

# Exploring Parents' Motivations for Sharenting and Consequences for Children's Well-Being

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**Abstract:** *Introduction:* This literature review uses thematic analysis to identify common themes and topics in recent literature on the perceptions, attitudes, and motivations towards parents' sharenting behavior.

*Objective:* This study investigates perspectives on sharenting—the practice of parents posting content about their children on social media—and the rationale behind this behavior. As digital platforms become more integrated into family life, understanding the motives for sharing is critical for assessing their social, ethical, and developmental consequences.

*Methods:* Articles were selected through a literature search. We eliminated articles that included sharenting, sharenting practices in Malaysia, impression management and sharenting, and reinforcement theory and sharenting. 41 articles were chosen and reviewed to identify the main topics of discussion.

*Findings:* This study identifies major motives for sharing, as revealed through qualitative interviews and surveys with parents and social media users, including a need for social connection, community support, and documenting parenting milestones. The findings reflect a variety of viewpoints on the practice, with some seeing sharing as a way to celebrate parenting and develop relationships. In contrast, others are concerned about privacy and the digital legacy left for children.

*Conclusion:* By analyzing these perspectives, the study contributes to the broader discussion of digital parenting practices and sheds light on the balance between sharing and privacy in the digital era. This study emphasizes the importance of raising parental awareness and providing help as they navigate the difficulties of social media sharing.

*Recommendation:* These results serve as a reference for future child psychology and mental health research. Thus, it is recommended that parental sharenting behavior be further explored, and a suitable legal framework should be established in Malaysia to govern and manage this issue before violations related to sharenting, such as digital kidnapping and cyberbullying, become difficult to address in the Malaysian context.

**Keywords:** Sharenting behavior, parental motivations, digital parenting, good health and well-being.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have revolutionized interpersonal communication and information dissemination, with prominent networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube becoming essential to everyday existence [1, 2]. The rise of social networking has led to the emergence of a trend called "sharenting," in which parents share content about their children online. Parents are driven to participate in sharenting for multiple reasons, such as seeking social connection and validation through shared experiences, as well as the function of sharing in enhancing social bonds and preserving family memories [3].

Nonetheless, these motivations include hazards, including the exposure of minors to cyber predators and identity theft [4]. Critics contend that children are incapable of consenting to their digital imprint, and excessive sharing may lead to enduring consequences for their mental health and privacy rights [5, 6]. Steinberg [6] investigated how parents share information about their children online. According to the report, 56% of parents have disclosed potentially humiliating details about their children, and 51% have offered material that may violate their child's privacy. The article also examines how some parents use social media to shame their children for bad behavior, raising worries about children's privacy and the long-term effects of sharenting on their well-being.

As parents navigate the intricacies of social media, it is essential to understand their motivations for sharenting and the ethical ramifications of their online

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behavior. It is crucial to balance the advantages of connectedness with the need to safeguard children's privacy, which requires a thorough examination of the motivations driving parents' sharenting behavior. Despite international research on sharenting, research on parental sharenting practices in the Malaysian context has been limited, particularly regarding technological adoption and cultural values. Current legislation often fails to protect children's digital identities, underscoring the need for clearer guidelines and public awareness to prevent these hazards and safeguard children's health in the digital age [7]. Although sharenting has been widely studied, limited research has examined its potential implications for children's health or overall well-being. In light of this gap, the present study aims to examine perspectives on sharenting—the practice of parents sharing content about their children on social media—and to explore the underlying motivations driving this behavior while also providing insights into potential implications for children's broader well-being and developmental outcomes.

### Problem Statement

The issue of 'sharenting' - when parents share information, photographs, and videos of their children on social media sites - has grown increasingly common in the digital era. According to the researchers, children frequently experience negative emotions such as embarrassment, annoyance, and even depression in response to their parents' sharing activities, which can potentially harm parent-child relationships and lead to issues such as online bullying [6, 8-10].

