sampling was adopted to explore the awareness of Thai parents in general. The researchers first searched the Facebook groups and Twitter accounts that Thai parents commonly participate in for sharing information about their children, including groups such as #เด็กน้อยน่ารัก (Cute baby), #เด็กตลก (Funny baby), #เด็กอ้วน (Chubby baby), or ปุ่มปั๊ (Pumpui; a celebrity who once refused to disclose her child's identity on social media), ปัญหาพัฒนาการ พฤติกรรม จิตวิทยาเด็ก by หมอแอม (Developmental problems, behavior, child psychology by Dr. Am), and จิตวิทยาเด็กและครอบครัว ปรึกษาเรื่องเลี้ยงลูก (Child and family psychology, consulting on parenting).

Then, the researchers contacted the administrators of those Facebook groups and Twitter accounts to request permission to post the link to the questionnaire. Once permission was granted, the questionnaire was shared in those groups, and data collection continued for one month in March 2023.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the respondents' awareness regarding various statements by measuring their mean values. The data distribution was also analyzed using standard deviation values. Furthermore, the mean values were assessed using the criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Criteria for Interpreting Mean Values of Responses

Mean	Interpretation
1.00–2.00	Low awareness
2.01–3.00	Moderate awareness
3.01–4.00	High awareness

Results

Parents' Awareness regarding the Negative Effects of Sharenting

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it can be observed from the information given in Table 2 that the mean values ranged from 2.32 to 3.12, with most categories having mean values below 3.00. This indicates that Thai parents, on average, have a moderate level of awareness regarding the negative effects of sharenting.

Table 2 Overall Mean Values and Standard Deviations Regarding Negative Effects of Sharenting

Category	Statement	Mean	SD
Misconception of Children Identity	1. Sharenting may affect children's identity development.	2.49	0.90
	2. Sharenting may cause others to misunderstand children's identity.	2.40	0.90
Cyberbullying	3. Sharenting may cause the risk of cyberbullying toward children.	2.52	0.90
	4. Sharenting may cause others to leave negative comments, curse, blame, and make fun of children.	2.65	0.93
Distress among Family Members	5. Sharenting may cause displeasure in family members.	2.54	1.03
	6. Sharenting may cause children to lose trust in their parents.	2.32	0.92
Cyber Identity Theft	7. Sharenting may cause cyber risks such as children identity theft.	3.12	0.81
Embarrassment	8. Sharenting may make children feel ashamed of others.	2.50	0.92
Physical Risk	9. Sharenting may cause physical risk by the disclosure of children's locations.	2.73	0.94
	10. Sharenting may cause physical risk as your children may be kidnapped or trapped [causing] bodily harm.	3.02	0.86
Digital Footprint	11. Sharenting may cause a digital footprint [to be created].	2.96	0.88
Confidence	12. Sharenting may cause children to lose confident.	2.45	0.87

Among the statements, the one that received the least agreement from the respondents was "sharenting may cause children to lose trust in their parents," with a mean value of 2.32. This suggests that Thai parents may not fully recognize the potential impact of sharenting on their children's trust in them. It implies that parents may not be fully aware that oversharing personal information about their children online can lead to a loss of trust in the parent-child relationship.

On the other hand, the statement that had the highest standard deviation was "sharenting may cause displeasure in family members." This indicates that respondents had a wider range of awareness regarding this particular statement. Some parents may be more conscious of the potential negative impact that sharenting can have on the relationships within the family, while others may not perceive it as a significant concern. It highlights the variability in parents' awareness and attitudes towards sharenting's impact on family dynamics.

Notably, both of these statements fall under the category of distress among family members. This suggests that Thai parents may have varying levels of awareness and concern about how sharenting practices can create displeasure within their families. It implies that some parents may recognize the potential strain that oversharing can place on familial relationships, while others may not perceive it as a prominent issue.

Overall, the data suggests that while Thai parents show a moderate level of awareness regarding the negative effects of sharenting, there is room for improvement in terms of understanding the potential consequences, particularly in relation to the trust between parents and children and the impact on family dynamics. Further education and awareness campaigns could help parents gain a deeper understanding of these issues and encourage responsible sharing practices.

Table 3 *Parents' Awareness of Laws and Regulations about Child Privacy*

Category	Statement	Mean	SD
GDPR regulation	13. Children have the right to demand parents to delete their personal data or pictures disclosures without permission.	3.08	0.93
	14. Children should be protected, especially about their personal information as they may be unaware of the risks and consequences of spreading information online.	3.27	0.69
Thai law	15. Thailand should have comprehensive laws and clear penalties on protecting the disclosure of children's information on social media.	3.33	0.73

Based on the information provided in Table 3, it is evident that the respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding child privacy laws and regulations. The mean values for all statements exceeded 3.00, indicating that Thai parents believe they are generally well-informed about the importance of protecting children's privacy in the context of social media.

The statement that received the highest level of agreement ($M = 3.33$) from the respondents was "Thailand should have comprehensive laws and clear penalties for protecting the disclosure of children's information on social media." This suggests that Thai parents strongly believe in the necessity of robust legal measures and appropriate penalties to safeguard children's personal information from being disclosed on social media platforms. It implies that parents recognize the importance of legal frameworks to ensure the protection of their children's privacy online.

Furthermore, the statement "children should be protected, especially regarding their personal information, as they may be unaware of the risks and consequences of sharing information online" had the lowest standard deviation among all the statements. This indicates that respondents generally agreed with the notion that children need protection, particularly when it comes to their personal information. The low standard deviation can reveal a high level of consensus among Thai parents regarding this statement, indicating that they recognized the vulnerability of children in understanding the risks and consequences associated with sharing information online.

