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Parents, Privacy Concerns, and Social Media

The meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns regarding sharenting

A. (Anne-Fleur) Elsenaar

Master of Science in Business Administration

Specialization Marketing

Supervisor: dr. P.J. Franco

Second examiner: H.A. Widyanto

Anne-Fleur Elsenaar

s1099527

anne-fleur.elsenaar@ru.nl

Radboud University

Nijmegen School of Management

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Abstract

The term “sharenting” is an emerging phenomenon in the last decade gaining attention from popular news articles to describe a shift in modern parenting. Sharenting refers to parents posting personal details about their children on social media. However, in the last few years, a more recent trend among parents has been exercising extreme caution regarding sharenting. The findings suggest that this is especially evident from the newer generation of parents and enables interdisciplinary theoretical implications for both privacy and sharenting theory. Drawing from privacy theory and adopting the practice theory lens from the Consumer Culture Theory domain, this research provides empirical knowledge into the meanings parents attribute to sharenting. This research addresses key limitations in prior privacy and sharenting literature by including the empirical study of parents’ subjective experiences towards privacy, where privacy is conceptualized as an enacted practice instead of a cognitive concept that only exists in the minds of consumers. Using data from in-depth interviews and netnography, this research identifies a three-phase process illustrating the factors behind parents’ privacy concerns regarding sharenting. The findings show that parents are becoming more aware of the permanence of online content and the dark side of social media (phase 1). This awareness leads to concerns and fears about the impact of sharenting on their children (phase 2), encouraging them to modify their sharenting behavior (phase 3). This study empirically shows that privacy concerns towards sharenting apply to consumer culture contexts. Finally, this study reveals how sharenting is perceived by parents, leading to practical recommendations for policymakers, marketers, and social media companies.

Keywords: Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Family Technology Consumption, Practice Theory, Social Media

Preface

Technology is taking a prominent stance in the lives of families nowadays. Parents of all ages use technology, ranging from entertaining their children to capturing joyful moments with their phones. This master thesis explores the meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns regarding the practice of posting photos of their children on social media. I was instantly interested in this topic, as the integration of technology into our lives and its implications for privacy, especially concerning children, have become more significant and have yet to be fully theorized.

For my research, I interviewed parents of various ages and found their reasons for sharing or not sharing photos of their children online compelling. Their experiences underscored the dangers of the Internet, making me reflect on how this integral part of our lives can significantly impact our privacy and the spread of personal information. The personal stories from the interviews touched me. Therefore, I found it important to successfully convey the stories told by the participants in this research, which provided me with the motivation I needed to write this research successfully.

As I conclude this thesis journey, I sincerely enjoy every aspect of this research. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Paolo Franco, for the support and guidance I received throughout the research process. His unwavering enthusiasm for my work and his endless patience in discussing and explaining each step of the thesis process made me enjoy this research even more. Most importantly, he provided me with the confidence to succeed, affirming that my hard work was paying off. Thank you, Dr. Franco, for your kindness, time, and effort. Finally, I would like to thank friends and family who have supported me in their own unique way in completing this thesis.

This research has enhanced my understanding of online privacy concerns from a consumer perspective, the consequences of sharenting for families, and that there is a difference in generations regarding sharenting behavior. I hope my research contributes to a better understanding of parents' sharenting behavior as it is a new and upcoming trend in today's culture.

I hope that reading my thesis will be enjoyable.

Apeldoorn, June 14, 2024

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1. Introduction

In today's technology-dominated world, it has "almost become a social norm" (Brosch 2016, p. 226) to share personal information and updates about one's child on social media to inform family, friends, and even total strangers. The widespread practice of this behavior has been given the term *sharenting*, denoting when "parents share information about themselves and their children online" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017, p. 3). Nowadays, parents share children's personal information on social media to share their family's success and feel validated by the likes and comments they receive (Moser et al., 2017). No wonder Facebook nowadays is referred to as a modern-day baby book (Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015). This is evident as over 43% of new parents share photos of their children online. By the time a child is aged 13, parents have posted 1300 videos and photos of them on social media (Nwoko, 2024). In today's digital age, online sharing has become a prevalent aspect of modern parenting.

However, the continuous development of technologies through which data can be collected has sparked increased interest in the dark side of data collection where privacy concerns are becoming more pivotal (Bleier et al., 2020; Martin & Murphy, 2016). These privacy concerns are further fueled by increasing discoveries of the online locations of these photos. A news article revealed that harmless photos of children posted by parents on social media make up half the content on pedophile image-sharing websites (Battersby, 2015). This practice has gained even more attention since new AI technologies can search social media and distort children's photos in ways most parents could never imagine (Liberatore, 2023). Privacy concerns are increasing as these manipulated photos may end up on child exploitation websites, highlighting the urgent need to protect children's personal information in an online setting.

Within consumer research, privacy has often been the subject of attention (Martin & Murphy, 2016). Existing research on privacy in family contexts is limited, as it primarily focuses on parental supervision to limit the exposure of children's personal information on the Internet (e.g. Alqhatani & Lipford, 2018; Erickson et al., 2015) and child surveillance technologies (e.g. Bettany & Kerrane, 2016; Marx & Steeves, 2010). However, only a few studies have investigated the privacy concerns children may face from others, underscoring the relevance of this study. For example, Minkus et al. (2015) studied how frequently parents or other family members violate children's privacy. Brosch (2016) found that parents breach their children's privacy by sharing too much personal information on the Internet.

Thus, limited attention has been given to exploring the factors contributing to privacy concerns related to parents posting photos of their children online. This is a contemporary topic

as newer parents are starting to refrain from posting their children online, mostly because of increasing advertisements about the risks of sharenting (Gilzean, 2023; Sokol, 2022), and the rise of AI technologies that show how easily a child's image can be manipulated (Bandara, 2023). This important development can inform marketing scholarship about the ethical considerations of sharenting and its consequences on children.

Therefore, this research aims to uncover the meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns when posting photos of their children on social media. This will be realized under the lens of practice theory (Thomas & Epp, 2019) where parents' sharenting behavior on Instagram is seen as a practice. Moreover, this research will take a Consumer Culture Theory (hereafter: CCT) approach to study consumer privacy, specifically focused on parents (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Through a CCT approach, the subjective experiences of parents towards privacy-related matters can be explored, as well as the meanings parents give to these practices as they are shaped through culture. Thus, a CCT approach towards privacy will allow one to see the meanings attributed to privacy practices and identify interconnections between these elements.

The research objective will be attained by answering the following questions:

- I. *Which privacy concerns emerge when parents consider posting photos of their children on social media?*
- II. *How do privacy concerns shape parents' current practices of posting photos of their children on social media?*

With this research, a contribution will be made to privacy and sharenting literature by introducing the focus on parenting as a new angle in marketing and seeing privacy as a practice that can be performed instead of purely a cognitive aspect. Moreover, understanding how privacy concerns shape parents' sharenting behavior contributes to our understanding of consumer behavior as it provides insights into consumers' motivations, feelings, and decision-making processes in today's digital age. Furthermore, this study can offer practical implications for marketing researchers since the findings will contribute to a new body of work in existing CCT literature, which could be the starting point for identifying cultural shifts regarding parents' sharenting behavior on social media.

This research paper is structured into different chapters. First, a comprehensive overview of important theories will be identified, followed by the CCT approach. Next, the methodology will be outlined, followed by the study's results. Then, the study's contributions, limitations, and future research are provided. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

2. Theoretical Background

This chapter elaborates on the theoretical background for this study. First, theories of consumer privacy are discussed, followed by sharenting theory to gain insights into privacy concerns in an online setting, as this forms the basis for approaching this study from a parenting angle. Third, deeper insights are provided into CCT as this approach is adopted in this research to study the factors contributing to privacy concerns regarding sharenting. Finally, this chapter discusses how sharenting can be studied through practice theory.

2.1 Theories of Consumer Privacy

Scholars across many disciplines have studied and theorized privacy to understand how people think about and deal with security concerns. As such, it provides a good starting point for theorizing the meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns when posting photos of their children online. The first definition of privacy dates back to 1890 when it was defined as “the right to be left alone” (Warren & Brandeis, 1890, p. 1). Since then, the concept of privacy has shifted from physical boundaries (i.e. being in someone’s physical space) to encompass the realm of the Internet, where information is stored, collected, and used online – a phenomenon called informational privacy (Beke et al., 2018). Moreover, due to the rise of the digital era, the definition of privacy has been extended to include online threats and challenges (Crossler & Bélanger, 2019).