Nevertheless, Malaysia's sharenting has received inadequate scholarly attention. The majority of local discussions have been published in non-academic outlets, providing anecdotal rather than evidence-based perspectives. This is a substantial gap in the existing literature. Additionally, the current body of research is significantly biased towards Western contexts. Although informative, these studies may not fully capture the culturally specific parenting norms, social values, and digital practices that shape sharenting behavior and outcomes in Malaysia [11, 12]. Addressing the gaps can provide insights into how sharenting practices affect children's overall well-being and development, emphasizing the importance of this study in children's mental health and developmental research.

Numerous studies have contributed to understanding sharenting. Tosuntaş and Griffiths [13] emphasized broad themes and trends, yet refrained from examining the psychological and behavioral factors that contribute to sharenting, such as parental motivations and impression management. Cataldo [14] concentrated on publication patterns through scientometric analysis, while Van den Abeele *et al.* [15] focused on mindful sharenting within influencer culture. However, these investigations do not examine the broader behavioral mechanisms that influence sharenting among parents in the general population. Besides, sharenting practices could plausibly influence multiple facets of children's well-being, including health, development, and lifestyle behaviors, yet these connections are rarely elaborated upon in recent studies.

The current study provides a focused synthesis of empirical research on the psychological and behavioral aspects of parental sharenting. It identifies significant themes, including motivations, attitudes, perceived risks and benefits, and identity performance. It organizes them into a cohesive framework to create a reliable and valid Sharenting Behavior Instrument for the Malaysian setting—an extremely important and necessary endeavor. Such an instrument will allow academics and policymakers to collect critical empirical data on the frequency, reasons, and consequences of sharing activities in Malaysia. This, in turn, might help shape guidelines and interventions to encourage responsible social media use while protecting children's privacy, safety, and well-being.

## 2. METHODS

The articles have been chosen by searching on accredited sites. We eliminated articles that included sharenting, sharenting practices in Malaysia, impression management and sharenting, and reinforcement theory and sharenting. We used mainly English language articles that were published in scientific databases, which are in line with the main aim of this study to identify all studies within a selective sampling frame that addressed the following research topics: parents' motivations for engaging in sharenting, perceptions of parents' sharenting behaviour, and general attitudes toward such practices.

The literature search was conducted in September 2023. We conducted keyword searches across four databases: Web of Science, ScienceDirect, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The keywords included:

sharenting; sharenting practices; impression management and sharenting; reinforcement theory and sharenting; sharenting and motivation; and perceptions and attitudes towards sharenting. Keywords were first searched individually, then searched again, paired with 'sharenting'. Finally, the keywords were paired across all configurations and searched again. Inclusion criteria included (1) English-language publications, (2) peer-reviewed journal articles, (3) empirical studies with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, and (4) a focus on parental motivations, perceptions, or attitudes towards sharenting. Conversely, studies were excluded if they: (1) were non-empirical in nature (e.g., conceptual papers, opinion pieces, or editorials); (2) focused exclusively on sharenting practices without discussing motivational or perceptual aspects; (3) examined impression management or reinforcement theory without directly linking these frameworks to sharenting behavior.

Regarding the selection process, 55 articles were initially identified from four databases. After 7 duplicates were removed, 48 articles remained. Then, 3 articles were excluded after screening titles and abstracts, 4 were excluded because they were not published in English. Eventually, a total of 41 articles met these criteria and were examined thematically. Thematic analysis was then conducted through in-depth readings of all the identified literature. Major themes were extracted from keywords across multiple articles, and minor themes were identified as subsections of each major theme.

This research mainly explores parents' sharenting motivation and children perceptions and attitudes toward parents' sharenting practice motivation. Consequently, the following research questions are set:

1. What are the motivations of parents to practice 'sharenting'?
2. What are the perceptions towards 'sharenting' of children?
3. What are the attitudes towards 'sharenting' of children?

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Impression Management and Self-Presentation Theory***

According to Erving Goffman [16], impression management is often known as self-presentation. Individuals, consciously or subconsciously, regulate

and control information in social interactions by using their behavior, morality, motivation, and personal attributes — such as ability, reliability, and future potential — to influence others' perceptions of a person, object, or event [16, 17]. Goffman [16] interpreted people's social interactions through the metaphor of a 'dramatic stage,' in which individuals, like actors, play roles corresponding to social situations — such as parents, politicians, doctors, or teachers — while being acutely aware of the audience's reactions [17]. His theory holds that humans have two stages: the 'front stage,' where they portray an idealized self to others, and the 'backstage,' where they prepare their presentation away from public view [16].