Overall, the results indicate that Thai parents had a strong awareness of child privacy laws and regulations, and they are supportive of comprehensive legal measures to protect children's information on social media. This reflects a proactive attitude toward safeguarding children's privacy in the digital age. The high level of agreement regarding the need for protection of children's personal information further highlights the recognition among parents that children may not fully grasp the potential risks and consequences of sharing information online.

Discussion

According to the results, the respondents appeared to have a moderate awareness of the negative effects of sharenting. In addition, the statement "sharenting may cause displeasure among family members" had the highest standard deviation. This indicates that the respondents may have a moderate awareness, along with varied perspectives from each person towards this statement. One of the reasons for the variety of perspectives from the respondents could be due to the differences in each respondent's past experiences with this statement, which could lead to different

perspectives, as indicated by the studies conducted by Albarracín and Wyer (2000) and Hagger et al. (2001).

Moreover, it is important to point out that parents in this study may not have been aware of the negative effects of sharenting on relationships in the family, with the lowest mean value being with the statement "sharenting may cause children to lose trust in their parents." This indicates that the parents in this study might not perceive this statement as a problem, even though several studies suggest that sharenting could lead to distress among family members (Siibak & Traks, 2019). Additionally, sharing content on social media without a child's permission frequently causes dissatisfaction, anger, and embarrassment towards parents, which could affect family relationships and trust (Levy, 2017). The reason why parents in this study might have disagreed with this statement could be because they believed that they have the right to sharent. According to the study conducted by Steinberg (2017), parents often disclose information about their children online without the child's approval because they believe it is their right to have freedom of speech and to decide how their children should be raised. Therefore, parents in this study might not be aware that their perceived control of the freedom of speech of their children could initiate distress among family members, especially when sharenting on social media. It is suggested that parents curb or postpone their sharenting act until their children reach the age of 11 or reaches a certain level of maturity (Zhao et al., 2019). When their children reach that age, they may have the ability to foresee the potential risks that may occur to them and are able to refuse their parents' behavior of sharenting.

On the contrary, Thai parents in this study tended to have a high awareness of their child's privacy in the laws and regulations section. The statement "children should be protected, especially about their personal information as they may be unaware of the risks and consequences of spreading information online," which is from the concept of Recital 38 of the General Data Protection Regulation of 2016 (GDPR), had the lowest standard deviation. It might be pointed out that the respondents tend to have a similar perception regarding this statement. Since GDPR is a regulation that aims to cover the protection of children's personal data from both outsiders and their parents, the majority of parents tended to agree, as they may want to protect their children's personal data that could be taken by fraud (Coughlan, 2018). Moreover, a high awareness concerning laws and regulations could be influenced by the lack of specific child privacy laws regarding children's online disclosure in Thailand. In addition, the Act of Parliament (2003, section 27), prohibits anyone from advertising or disseminating children's information through mass media only when they have bad intentions. For example, to seek benefits for oneself, which means the law does not apply if anyone causes negative reputations to children with no intention to do so. Moreover, it does not cover the consent from children for the collection of their personal information. Hence, parents might think that there is a need to have clearer and concrete laws and regulations to protect their children regarding this matter in Thailand.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that Thai parents have a moderate awareness of the negative effects of sharenting, with a higher awareness of child privacy laws and regulations. However, there is still a need for more education and awareness-raising efforts on the negative effects of sharenting and the importance of obtaining their child's consent before sharing any personal information or images online. Policymakers and legislators should also consider enacting specific laws and regulations to protect children's privacy online in Thailand.

It is important to note that the study had some limitations. First, the sample size may not be representative of the entire population of Thai parents, as the data were collected through a convenient sampling process. Second, the study only explored awareness levels and did not delve into the factors that may influence awareness levels. Further research could investigate these factors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the awareness levels of Thai parents regarding sharenting and child privacy on social media. The findings could inform policymakers and practitioners in designing effective measures to protect children's privacy online.

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Appendix

Survey on Parents' Awareness of Sharenting

Objective: To investigate parents' awareness of negative effects in sharing their children's information online as well as the needs of laws and regulations protecting their children's information.

Instructions: On a scale of 1 to 4, to what extent do you think you agree with the following statements? Please tick (✓) the level of agreement that most closely reflects your opinion.

1 = *Strongly Disagree*

2 = *Disagree*

3 = *Agree*

4 = *Strongly Agree*

Read each statement carefully and place a tick (✓) in the box corresponding to your level of agreement. Please ensure you respond to every statement and avoid selecting multiple responses for a single statement. If you are uncertain or neutral about a statement, please choose the option which most closely aligns with your feelings. Your honest responses are appreciated.

Statement	<i>Strongly Disagree</i> 1	<i>Disagree</i> 2	<i>Agree</i> 3	<i>Strongly Disagree</i> 4
1. Sharenting may affect children's identity development.				
2. Sharenting may cause others to misunderstand children's identity.				
3. Sharenting may cause the risk of cyberbullying toward children.				
4. Sharenting may cause others to leave negative comments, curse, blame, and make fun of children.				
5. Sharenting may cause displeasure in family members.				
6. Sharenting may cause children to lose trust in their parents.				

7. Sharenting may cause cyber risks such as children identity theft.				
8. Sharenting may make children feel ashamed of others.				
9. Sharenting may cause physical risk by the disclosure of children's locations.				
10. Sharenting may cause physical risk as your children may be kidnapped or trapped [causing] bodily harm.				
11. Sharenting may cause a digital footprint [to be created].				
12. Sharenting may cause children to lose confident.				
13. Children have the right to demand parents to delete their personal data or pictures disclosures without permission.				
14. Children should be protected, especially about their personal information as they may be unaware of the risks and consequences of spreading information online.				
15. Thailand should have comprehensive laws and clear penalties on protecting the disclosure of children's information on social media.				