Privacy has been extensively studied in the consumer research literature (Horppu, 2023). Previous studies have examined the link between trust and privacy in marketing (Martin, 2018; Pan & Zinkhan, 2006) and the privacy choices of consumers (Johnson et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2011). These studies all address the collection and sharing of personal information. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) states that *personal information* is “any data relating to an identified or identifiable living person”, for example: name, address, and phone number (Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens, n.d.). This also includes sharing photos or personal information of children on social media. Even though the studies mentioned above are about privacy, it is not quite the kind of privacy this study refers to regarding parenting and technology. Nevertheless, it is still essential to understand the three fundamental privacy concepts, as it underscores the fact that this study on parenting and technology is necessary. In privacy literature, the concepts of privacy concerns, privacy calculus, and privacy paradox have been widely studied.

First, privacy concerns refer to all concerns consumers have about their information and how it is collected and utilized by different actors (Smith et al., 1996). The work of Smith et al. (1996) is also one of the earliest references in the literature that addresses how privacy concerns can be measured, using the ‘Concern For Information Privacy’ scale. This scale conceptualizes privacy concerns based on the collection and use of personal information. The strength of these privacy concerns depends on the individual, as previous experiences with privacy awareness, culture, and personality traits all play a role (Martin & Murphy, 2016).

Second, the ‘Privacy Calculus Theory’ suggests that consumers determine for themselves whether they regard the consequences of the collection, storage, and use of personal information by organizations to be beneficial or harmful (Laufer & Wolfe, 1977; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020). The study by Plangger and Montecchi (2020) investigated consumers’ attitudes toward surveillance regarding privacy concerns and concluded that these attitudes influence consumers’ responses to surveillance practices. However, one major drawback of this theory is that consumers often do not behave rationally, as non-conscious factors play a role in the decision-making process (John et al., 2011). This is also the starting point for the last privacy concept, the privacy paradox.

Third, the privacy paradox occurs when consumers’ attitudes or perceptions towards privacy are inconsistent with their actual behavior (Berendt et al., 2005; Kokolakis, 2017). Paradoxical behavior occurs because consumers easily overlook privacy concerns when engaging in low-involvement activities (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1980). In this study, low-involvement behavior can be seen in online practices, such as online browsing or using mobile phones to take photos. This establishes the foundation for exploring consumer privacy in an online environment, which will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

While these concepts have been widely studied, they miss the exploration of how privacy concerns manifest in family contexts. For example, privacy concerns do not only apply to individual consumers and firms in an online context but also revolve around capturing the behavior and cultural meanings that modern families give to technology. This has been previously overlooked in the privacy literature as parenting and technology is a fairly new research topic.

2.2 Sharenting Theory

Privacy concerns also occur when consumers engage in online behavior (Acquisti et al., 2016; Nissenbaum, 2015), which can be unintended, as in the case of posting photos on social media.

When relating privacy concerns to parenting practices, it can be concluded that only a handful of studies have explored this angle.

In the last decade, a trend called *sharenting* has taken over the social media landscape, meaning that (grand)parents post personal information about children on social media, without comprehending the potential consequences or the harm it may cause posting such information (Brosch, 2016; Fox & Hoy, 2019). The study by Fox and Hoy (2019) found that the motivation behind sharing children's personal information on social media originates from the desire to be seen as a good parent. Ong et al. (2022) dive deeper into this practice by stating that parents, especially those of the current generation who grew up with social media, may have a false sense of trust regarding the impact of sharenting. Due to parents' familiarity with social media, they share content about their children with more ease, making them more susceptible to privacy breaches and data misuse (Ong et al., 2022).

The common assumption is that parents act as the protectors of their children where they look out for their children's best interests (Shmueli & Blecher-Prigat, 2011). However, with the increasing rise of sharenting, a contradiction is seen between parents' interest in protecting their children versus sharing photos of them to show they are good parents, risking impinging upon their children's privacy (Brosch, 2016). The same author elaborates on the problem of sharenting, describing that parents often post inappropriate photos of their children on Facebook, as this can satisfy the need for self-realization and social approval. Referring back to the privacy paradox, this illustrates that parents do not always act as protectors as they post children's personal information across social media.

Only until quite recently, many parents were not aware that sharenting can put children at risk, such as identity fraud and in the worst case, physical abduction (Minkus et al., 2015; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019). Minkus et al. (2015) studied the privacy breaches that may occur to children at the hands of their (grand)parents. The results show that parents unknowingly post too much personal information about their children on social media. Minkus et al. (2015) also stress that data is collected by external parties, creating comprehensive online profiles of children that may compromise their security. It is important to note that even when an account on social media, such as Instagram, is switched to private mode, posts are not necessarily safe (Minkus et al., 2015). Photos of children can show up on inappropriate websites, as it only takes one person to forward the photo. The findings emphasize better privacy practices among parents, such as thinking about the personal information that may be disclosed when sharing photos of children online (Minkus et al., 2015). Williams-Ceci et al. (2021) confirm this by highlighting the value of interventions in raising awareness of responsible posting practices by

parents. It does so by leveraging the fact that posting personal information about children can have a lasting effect on them.

While all of these studies have significantly contributed to privacy theory by describing the importance of responsible posting practices when it comes to one's child, scant attention has been given to exploring the meanings that contribute to privacy concerns related to parents posting photos of their children online. Moreover, the sharenting literature has so far accounted for the impacts of sharenting and the cognitive considerations of sharers. It misses the exploration of sharenting practices in a family context. In that sense, prior work does not yet account for how privacy is enacted by parents through how they use their technologies, carving out an opportunity for the proposed study. Thus, using practice theory can reveal the broader skills and competencies related to real-life sharenting practices and the impact these practices have on parents' sharenting behavior regarding privacy concerns. In this context, thinking about how privacy is enacted by consumers as a practice is enabled by a CCT approach, as the next section explains.

2.3 Consumer Culture Theory

CCT is an interdisciplinary research tradition that focuses on understanding consumer behavior within the broader context of culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). It is especially relevant for explaining how cultural meanings, historical influences, and social dynamics shape consumer experiences in their everyday life. Arnould and Thompson (2005) explain in their study that in this research domain, CCT emphasizes that consumers see the real world not as unified or rational, but rather navigate through multiple subjective realities and use consumption to experience these realities.

Limited literature in marketing focuses on privacy concerns within the context of CCT. The study of Horppu (2023) introduces a CCT approach to studying consumer privacy. Horppu (2023) proposes three necessary shifts in research focus when adopting a CCT approach to think about consumer privacy. These shifts are from prediction to experience, from causality to systems, and from outcome to process. This is aimed to challenge the existing assumptions about privacy in consumer research and offer a more nuanced perspective. The author concludes that adopting a CCT approach enriches consumer privacy research as it approaches privacy as a socially constructed phenomenon (Horppu, 2023).

The study of Horppu (2023) demonstrates an attempt to shift away from seeing privacy solely as a cognitive aspect. However, most privacy studies within marketing only capture the cognitive aspects of privacy, meaning how consumers rationalize privacy in their minds by

going through a process of pros and cons when determining whether to give out their personal information. This stresses the importance of viewing privacy not only as a cognitive aspect but also as a practice that can be performed, reflecting daily routines and habits. Moreover, by introducing parenting as a new angle within privacy literature, this study can contribute to capturing how sharenting practices shape the behavior of parents in today's digital age. Consequently, employing a CCT approach will allow this research to see privacy practices arising through the interaction of consumer actions and socio-cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Within CCT, various approaches and lenses exist that can help researchers frame their research. The most relevant lens to uncover which meanings parents attribute to the practice of sharing photos on Instagram is practice theory.

2.4 Practice Theory

Practice theory is a sociological perspective that focuses on social practices, which are repeated, routinized actions that individuals and groups perform in their daily lives (Arsel & Bean, 2013). In the context of consumer behavior, practice theory understands the routines, rituals, and habits associated with parents posting photos of their children on social media. This can be seen as a social practice (Reckwitz, 2002). Therefore, this theory will help to describe the process and establishment of sharenting.

According to Shove et al. (2012), practices consist of three key components: materials, meanings, and competencies. Materials include physical objects that are essential for carrying out the practice. Competencies refer to the skills, knowledge, and techniques required to perform the practice effectively. Finally, meanings are symbolic ideas, values, and emotions associated with the practice that help understand how culture has shaped individuals into practicing a certain behavior (Shove et al., 2012).