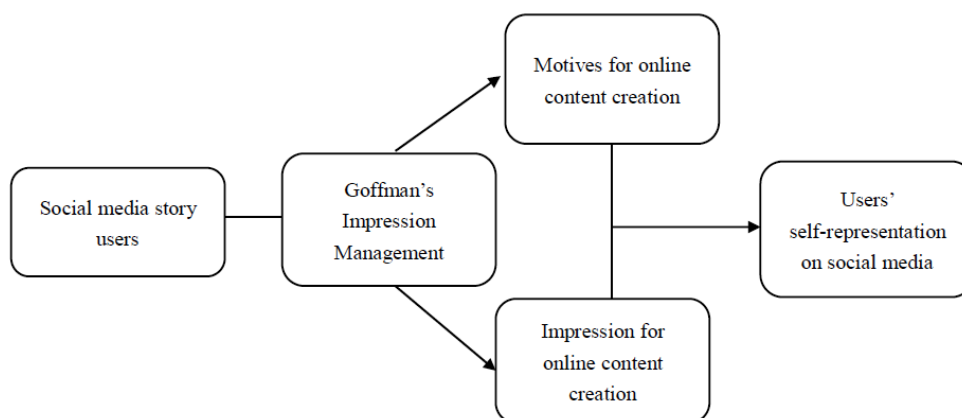
The impression management paradigm posits that one of the people's primary objectives is to be perceived positively by others, whether within or outside an organization [17]. Individuals strategically portray themselves to others by recognizing, managing, and optimizing their impressions to be perceived as outstanding performers in their positions, and by trying to avoid negative comments. Individuals use impression-management strategies, such as ingratiation and self-promotion, to maintain a positive image, and protective or defensive strategies, such as excuses and apologies, to mitigate flaws and avoid negative perceptions [17].

In the digital age, social media has expanded classic self-presentation theories by providing new contexts for interaction. Parents use online representations to demonstrate their parenting accomplishments [18]. Parents participate in indirect self-presentation by sharing facts about their parenting life, which helps them develop an ideal self-image. According to Collett's [18] research, moms utilize their children's portrayal to strengthen their position as mothers, boosting their subjective well-being. Thus, 'sharenting' might be regarded as an indirect type of self-presentation.

Consequently, sharenting could be considered an indirect form of self-presentation. Goffman's Impression Management Theory, as depicted in Figure 1, provides a theoretical framework for interpreting how social media users, particularly parents, generate and regulate online impressions to influence their self-presentation through sharenting behaviors.

### **Reinforcement Theory of Motivation**

Skinner and colleagues established the theory of reinforcement in motivation. It hypothesizes that



**Figure 1:** Impression management and self-presentation theory.

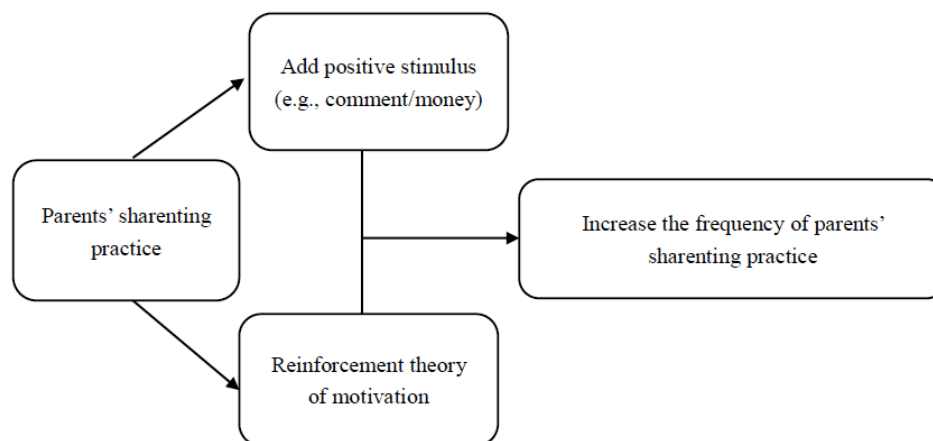
behavior is impacted by its consequences, as defined by the 'law of effects'. This law states that behaviors with positive effects are more likely to be repeated than those with negative consequences. This idea is regarded as a valuable tool for managing actions and behaviors. By doing so, parents hope to form a sense of themselves as 'good parents' and gain pride and emotional support [18]. Positive feedback from social media interactions, such as likes and comments, supports the behavior [5, 19, 20]. Furthermore, 'sharenting' can boost a child's popularity, perhaps leading to commercial prospects and cash rewards. These favorable results motivate parents to continue and expand their 'sharenting' activities.