Within the framework of practice theory, parents not only engage in the social practice of posting photos online but also attach meanings to these practices. For example, parents experience joy when they do fun things with their children. A different interpretation of meanings is possible; therefore, it is highly relevant to explore the meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns when engaging in sharenting as these practices are shaped by culture. This will contribute to a new angle within privacy literature as it is now missing the materials, objects, skills, and competencies concerning consumers *doing* privacy, and not just *thinking* about it. Practice theory is particularly suitable for capturing real-life privacy practices in a family context and will help shed light on this unexplored topic.

Practice theory has been applied to many academic studies. Thomas and Epp (2019) used practice theory to explore the challenges new parents face in habituating practices during the early stages of parenthood. The authors make a distinction between envisioned and enacted practices. Envisioned practices relate to the planning parents make that will guide how they care for their children. Envisioned practices are built by drawing on available social practices and represent what parents expect to happen in the future (Thomas & Epp, 2019). After making a plan, parents implement their envisioned practices where the practice is performed, this represents the enacted practice. The study reveals that while many practices are successfully habituated, around half of the practices new parents want to adopt experience misalignments that disrupt habitation (Thomas & Epp, 2019). The findings highlight the significance of creating an effective plan and building capabilities to succeed in habituating new parenting practices.

Thomas and Epp's (2019) study is useful for this research as it enables marketing scholars to understand that sharenting and privacy practices often turn out differently than expected. It is illustrated that practice theory is a suitable framework for understanding how everyday practices and routines shape parents' sharenting behavior. To answer the research questions, the next chapter will describe the research methods.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methods of this research are discussed. First, an outline of the research approach is given, including the objective of this study. Next, the data collection methods and data analysis techniques will be explained, followed by the research quality. A description of ethical standards will cover the last part of this chapter.

3.1 Research Approach

To attain the research objective of understanding which meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns regarding the practice of sharenting, a qualitative approach is adopted. This is the most suitable approach as an in-depth understanding of underinvestigated topics requires understanding real-world problems and experiences. This is necessary to gather insights into people, their experiences, actions, and motivations including the broader context in which they find themselves (Mik-Meyer & Justesen, 2012; Myers, 2019). As this research requires the investigation of communication forms within families and their subjective experiences regarding sharenting, a qualitative approach fits best with the purpose of this research. In contrast to quantitative research, the research objective cannot be achieved through treatments or quantifying predefined variables (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Moreover, this research is based on an inductive approach, meaning no hypothesis is tested (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research philosophy that best aligns with the research objective of identifying subjective experiences and meanings attributed to social media practices is that of constructivism. This philosophy views social reality as subjective and co-constructed through an individual's experiences and interpretations (Mik-Meyer & Justesen, 2012; Myers, 2019).

In addition, practice theory also emphasizes that objects/materials, as well as skills/competencies, co-construct the social world. This approach is justified as this study conducted open-ended interviews to uncover parents' views of reality and the corresponding practices carried out accordingly. Researchers who study practices dominantly utilize qualitative methods (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Thomas & Epp, 2019). Thus, adopting a constructivist approach combined with CCT-style research reveals valuable insights into how parents interpret and make sense of their experiences regarding privacy concerns when sharing photos online (Mik-Meyer & Justesen, 2012; Myers, 2019). Acknowledging the subjective view of each individual's reality gives a deeper insight into consumer behavior and decision-making processes.

3.2 Data Collection

Two different qualitative research methods are utilized in this research: structured open-ended interviews and non-participatory online ethnography, or ‘netnography’ (Kozinets, 2002). Applying two different techniques to gather data ensures triangulation as it paves the way for exploring deeper insights into the meanings and experiences of parents regarding privacy concerns when posting photos of their children online (Myers, 2019). Moreover, this is beneficial for this research as it increases the trustworthiness of the results.

3.2.1 Interviews

The first research method applied in this study involved conducting interviews. This method allowed for gathering the subjective experiences of parents to gain insights into their current privacy concerns. For the first wave of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted to form a general understanding of the research context and identify theories to apply in this research. The second wave of data collection focused on specific privacy questions, going into more depth about parents' sharenting behavior. Throughout the data collection process, the interview guide evolved as the researcher gained new information (Appendix A). A semi-structured interviewing approach allowed both the researcher and respondents the flexibility to dive deeper into specific topics, creating unexpected discoveries that could not otherwise have been detected (Mik-Meyer & Justesen, 2012; Myers, 2019).

As this research is part of a wider team of master students investigating parents and technology, the interview guide features three different themes, each with specialized questions. In total, 15 interviews were held with Dutch families that have children between the age of 0-23. An overview of the participants is given in Table 1. The target group is justified as the data drawn from the interviews provide insights from many to uncover privacy concerns and the meanings attributed to this. Moreover, with this approach, the researcher can observe a potential cultural shift regarding parents' sharenting behavior (Jansen, 2007).

Parents were primarily chosen as key informants for the open-ended interviews to uncover the practice of sharing photos of their children online, as the “doing” aspect of privacy has been overlooked in existing studies. As such, the interviews provided valuable insights into how parents interpret and make sense of their experiences regarding sharenting. For the first wave of data collection, the participants were chosen based on convenience (Hultsch et al., 2002) and snowballing sampling (Patton, 2002), as the researcher used her social network to establish contact. Consequently, snowball sampling led to further contacts which were utilized to refine the interview questions for the second wave of data collection (Patton, 2002). After

conducting the first few interviews, theoretical sampling was applied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the findings from the interviews emerged, the researcher spoke to parents about specific privacy situations to build a framework concerning sharenting and privacy practices.

Table 1. Participant table

Family	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Family member
Williams	Ivo	41	Digital detective	Father
	Kyra	39	Healthcare professional	Mother
	Marin	9	In grade school	Daughter
	Naomi	5	In grade school	Daughter
	Dennis	2	-	Son
Clark	Siebe	43	Artist	Father
	Greetje	43	Stay-at-home mom	Mother
	Bo	14	High school student	Daughter
	Dante	12	High school student	Son
	Senna	8	In grade school	Daughter
	Fien	5	In grade school	Daughter
Morgan	Brooke	45	Elementary school teacher	Mother
Reed	Harper	33	Stay-at-home mom	Mother
Smith	Daphne	49	Unemployed	Mother
	Percy	51	Baker	Father
	Sabrina	15	High school student	Daughter
Harper	Laura	49	Optician	Mother
	Travis	49	Truck driver	Father
	Ashley	16	High school student	Daughter
Stewart	Tobias	50	Trainer	Father
	Danielle	49	Ballet teacher	Mother
	Romee	10	In grade school	Daughter
	Jens	7	In grade school	Son
Cox	Ronald	40	ICT professional	Father
	Inge	38	Pabo teacher	Mother
	Jackie	7	In grade school	Daughter
	Quinten	3	-	Son
	Noa	1	-	Daughter
Fisher	Hugo	38	ICT professional	Father
	Maxime	36	GP assistant	Mother
	Thibeau	11	In grade school	Son
	Josephine	9	In grade school	Daughter
	Julie	6	In grade school	Daughter
Bennett	Skylar	46	D&I manager	Mother

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued

Family	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Family member
Hayes	Lizzie	29	High school teacher	Mother
	James	30	Manager	Father
Parker	Rose	29	Manager	Mother
Bailey	Luna	36	Sports instructor	Mother
	Caleb	38	Quality controller	Father
Johnson	Carolina	55	Volunteer	Mother
	Bruce	55	Interior architect	Father
	Cressida	23	Student	Daughter
	Elise	21	Student	Daughter
Jones	Imogen	59	Municipal officier	Mother
	Greg	56	Furniture maker	Father
	Morrigan	22	Student	Daughter
	Theo	20	Construction market employee	Son

3.2.2 Non-participatory Netnography

Given the focus on technology in this study, the online world represents a valued environment to collect additional qualitative data from parents sharing their opinions about privacy concerns when posting photos of their children online. Therefore, non-participatory netnography was utilized as a secondary data source to complement the results from the interviews (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). This was first used by Robert Kozinets and defined as “a specialized form of ethnographic research that has been adapted to the unique contingencies of various types of computer-mediated social interaction” (Kozinets, 2012, p. 3).

This research uses Reddit as the main social media platform for data collection. The researcher observed opinions and meanings within six Reddit communities related to parents’ sharenting behavior. Terms like “*kids photos social media*”, “*photos children social media*”, and “*Insta photos children*” were used to find valuable posts within these communities. The findings from the secondary data method allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of parents’ sharenting behavior and the meanings they attach to this upcoming trend. This contributed to a better understanding of the participants’ associations with sharenting. It is important to note that the researcher was embedded as an observer of the online communities and refrained from actively participating in answering or replying to messages (Bettany & Kerrane, 2016). The sole purpose of this data collection method was to read the experiences given by the members of the community to provide context to this study.