As shown in Figure 2, reinforcement theory explains how positive stimuli, such as comments or monetary rewards, strengthen parents' sharing behavior by increasing the likelihood of repetition. The figure demonstrates how parental sharing practices are reinforced through positive social feedback, increasing the frequency of such behavior.

The reinforcement theory gives a framework for understanding how behaviors are influenced by their outcomes. In the context of 'sharenting,' it demonstrates how positive social media feedback can influence parental behavior. While the theory explains the incentive for 'sharenting,' it may overlook some ethical and privacy issues associated with the behavior. To begin, the positive reinforcement parents receive from social media may unintentionally prioritize external validation above actual parental interaction. This might undermine the parent-child bond if parents prioritize maintaining an online image over building meaningful relationships with their children.

Furthermore, 'sharenting' raises serious concerns about children's privacy and consent. While parents may benefit from the attention and opportunities offered by 'sharing,' children may have little control over their online presence. This might have long-term ramifications for their privacy and personal identity, especially as kids become older and gain more autonomy. Furthermore, the financial motives linked with 'sharenting' might raise ethical concerns. While some parents may see economic prospects for their children as beneficial, others may wonder whether children should participate in monetized activities without fully understanding the repercussions or being able to agree. Finally, while the reinforcement theory sheds light on the reasons behind 'sharenting,' evaluating the more significant ethical and privacy concerns is critical. Parents should balance the benefits of social media use and their children's well-being and liberty.

Sharenting—the practice of parents sharing content about their kids on social media—can be explored through Impression Management and Self-Presentation Theory, as well as Reinforcement Theory of Motivation. As discussed above, the present study applied these two theories (Impression Management, Self-Presentation Theory, and Reinforcement Theory of Motivation). First, this study used Impression Management and Self-Presentation Theory because they are embedded in social psychology, which holds that people consciously direct how others perceive them. Parents who are evolving in sharenting might present an idealized version of family life by selectively sharing content that aligns with desired identities—such as being perceived as a good parent, a loving family, or having a perfect lifestyle. Secondly, Reinforcement Theory states that behavior is formed



**Figure 2:** Reinforcement theory of motivation.

by its outcomes, especially rewards and punishments. Accordingly, in sharenting, parents' motivations are formed by self-presentation goals and reinforcement actions. Parents share information that aligns with the image they desire to represent (Impression Management). The positive social feedback they receive (Reinforcement) motivates them to keep this image by continuing to post. The integration of Impression Management and Self-Presentation Theory with Reinforcement Theory in the context of sharenting highlights how social feedback shapes parents' behavior. Sharenting serves both as a tool for self-presentation and as a practice strengthened by the social advantage embedded in online interactions.

## DISCUSSION

### Parents 'Sharenting' Practice

Sharenting, according to the Collins English Dictionary, is when parents regularly use social media to post images and information about their children. Choi and Lewallen [21] add that parents use social media extensively to publish and exchange material, such as making profiles, posting photographs and videos, and sharing links. The fast rise of social media platforms has made sharing an international phenomenon, now used in families worldwide.