3.3 Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed, translated, and coded to organize the data. The method of coding was two-fold. First, through reading and re-reading, open coding was applied to summarize the data. The second level involved axial coding, to find patterns and interrelationships within the data. Coding is an iterative process where continuous comparisons between the collected data and emerging theories are made (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews were transcribed by hand and the coding was done in Microsoft Excel.

The analysis of the netnography research was performed by directly copying the threats posted by Reddit members within the online communities to an Excel file (Kozinets, 2002). The researcher also included her own observations, thoughts, and emotions in the field notes. This approach allowed the researcher to gather a broad range of parents' experiences, enriching the context of this study, and accounting for confirmation bias by actively seeking out diverse perspectives on the subject (Kozinets, 2002). The researcher started collecting the secondary data after the first wave of interviews. Within Reddit, the search function was used to trace how these discussions have evolved to a specific point in time during the entire month of April 2024. The researcher looked at the threats every other day to maintain a consistent pattern of data collection.

3.4 Research Quality

When conducting CCT-style research, Hogg and Maclaran (2008) state that two important criteria must be met: authenticity and plausibility. These two aspects are crucial to uphold the quality of research and are discussed below.

In a research context, *authenticity* is defined as: “convincing readers, not only that the interpretation is drawn from the data, but also that the researcher has spent time in the field and has experienced the ‘lived worlds’ of the informants” (Hogg & Maclaran, 2008, p. 135). This study conveyed authenticity by clearly structuring how, when, and which data collection methods were used. The next aspect is *plausibility*, which is defined as: “accounting for as much of the information as possible so that there is some degree of well-argued ‘fit’ between the information (or data), and the explanation offered to account for the interpretation offered of the data” (Hogg & Maclaran, 2008, p. 137). Plausibility is ensured as data is collected and coded through a systematic approach. By applying different data collection techniques, triangulation is ensured, contributing to the trustworthiness of this research (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

Lastly, to uphold the research quality, this research is based on iteration. The interview questions were updated after each interview to ensure that the researcher moved in a more

focused direction when answering the main objective of this study. While this study is designed to provide in-depth insights into the meanings parents attach to sharenting, it is important to acknowledge considerations regarding transferability. Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other studies and contexts (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). In this research, a qualitative approach was chosen which focuses on the subjective experiences of parents, which may not fully represent other settings.

3.5 Research Ethics

Considering ethical considerations is of utmost importance when doing qualitative research. In this study, *ethics* is referred to as “a researcher’s obligation to protect research participants’ privacy in mediated research contexts [...] to better protect the interests of participants in situations where vulnerability or potential harm is not easily determined.” (Markham, 2025, p. 334).

All participants received a consent form (Appendix B) and a plain language statement (Appendix C) before the interviews were conducted. Participants were given time to read the documents carefully and sign them accordingly (Myers, 2019). To ensure credibility, the names and email addresses of the researchers were included as well as the contact information of the researchers’ supervisor if the participants had any questions. For participants under the age of 18, the consent form was signed by their parents.

Furthermore, an important part of ethics is voluntary participation and consent, meaning that cooperation in this study was completely voluntary and the participant could withdraw at any given time (Myers, 2019). Before conducting the interviews, the researcher explained the objective of this research and asked permission to record the interview. Participant confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms when referring to the results of the interviews. The personal details of the participants are only known to the researchers involved.

For netnographic research, all personally identifiable information of the members of the online community Redditt was disclosed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to address the data in this research (Kozinets, 2002), and literal quotes were slightly modified to ensure anonymity so the data could not be traced back to the online community and its members (Markham et al., 2012). After the study was completed, the researcher signed an integrity form committing to the authenticity of their work, ensuring originality and that the study was free from fabrication or plagiarism.

4. Findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the interviews and netnographic research. The interview outcomes provide a theoretical framework that illustrates the factors contributing to privacy concerns related to parents' sharenting behavior on social media. Moreover, netnography was utilized as a secondary data source by searching for sharenting within six online parenting communities on Reddit. The process depicted in the framework is divided into three phases: *Awareness of Sharenting*, *Cultural Meanings of Sharenting*, and *Sharenting Behavior* (Figure 1). Together, these phases provide an in-depth view of why parents are starting to refrain from posting photos of their children on Instagram. In particular, this framework draws on practice theory (e.g. Thomas & Epp, 2019) to explain which kind of sharenting practice a parent will choose concerning their child. This is based on becoming aware of and learning about sharenting practices over time. Each phase is discussed separately and supported by data from the interviews and netnography.

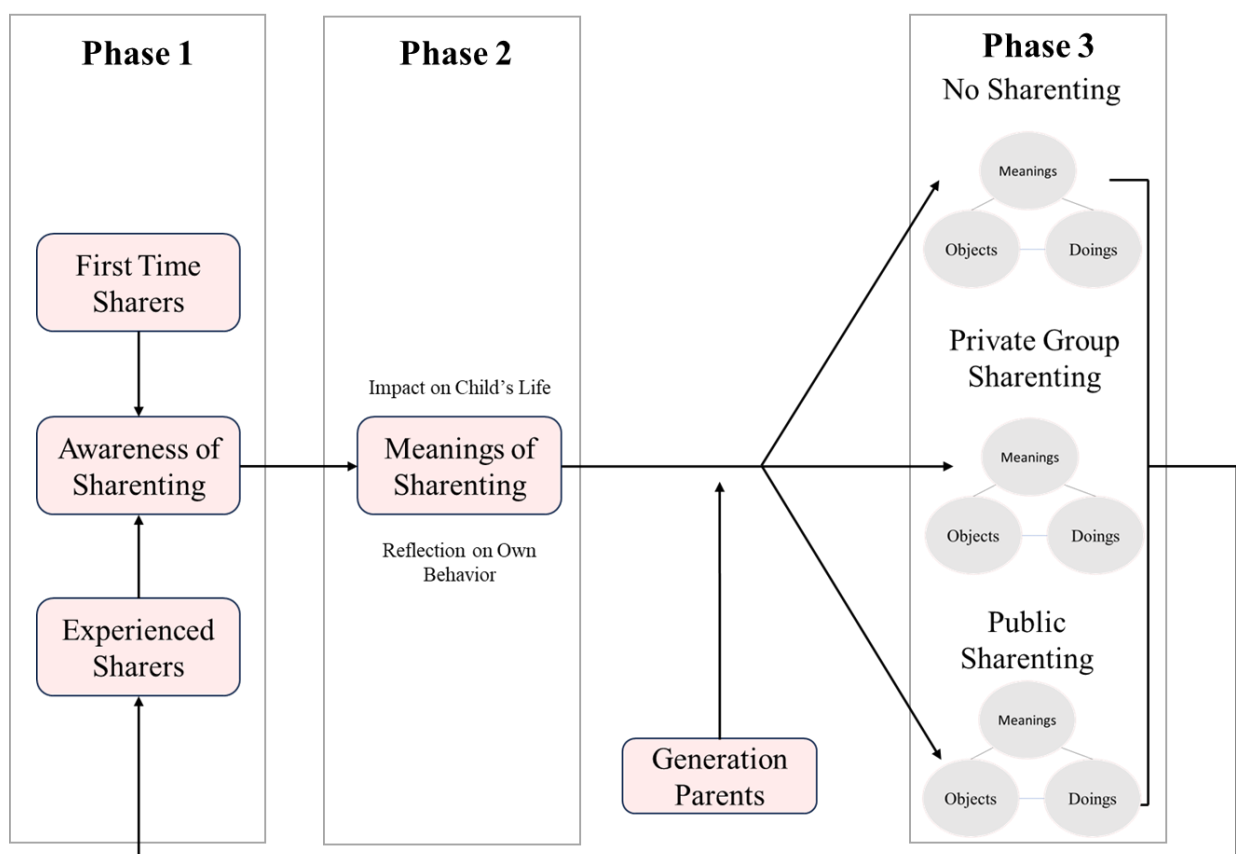


Figure 1. Process of Awareness, Cultural Understanding, and Sharenting Behavior

4.1 Phase 1: Awareness of Sharenting

In the first phase of the framework, parents become aware of the sharenting phenomenon. In this phase, two types of situations exist: parents who are first-time sharers and parents who already have experience with sharenting. This section describes the two types of behavior regarding the awareness phase. It is important to discuss parents' awareness of sharenting, as it is the first step to understanding what factors contribute to privacy concerns when parents share photos of their children on social media.

4.1.1 First-Time Sharers

Parents who are first-time sharers have not been reflecting on an existing sharenting practice, sharenting is seen here as an envisioned practice (Thomas & Epp, 2019). Applied to the framework, this will be their first time around the loop. In this situation, parents are learning about the phenomenon of sharenting, which in turn creates awareness. In terms of practice theory, potential objects, and meanings are considered in this phase as first-time sharers have not engaged or chosen a specific kind of the wider sharenting practice.

It is apparent from the interviews that parents have the intention to create a digital photo album by capturing happy family memories. The intention of creating a digital photo album can be seen as the materials produced by the practice. According to Shove et al. (2012), materials are defined as the objects that help the consumer perform the practice of consumption. For example, the research participants agreed that modern technology enables them to share photos of their children online to stay in touch with family and friends. Harper Reed (mother of a 6-year-old) said: *"I like to post photos to keep an online photo diary."* The Smith family has similar thoughts: *"Yes, just fun things, a day out or a holiday."*

Parents are becoming aware of how precious the happy moments they spend with their children are. They have the desire to capture these moments to look back on them in the future. It is important to note that first-time sharers are a minority group, as most data from the interviews and netnographic research show that most parents are cautious about sharenting. This brings us to the experienced sharers.

4.1.2 Experienced Sharers

In contrast to first-time sharers, experienced sharers completed the whole sharenting process at least once. This means that parents have engaged in some form of sharenting, and reflected on it as they became aware of the sharenting consequences. According to the interviews and netnographic data, experienced sharers have learned about problematic objects revolving around sharenting, such as the permanence of online content and the dark side of social media.

These problematic objects can be seen as the privacy concerns that emerge when parents consider posting photos of their children on social media. For instance, experienced sharer Laura Harper (mother of a 16-year-old) became aware of the permanence of online content due to a family member: *“When the children were young, there was a lot of sharing, but later you started to think more. Then your grandfather said: everything you put on it will still be there in 100 years. So at some point, I took down all the photos and if they want to be on it, they are on it”*. Lizzie Hayes (mother of a 1-year-old) confirmed these insights: *“You don't know what happens to it anyway. Because as soon as you put something on Instagram, then you no longer have ownership, right”*.

The Reddit community seems to adopt a similar viewpoint, a father from r/Daddit wrote: *“Nothing good can come from sharing pictures of your children on social media.”* (April 2024). A Reddit user from r/Childfree further acknowledges this: *“The Internet is packed with creeps and weirdos and families are just posting every second of their child's life online. It's weird.”* (April 2024). It is evident from these responses that besides objects, parents also attribute meanings to this phase. Meanings represent the core values of the practice (Shove et al., 2012). Thus, experienced sharers are becoming aware of the permanence of online content and are increasingly concerned that individuals with malicious intent can search the Internet for their children's photos.

Another negative sharenting component that raises awareness among parents is the dark side of social media, where AI technologies show how easily a child's image can be manipulated (Bandara, 2023). The data showed that parents use their phones and laptops to browse the Internet to find news articles about the increasing dangers of AI. Especially the netnographic research showed reasons why parents are starting to refrain from posting photos of their children online. Two Reddit fathers from r/Daddit have made this explicitly clear. The first father wrote: *“I mean, AI has absolutely mutilated the Internet for photos and turned them into God knows what. There's no room for debate on that, we know what happened.”* The second father is even more honest, writing: *“If I was a pedophile I'd be scouring the hell out of daycare public social media pages. And that's not even with AI involved.”*

Not only the Reddit community is aware of the dark side of social media. The interview data showed that the respondents also have a similar view on this topic. Rose Parker (mother of a 1-year-old) said: *“I had seen a video once [...] and I think based on certain technology, AI can distort the face. Then I thought, okay, it's a bit creepy that they can do that. So then I thought, well, we're not going to do that anymore.”* Skylar Bennett (mother of a 12 and 11-year-old) agrees: *“Hijacking my children's identity to use in videos and then my child ending up on*

a dark web. I'm well aware that it happens.” Interestingly, the interview respondents and Reddit users attribute similar meanings to the permanence of online content and the dark side of social media within the awareness phase. It can be concluded from these results that parents are becoming more aware of sharenting consequences, resulting in being more cautious about what aspects of their children’s lives they want to share on social media. This leads to the second phase of the process where parents reflect on their behavior: the meanings they attach to sharenting.

4.2 Phase 2: Meanings of Sharenting

The discussed awareness has a significant impact on parents’ formation of meanings related to sharenting. Various statements in the data show the extent of this influence. A mother from r/AskReddit wrote: *“I believe it's a violation of the privacy of someone that is unable to consent.”* (April 2024). Brooke Morgan (mother of an 11-year-old) agrees: *“She does not choose to be on the Internet. And I don't think it's necessary to have her on the Internet all the time.”* In this phase, two themes emerge from the data: (1) as parents become aware of the negative sharenting implications, they reflect on their behavior; and (2) they realize that sharenting might have an impact on their children’s lives.

4.2.1 Reflection on Own Behavior

It became apparent from the data that parents are critically reflecting on their behavior towards the intention of engaging in sharenting after learning about the consequences. In terms of practice theory, reflecting on one’s behavior can be seen as the doing of a practice. This is evident as many parents view sharenting as a form of showing off, something they prefer not to engage in. Take for instance Luna Bailey’s standpoint: *“I think if you want to be interested in each other, you can also visit them. You don't have to put your whole life on Facebook.”* The Johnson family agrees: *“You put your children in a shop window to make money.”* A father from r/Parenting wrote the following about this topic: *I think my reservation is, are you here to see my kid? Or are you here to get your social media content.”* (April 2024).

Moreover, the interview data showed that parents ask permission from their children when taking a photo. Skylar Bennett (mother of a 12 and 11-year-old) said the following: *“[...] at some point I realized it. Well, I have to ask permission from my children.”* This also crossed Brooke Morgan’s mind (mother of an 11-year-old): *“When I share a photo of [...], I often ask her, because she is now of such an age, whether she is okay with me sharing that photo.”* These results illustrate that parents are reflecting on their behavior, which can be seen as doings. These

doings give rise to the meanings around sharenting, which will be discussed in the next paragraph.

4.2.2 Impact on Children's Lives

Interestingly, parents are also reconsidering the impact sharenting could have on their children's lives. This is especially evident from both the interviews and netnographic research, with recurring patterns such as consent and AI. For instance, the Harper family has the following concerns: *"What will those children think later? Will they like that later? They have no say in it now."* Rose Parker (mother of a 1-year-old) agrees, stating: *"[...] I don't know when he looks back later, he will think, yes, he might not have done it that way himself."* Moreover, the Stewart family has concerns regarding bullying: *"[...] if your child is later visited by friends and there is a weird picture between them, yes you do not want to bother them with that actually."* These concerns can be seen as meanings, as the evaluation of the impact of sharenting is accompanied by different feelings. The interview data showed that besides concern, the feeling of fear especially emerges among parents. This is evident from the following statements: *"It's a bit of a bad feeling knowing that something like this could happen to you, to your child's photos."* (Rose Parker), *"I think everyone has become more cautious in recent years anyway."* (Maxime Fisher).

With regards to AI, this phase differs from the awareness phase in that parents now worry about the fact that AI can distort and save children's faces without any consent, moving beyond awareness to forming understandings. A father from r/NewParents wrote the following: *"AI is literally storing your children's face in a database and your kid can't give permission to that."* (April 2024). Maxime Fisher has a similar view: *"Although with AI that doesn't matter a damn these days either. All you need is your face and then it can be totally abused."* A father from r/WrenEleanor wrote he feels physically sick about the dangers of AI: *"AI, identity theft, deep fake, digital footprint, etc. Makes me want to puke just thinking about it."* (April 2024). Parents see the dangers and impact sharenting might have on their children's lives. Moreover, the interview data showed that parents have a fear of their children being bullied. This is a big concern for the Bailey family: *"They can blackmail you in front of you."* These feelings shape the meanings and interpretations parents associate with sharenting in this specific phase. Thus, these findings illustrate that parents experience fear and concern regarding the consequences of posting their children's photos on the Internet. These feelings allow parents to learn from their experiences and lead to a modification of behavior, which is addressed in the final phase.