According to surveys, sharenting is very common among parents. A 2014 University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital study indicated that 56% of moms and 34% of men post parenting-related information on social media [22]. Similar tendencies have been reported in Australia, where 90% of parents acknowledged oversharing [23], and in Spain and the Czech Republic, where 70-80% of parents share [24].

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, have emerged as the principal means of photo sharing, with around 500 million photos uploaded monthly [25]. According to research, moms prefer to upload images of their children since communicating visually is faster and simpler than delivering a story. Kumar and Schoenebeck [5] found four types of photographs that parents share: milestones, family activities, charming moments, and unusual happenings. Brosch [26, 27] discovered that parents generally share images of happy times, such as daily living, trips, and special events.

According to the uses and gratifications hypothesis, people use social media to meet various needs, such as cognitive, emotional, self-integration, social integration, and stress release [28]. This hypothesis describes how people receive psychological enjoyment from social media, which motivates them to interact. International studies also emphasize the motives for sharing. Sharing allows parents to exchange parenting advice, obtain emotional support, and connect with others who share their interests [22, 29-32]. This technique makes parents feel less alienated and allows them to seek advice from their peers [30]. Furthermore, sharing will enable parents to keep friends and relatives linked to their children, show pride, and save memories [22, 33, 34]. Furthermore, sharing allows parents to define their roles as excellent parents and exhibit their parenting abilities [5, 19].

According to the 'Reinforcement Theory of Motivation', which states that behavior is shaped by its consequences, it directly relates to sharenting through the feedback mechanisms provided by social media. Parents who share content about their children on social media platforms often engage in behaviors

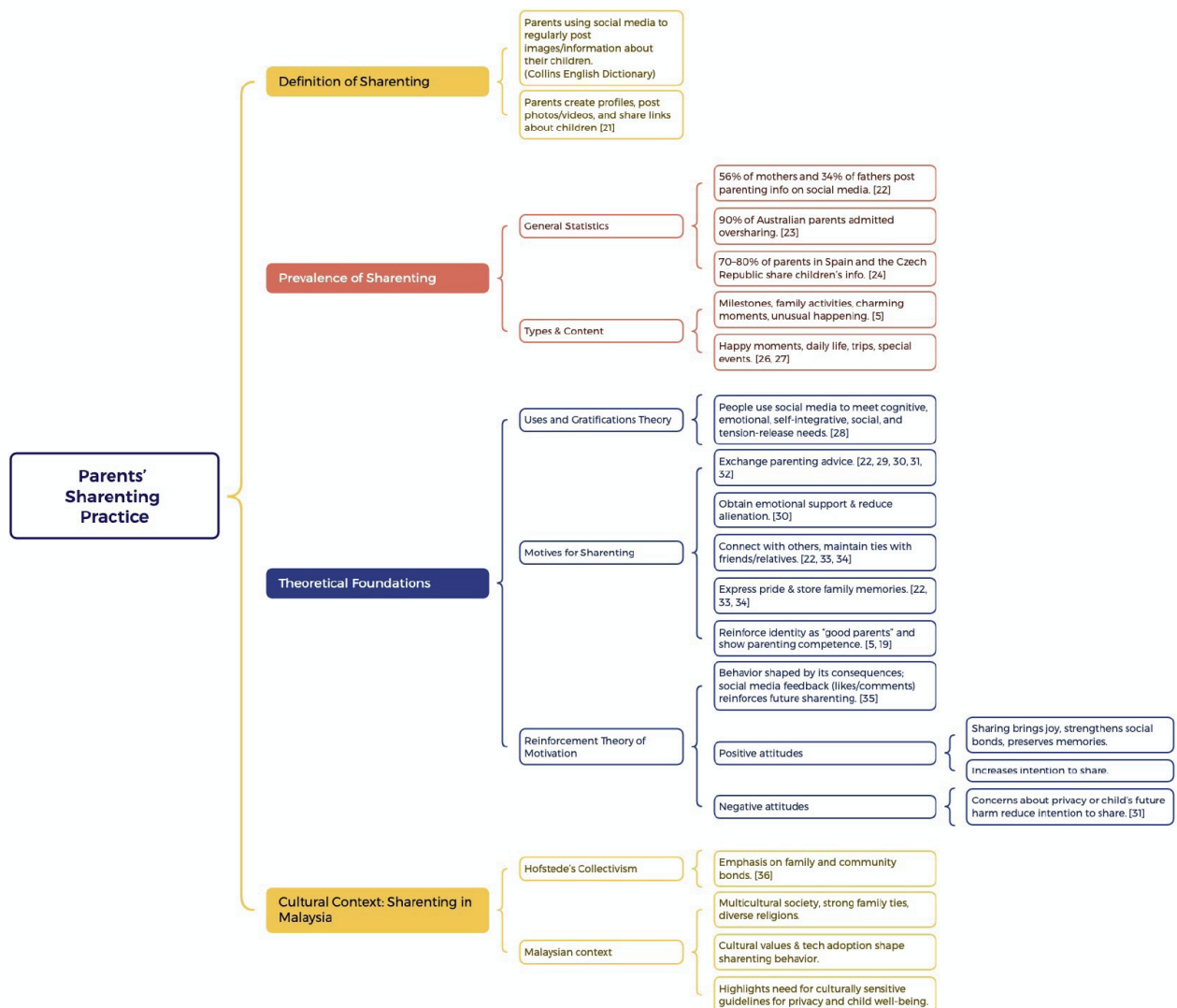
reinforced by the responses they receive, which influence their future sharenting practices [35]. Moreover, parents may have positive attitudes towards sharenting if they believe sharing content about their children brings joy, strengthens social bonds, or captures precious memories. These positive outcomes can increase their intentions to engage in sharenting. Conversely, if parents believe sharenting can lead to privacy invasion or negatively impact their children in the future, these attitudes may reduce their intention to share content about their children [31].