4.3 Phase 3: Sharenting Behavior

The third phase in the sharenting process relates to the sharenting behavior of parents, which is the actual doing of the practice. This phase explains that parents can choose between three types of sharenting behavior (not sharing, sharing in a private group, and public sharing), based on the formed awareness and cultural understandings about privacy concerns. It is important to note that this is still seen as one behavior. The practice parents eventually choose to engage in, or the specific meanings, objects, and doings to pursue, is based on phases 1 and 2 where parents become aware of and have learned about sharenting. The data showed that parents mostly post in a private group setting or refrain from sharing at all. This subchapter will discuss the three sharenting behavior types to conclude the process and form a broad overview of sharenting behavior among parents.

4.3.1 No Sharenting

The interview data showed that there are a few parents who refrain from sharenting at all, meaning that they do not even share in a private group. In terms of practice theory, the practice here is parents protecting their children's data and refusing to engage in sharenting. The reason for this is that they look out for their child's best interest, keeping in mind the impact it could have on their children in the future. Rose Parker (mother of a 1-year-old) said: *"We just don't want our child on the Internet. You know, a child like that just didn't ask for it."* For Brooke Morgan (mother of an 11-year-old), this is a sensitive topic: *"Children don't need to be exposed to everyone. Want to protect your children a bit?"* Brooke also said that if people wanted to see her child they could come over in real life. Daphne Smith (mother of a 15-year-old) also has clear reasons not to share: *"I personally think it's unwise to share at all. Because those children don't choose for it, that's one thing."* It is apparent from the interview data that parents who refrain from sharenting at all do so because of previous negative sharenting experiences, such as unwanted comments and followers.

Moreover, the data showed that besides experienced sharers, there is another group of parents who made strict agreements to not share any photos of their children at all, public or private. However, within this group, parents sometimes have a feeling they miss out on the sharenting trend. This feeling emerges as families who do share on Instagram only post about happy memories, showing off their pride.

We're also going to get an ice cream [...]. Do you know that you just start doubting yourself? Gosh, someone else is having more fun than me. But that child screams the same way or cries the same way or doesn't want to put on the

shoes or doesn't want to finish dinner. They don't put that on Instagram. No, you know? (James Hayes, father of a 1-year-old).

Thus, parents who refrain from sharenting have clear grounds for their behavior, although they do experience feelings of missing out, they stick with their initial agreement. It is an upcoming trend among parents, together with private group sharenting, discussed in the next subsection.

4.3.2 Private Group Sharenting

In contrast to parents who do not want to engage in sharenting behavior at all, parents who fall in the private group sharenting category like to update family and friends about their child. Apparent from the interview data and netnographic research is that most parents share on a private Instagram account: *“I always very naively think oh I only share that with my Instagram circle [...] but I do worry about what is possible with a photo that is online.”* (Hugo Fisher, father of a 6, 9, and 11-year-old), *“Only on Instagram [...] that's a closed group.”* (Brooke Morgan). A mother from r/NewParents wrote: *“A Private account is fine, but anything public is crossing the yellow-red line.”* (April 2024).

Besides private social media accounts, some parents wish to use different sources, such as protective apps. This is especially evident in the Reddit community. A mother wrote the following about this in r/NewParents: *“We're not sharing any photos online at all. All communication goes through private chat groups with family.”* (April 2024). Another r/NewParents mother has the same thoughts: *“We utilize a private shared family album through a paid app.”* (April 2024). The Hayes family agrees with this approach, stating *“If I have a nice photo, I will send it via WhatsApp.”*, as does the Johnson family: *“I'll post it there [WhatsApp]. I don't post that in the middle of the socials.”* Examples like these illustrate the movement of parents becoming more cautious about sharenting, and using objects such as private social media accounts or other protective apps. In terms of sharenting, one option remains, which is public sharenting.

4.3.3 Public Sharenting

The cautiousness of parents regarding sharenting is seen in the interview data regarding public sharenting. In the 15 interviews conducted, only two families have engaged in public sharenting recently. Interestingly, these parents changed their behavior to private group sharenting after receiving unwanted reactions and a feeling of uncomfortableness. Harper Reed (mother of a 6-year-old) said the following about this: *“I noticed that the strangest people react when your profile is not private, and that made me very uncomfortable. You have no idea who is on the other side of the screen and what they are doing with your photos.”* Rose Parker (mother of a

1-year-old) explains that after sharing, she became aware of the dark side of social media: *“During the first month we sometimes shared a photo on Instagram [...] we talked about it and then we said maybe we shouldn't do it anymore because of AI.”*

When looking at the netnographic research, the Reddit community has fairly similar experiences with public sharenting.

I used to be one of those parents who thought parents were being overdramatic about not sharing their kids on social media. What changed my mind is that one time, I posted an Instagram reel of my toddlers in diapers without making it private. The amount of likes and friend requests I received from strangers, especially from foreign countries, and all that weird [...] was disturbing, especially after checking out some of their profiles (r/Dads user, April 2024).

Evident from the data is that after negative experiences with public sharenting, parents move into the awareness phase once again, form new meanings, and modify their behavior to private group sharenting. The data showed there is one aspect that moderates parents' sharenting behavior, which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

4.3.4 Generation of Parents

The final matter to be addressed is the influence of parents' generation on sharenting behavior. The interview data already showed that the younger generation parents (late generation Y, early generation Z) are more aware of the dark side of social media than parents from an older generation (late generation X, early generation Y). This is evident as the older generation parents used to engage in public sharenting when they were younger. Mother Laura Harper (age 49) said the following about this: *“When the children were young, there was a lot of sharing, but later you started to think more.”* Siebe Clark agrees (age 43): *“Yes I think so. But that was a long time ago though. Eight years ago or so.”* The reason for the change of behavior is explained by Daphne Smith (age 49) as she mentions that privacy concerns are a matter of the last few years: *“That wasn't really a thing back then. That was 2012 when I went on Facebook, privacy has really only been in recent years.”*

The Reddit community also sees a difference between sharenting behavior of younger and older generation parents. One user from r/Daddit wrote: *“I would say that the older generations generally post more photos on social media. It's the younger generation parents that are more cautious about this.”* (April 2024). One father from the same Reddit forum agrees: *“I was thinking about this after posting. My in-laws would (if they could) bombard the Internet with photos of my daughter if they had the chance. Thankfully today's technology is just a bit*

beyond them.” (April, 2024). The research findings indeed indicate that the younger generation is more cautious about sharenting.

Thus, the data from this research explain and demonstrate a difference in sharenting behavior from the perspective of older and younger generation parents. To conclude this chapter, previous sharenting experiences and becoming aware of the current privacy concerns made parents of all ages change their behavior towards sharing photos of their children on social media, especially on Instagram.

5. Discussion

From the previous chapters, it has become apparent that there is a growing awareness among parents of all ages regarding the dark side of social media. Consequently, parents are modifying their sharenting behavior due to increasing privacy concerns. In this chapter, theoretical contributions are prominently featured. Next, the practical implications and suggestions for actors involved in sharenting are discussed. Finally, this chapter addresses this study's limitations and presents recommendations for future research.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research explores the impact of privacy concerns on parents' sharenting behavior. Drawing from relevant literature, this study presents several outcomes that make valuable contributions in the field of privacy, sharenting, and practice theory, while also providing suggested directions for further exploration.

5.1.1 Contributions to Privacy in the Domain of Consumer Culture Research

In the privacy literature, three concepts have been widely studied: privacy concerns (Smith et al., 1996), privacy calculus (Plangger & Montecci, 2020), and privacy paradox (Kokolakis, 2017). However, these individual concepts miss the exploration of privacy concerns manifest within a family context, particularly regarding sharenting. Within the field of marketing and CCT, this is an even more understudied topic.

Horrpu (2023) was one of the first to lay the foundation for such research by synthesizing how privacy has been conceptualized within consumer theory. Nonetheless, as with most prior literature regarding privacy, Horrpu (2023) did not take a family context angle, carving out the opportunity for this study to establish a new connection between privacy and consumer culture. Therefore, this research took a novel approach by empirically studying parents' privacy concerns regarding the upcoming phenomenon of sharenting. This research adds new insights to privacy and sharenting literature as it sheds light on parents' subjective experiences regarding privacy concerns by seeing privacy as an enacted practice instead of only the cognitive components. By doing so, the research findings uncovered that parents attribute two feelings to the consequences of sharenting: concern and fear. Future research could strengthen the focus of seeing privacy as an enacted practice by investigating how privacy practices vary across different generations of parents. In this research, the generation of parents is included as a moderator. To fully explore generational differences, a recommendation is to

examine the changes in attitudes, meanings, and practices towards privacy across different generations of parents.

5.1.2 Contributions to Sharenting Theory

Firstly, prior privacy literature outlined parents' importance in responsible sharenting behavior (Brosch, 2016; Minkus et al., 2015). However, scant attention has been given to exploring the factors that contribute to parents' privacy concerns related to sharenting, as this is a new topic emerging in literature. This research showed that parents are becoming aware of the dark side of social media and the permanence of online content. This heightened awareness influences parents' sharenting behavior. For example, parents are more cautious about sharing their children's personal information on Instagram, often opting for private accounts only friends and family can access. As a result, parents are considering the long-term implications sharenting could have on their children in the future and act accordingly.

Moreover, these findings contradict the results of Ong et al. (2022) as they concluded that parents of the current generation may have a false sense of trust regarding the impact of sharenting. Ong et al. (2022) argue that parents of the current generation are familiar with social media and easily share their children on different platforms. However, the results of this study suggest that the younger generation parents (late generation Y, early generation Z) are extremely aware of the dark side of social media and the consequences of sharenting. This is opposed to the older generation parents (late generation X, early generation Y) who engaged in public sharenting when they were younger, as privacy concerns were not important back then. The results illustrate that a shift in behavior is observed where parents of all ages are starting to refrain from sharenting, contributing to a new body of work within CCT research.

Secondly, an ethical dilemma is faced by parents as the results showed that there is a tension between parents' desire to share happy moments of their children's lives on Instagram and their concerns about respecting their children's privacy. Prior literature suggested that parents want to be seen as good parents by engaging in sharenting, risking impinging upon their children's privacy (Brosch, 2016). However, this viewpoint is contradicted as the findings of this research show that parents have an active stance in asking their children for permission to take a photo before sharing it on Instagram. Prior literature did not account for this new parenting angle where permission is sought from children. Nowadays it is often assumed that parents have the right to control their children's digital presence and that sharing happy family photos online has become a part of modern parenting (Minkus et al., 2015). The unexpected research finding sheds new light on the cultural meanings being developed among parents, as

parents are starting to refrain from sharenting because they feel their children did not choose to be shared online. Thus, by taking a CCT approach this research has contributed to seeing privacy practices arising through the interactions of parents and social-cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). A recommendation for future research is to investigate how sharenting practices regarding seeking permission from children manifest in societies with different cultural norms and attitudes that shape parents' views on privacy, expanding the body of sharenting literature.

5.1.3 Contributions to Practice Theory

A substantial body of work consolidates practice theory (i.e. Arsel & Bean, 2013; Reckwitz, 2002; Thomas & Epp, 2019). Nonetheless, this study added two important contributions to this domain: splitting the elements of the practice into distinct phases and providing a feedback loop that allows for a modification of behavior.

The first contribution involves the unique positioning of this research regarding practice theory. It is important to note that this study has drawn from the work by Thomas and Epp (2019) as their research shows that parents can envision how a practice will come together. This formed the basis of parents' sharenting behavior process conceptualized in this research. Despite the existing rich knowledge, this research differentiates itself from other practice theory-oriented studies as it takes the sharenting practice elements of objects, meanings, and doings, and splits them into distinct phases. This approach provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of sharenting practices, allowing for a deeper exploration of the elements that influence parents' sharenting behavior. The distinct phases enable parents to envision a clear practice, incorporating different elements of the practice throughout each phase. These elements together inform the decision regarding which option of the wider sharenting practice to engage in.

The second contribution directly adds to the work of Thomas and Epp (2019). In contrast to their work, this research conceptualized a feedback loop within the sharenting framework, making it possible to illustrate the process from parents who are first-time sharers transitioning to experienced sharers. This research has therefore integrated reflecting on the practice after it has been enacted, where parents modify their behavior as they learn about new objects, meanings, and doings. In light of these findings, this study also directly refutes the argumentation of Thomas and Epp's (2019) work as the authors argued that *how* parents make plans ultimately matters more than *what* parents actually plan to do. In the context of sharenting, this does not hold as the findings of this research suggest that parents do change their behavior

after engaging in the practice. Thus, this research is pioneering as sharenting is a new practice which is understudied in current literature.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Understanding parents' sharenting behavior allows for the comprehension of a new routinized practice and sheds light on the meanings that are attached to this. Since the research findings showed that sharenting behavior is shifting in a new direction, different stakeholders have the opportunity to leverage this phenomenon.

First, as mentioned before, the continuous development of technologies through which data can be collected has sparked increased interest in the dark side of data collection where privacy concerns are becoming more pivotal (Bleier et al., 2020; Martin & Murphy, 2016). The framework of this research shows that these concerns are legitimate as parents are refraining from sharenting. This provides an opportunity for policymakers to update their online privacy and data protection regulations as new insights are gained into parents' shifting sharenting behavior. By understanding the decision-making process of sharenting, policymakers can develop more effective and targeted regulations to protect children's personal data. For example, within the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) primarily applies to organizations that process personal data, not to individuals for personal activities (GDPR, 2019). This means the regulation does not apply to parents posting photos of their children on social media. Therefore, a new policy could include consent requirements for children to agree to before parents can share the photo online. For younger children who cannot consent, automated AI-driven reporting and removal mechanisms can be implemented to regulate children's personal information and remove photos if the content is inappropriate.

Second, due to the increasing awareness among parents, the consequences of sharenting are becoming more pivotal. Marketers could build on this awareness by educating parents of all ages about the increasing privacy concerns regarding sharenting. By leveraging the meanings of concerns and fear, the importance of careful social media behavior can be highlighted. This can be illustrated by explicitly showing the negative consequences associated with sharenting that could impact children's well-being. This implication provides an opportunity for Instagram, as most parents have an online presence on this platform. Instagram could use its widespread reach and influence to educate parents about the consequences of sharenting and the impact it could have on their children. The platform already features a safety center, this could be extended to a "Family Safety Center" where parents can find all necessary information and resources related to sharenting, including educational programs and resources

that guide parents to engage in responsible sharenting practices. This center would be designed for parents to support them in managing and protecting their children's online presence. Guides about privacy settings, online safety, and possible consequences can provide parents with the knowledge needed to make a well-informed decision regarding sharenting. This mitigates potential risks associated with sharing children's personal information online.

Finally, consumers can benefit from this research, realizing that online content is permanent and their sharenting behavior can have a long-lasting impact on their children. This research has contributed to a better understanding of the objects, meanings, and doings in families' lives. As a result, parents can make a more informed decision regarding when to engage in sharenting, knowing all the facts involved.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

As with any research, this study has certain limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the theoretical contributions of studying parents' sharenting process using consumer culture theory are based on the subjective experiences of parents, impacting the transferability of the research. To improve the transferability, two different research methods were applied: interviews and netnographic research, ensuring triangulation (Mik-Meyer & Justesen, 2012; Myers, 2019). The interviews were conducted with Dutch families, of varying ages. As this research investigated a new and understudied phenomenon, cultural characteristics, beliefs, and values might influence the findings. For example, meanings attached to sharenting behavior in the Netherlands differ from other countries in the world.

Moreover, by consulting an international forum such as Reddit, the findings of this research could be distorted due to cultural differences. For this research to be transferable to other consumer cultures, a recommendation for future research is to conduct the same study in different countries, investigating if socioeconomic disparities among parents in different working classes affect their sharenting behavior. This will shed light on parents' social media behavior around the world, contributing to a larger body of work regarding sharenting.

Thirdly, one aspect this research did not include was the impact of sharenting on parents' technology use. This is an interesting aspect, which was not included in this research due to the limited time frame. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to focus on the technological side of sharenting, as this research has focused on the feeling aspects.

Subsequently, it is important to note the possibility of self-reporting bias. Since data has been obtained through interviews with participants the researcher holds a personal connection to, participants may have magnified or underestimated their actual sharenting behavior. This

could lead to inaccurate data. For example, participants could magnify the meanings attached to sharenting as they know this research was intended to uncover specific meanings. Therefore, a recommendation for future research could be to incorporate probability sampling on a larger scale to select participants for the interviews.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, this research faced a 6-month timeline, which resulted in a time constraint. Since this is a profound topic being investigated, conducting comprehensive research on sharenting within families requires a significant amount of time and resources. Therefore, a minimum timeline of one year would have been a better option. Although one year would be better, this research made the most of its time constraints by opting for convenience and snowball sampling. This presented an opportunity to investigate a broad target group, enabling the observation of cultural shifts within different generations of parents.