According to Hofstede [36], family and community are highly valued in collectivist cultures like Malaysia. Prior studies on sharenting in Malaysian culture examine how cultural values and technological adoption influence parents' sharing of their children's information on social media. Malaysia, a multicultural society with strong family ties and diverse religious

practices, presents a unique context for understanding sharenting. This also highlights the need for culturally sensitive guidelines for sharenting that address privacy and child well-being in a multicultural society. Figure 3 presents the overall framework of parental sharenting practices, summarizing key dimensions — such as definition, prevalence, theoretical foundations, and cultural influences — derived from the reviewed literature.

### Motivations for Sharenting in Malaysia

Sharenting the act of parents sharing information about their children on social media—is an escalating trend in Malaysia and other nations. Parents participate in sharenting for several reasons, such as seeking validation and social support, chronicling their children's growth, and updating family and friends [3, 31, 37]. Although sharenting can yield beneficial



**Figure 3:** Key dimensions of parents' sharenting practice.



effects, including the dissemination of knowledge and the establishment of social relationships, it also engenders apprehensions regarding the privacy and safety of youngsters [31, 38]. Certain parents employ thoughtful sharenting tactics to balance the dissemination of information with the safeguarding of their children's privacy, including using privacy settings and avoiding the use of identifying images [39]. Nonetheless, sharenting practices may result in privacy disturbances and disputes among family members [37, 39]. Sharenting underscores the need for parents to consider the potential long-term ramifications and ethical considerations of sharing their children's information online [40].

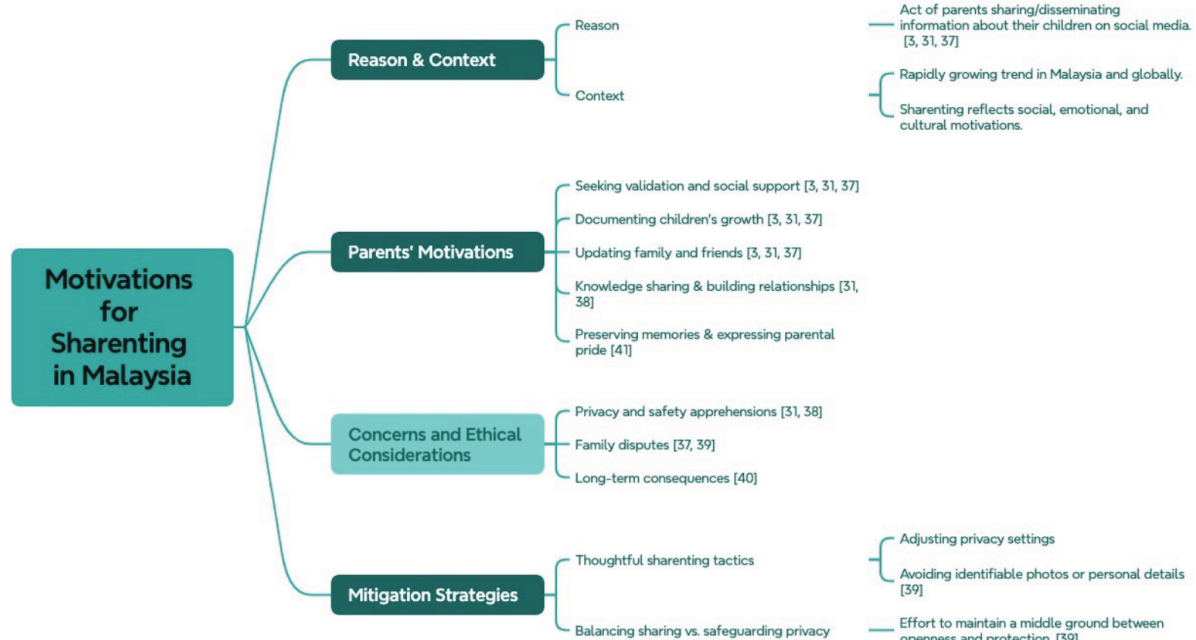
A previous study on parents' attitudes and 'sharenting' behavior examines the underlying beliefs, motivations, and concerns influencing how and why parents share content about their children on social media [41]. This review synthesizes research across multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and media studies, to understand the complex factors driving sharenting and its implications for both parents and children. Despite differences in presentation, domestic and foreign research consistently identify comparable reasons for sharing, such as preserving memories, demonstrating parental abilities, seeking social support, and maintaining connections. Figure 4 presents a summary framework of parents' motivations for sharing in Malaysia, highlighting motivations (e.g., social validation, memory preservation) and challenges

(e.g., privacy concerns and ethical considerations) based on the reviewed literature.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study fills a gap in Malaysian psychological research on parental sharenting and children's perceptions. It adds to the literature by highlighting the potential negative impact of sharenting on children's psychological well-being, such as increased risks of anxiety, embarrassment, identity exposure, and cyberbullying. The findings raise ethical concerns about children's right to privacy and the absence of informed consent. Uninformed sharenting may compromise children's autonomy and emotional security.

Therefore, parents must implement child-centered, mindful sharing practices that prioritize their children's autonomy, privacy, and psychological well-being in digital settings. Health professionals, including pediatricians, family physicians, and child psychologists, should proactively address sharenting during consultations by advising parents on the potential impact of online sharing on their children's emotional development and on the cultivation of their children's digital identity. To establish safer, healthier online environments for children, policymakers should strengthen the legal and ethical frameworks that protect children's digital rights. This includes mechanisms to remove harmful content, protect privacy, and obtain image consent. Alongside these legal and ethical considerations, it is crucial to evaluate



**Figure 4:** Main factors influencing sharenting.

how parental sharenting may indirectly affect broader dimensions of children's health and development, including promoting safe digital practices, enhancing emotional resilience, and cultivating positive social interactions.

In conclusion, the collaborative efforts of parents, professionals, and policymakers are essential to protecting children's psychological well-being in the digital age. In the future, research should investigate the long-term effects of sharenting on children's social development, self-esteem, and emotional regulation across diverse cultural contexts.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the psychological impact of sharenting behaviors on children may be uniquely influenced by cultural values, parenting styles, and digital media usage in Malaysia. Current Western research indicates that sharenting can result in emotional distress, privacy violations, and the straining of parent-child relationships. These concerns are largely unexplored in Malaysia. This review emphasizes the necessity of culturally grounded research to inform digital child protection efforts, parental education, and policy.

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