6. Conclusion

Prior research has established a large body of work regarding privacy practices to protect children from giving out their personal information online. However, only a handful of studies have investigated the privacy concerns children may face from others. Moreover, within privacy literature, studies have focused on the cognitive aspects of privacy, what is missed here are the materials, objects, skills, and competencies of consumers performing privacy. Therefore, this research aimed to fill the gap in existing knowledge by exploring the factors contributing to privacy concerns related to parents posting photos of their children online, using practice theory. The findings of this research answer the research objective of which meanings parents attribute to privacy concerns regarding the practice of sharenting on Instagram. To answer this objective, two questions were formulated.

The first research question was: *“Which privacy concerns emerge when parents consider posting photos of their children on social media?”* This study revealed that parents learn about the problematic objects revolving around sharenting, such as the permanence of online content and the dark side of social media during the awareness phase. Parents were shocked to learn that photos of their children can end up at child exploitation websites which attract individuals with malicious intent. Moreover, parents are concerned and scared about the rise of AI. These meanings are attributed to privacy concerns as AI can easily manipulate images of children based on one photo, contributing to the exploitation of children’s photos.

The second research question of this study was: *“How do privacy concerns shape parents’ current practices of posting photos of their children on social media?”* The research data has shown that parents reflect on their own sharenting behavior based on the developed awareness about the permanence of online content and the dark side of social media. Especially parents of the younger generation see that sharenting could have an impact on their child’s life and therefore are starting to refrain from posting photos online. Most parents wish to keep their family updated on their child’s development and choose to do so within private groups, such as closed Instagram accounts or via WhatsApp.

This research has contributed new knowledge to the existing literature on consumer privacy and sharenting in the context of CCT. The findings of this study enhance our understanding of the meanings parents attach to sharenting behavior and highlight a growing trend in recent years where parents are starting to refrain from this practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Project: Family technology consumption

INTERVIEWER:	Anne-Fleur Elsenaar
DATA & TIME:	
AUDIE/VIDEO RECORDER?	Audio
OTHER COMMENTS:	

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Names:	
AGE (CIRCLE RANGE):	5-14 15-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+
GENDER:	Male / Female / Nonbinary / Transgender / Prefer not to say

PRE-INTERVIEW:

What do I know about the participants prior to the interview? How well do I know them?

What is our relation or how did we meet?

INTERVIEW START

VERBAL CONSENT FORM

EXPLAIN: I WILL START WITH SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU. AFTER THESE I WILL ASK MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TOPIC I AM STUDYING.

FEEL FREE TO ASK ME IF QUESTIONS AREN'T CLEAR, AND ALSO IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE ANSWERING CERTAIN QUESTIONS.

1) Rapport building and General Context Background

Thank you for taking the time for this interview. This interview will be conducted to gather information on the topic of technology usage in families to complete my Master's Thesis. First I will ask you some general questions about yourself and the family and then on your general technology usage. After that, I will dive deeper into questions related to 3 technology topics. To give a general sense of the kind of technology I am talking about, in this research, I mean current technologies such as communication technology, the Internet, everyday devices, and entertainment technology.

Can you tell me a little about yourself:

- Can you provide some insight into your current family situation, do you have a partner? Children? Who lives at home here?
- What do you spend most of your time doing? (working, studying, hobbies)
- What do you do in your spare time outside of work and school (alone or together)?

Questions about family dynamics (Contextual background):

- Can you tell me about what is important in life for your family?
- What do you do together as a family in your free time/weekends?
- Are there specific traditions or activities that you do together as a family?

General questions regarding technology use:

- Which technological devices do you use the most, both individually and together? (think of mobile devices, Internet, mobile applications, gaming systems, wearables and other entertainment devices).
- To the children: Which devices with a screen do you use? (for Maartje)
 - Which one do you use the most?
 - Which devices do you use together with your brother/sister?
- Of the various technological devices you use, which do you use most in your spare time?
- Can you estimate the number of hours you typically use this device(s)?
- What do you think of your own use of technology? (Do you think it is too much, or normal, would you like to reduce it?) → ask why?
- Do you sometimes feel like you would like to reduce your technology use or time spent on devices?

- If so, how do you do this?
- To the parents → What do you think of your child's use of technology?
 - Do you actively deal with their technology use, with rules or control, etc.? Or do you just let them do what they want?
- How do you manage technology use for yourself and for the children? (such as no devices in bed, maximum number of hours per day, etc.)
- Do you have specific rules for technology consumption?
 - If so, what are those rules?
 - If so, why do you have these rules?
 - If not, why not?
- Do you think your technology use influences that of the children? How?
- Do you see similarities or differences? → example?

2) Specialised Questions (NARROWED TO YOUR TOPIC)

Questions - Technology paradox

Intro: Now I will be asking you some questions relating to your view on technologies. The goal of my research is to gain insights into how families view modern-day technologies and how they manage their usage.

- Is there something that excites you about current technology?
 - Can you describe a situation where you became happy/enthusiastic/excited?
- Is there something you don't enjoy about current technology?
 - Can you describe a situation where you became frustrated/angry/anxious?
- How do you generally view these types of technologies and everything we can do with them in this current era? (are you more positive or negative?)
- How does technology impact your life? Can you give examples?
- Can you give an example of conflicting feelings (paradox) about a certain technology? (for example, do you view the same technology as something good and something bad?)

Paradox 1: Technology to entertain kids (time for yourself) / kids getting lost in it and addicted

- Do you ever use technology devices (telephone, tablets, TV, etc.) to entertain or distract the children so that you can have a moment for yourself or to do other chores or tasks (e.g. cooking dinner, cleaning)?
- If the kids are on an iPad or watching TV, is it easy to get them off of it and put the devices away? Or are they resisting and making a big fuss about it?
 - How do you deal with this?
- Do you feel that you and/or the children are really in their own world when you/they are on technology devices?
 - Do you feel like it is an addiction?
 - How do you deal with this?

Paradox 2: Monitoring / invasion of privacy

- Do you use technology to keep track of each other to see where someone is or if someone has arrived safely at their destination or monitor what the children are doing online? (think of checking what your child is looking for and watching on the Internet or checking via GPS whether someone has arrived at work safely, etc.).
 - Can you give examples?
 - If so, why?
 - If not, why?
- Do you also see this as a violation of privacy or of trust in each other? Or is it sometimes necessary for each other's safety up to a certain limit?
 - How do you deal with this?

Paradox 3: Digital disconnectivity / digital dependency paradox

- Do you feel that you are dependent on technology? → can you explain?
- Do you feel the need to check your phone a lot? → why?
- Do you have the feeling that because of technology you are more busy with work outside of the typical working hours (9-5)?

Questions - Attitudes toward privacy within technology

Intro: Now I will be asking you questions related to the topic of attitudes towards privacy when using technology. Privacy nowadays is a topic that gets a lot of attention, as you may know. Therefore, the goal of my research is to investigate how parenthood changes attitudes towards privacy, specifically when parents are sharing sensitive information about their children on social media. Additionally, I aim to understand how this shift in behavior impacts parents' technology use.

Phase 1: Awareness

- What is your opinion towards sharing photos or information about children on social media?
- Can you tell me about a specific time when you shared a photo of your child on social media?
 - IF THEY DID NOT SHARE: next question
 - What was the reason for sharing (birthday, first day of school)?
 - Do you take certain considerations into account before sharing a photo of your child on social media (privacy issues)?
 - **If YES:** Can you tell me a little more about these privacy considerations before posting the photo?
 - On which social media platform was the photo posted?
- Can you tell me about a memorable moment when you wanted to share a photo of your child on social media but did not?
 - What is the reason for not posting the photo on social media? (= most likely privacy concerns or dark side social media)
 - How did you become aware of this? (through the news for example or blogs)

Phase 2+3: Cultural Understandings/Modification of behavior

- Do you often see family members/friends/colleagues posting about their children on social media?
 - **If yes:** can you tell me what the post was about?
 - Are these posts public or private?
 - On what platform are these photos posted?
 - **If no:** do you know the reasons why they do not share photos of their children online?

BASED ON SHARING / NOT SHARING PHOTOS ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

If parents **DO** share:

- Can you tell me about the time when you became more cautious about sharing certain details about your child online?
 - What was the reason for this? (privacy, kids don't choose this)
 - What have you learned from this experience?

If parent **DON'T** share:

- Can you tell me when it was decided not to post photos of your child online?
 - What was the reason for this?

Final questions

- What specific feelings do you experience when deciding whether/not to post a photo of your child online (fear, fomo, concern)?
 - How do you think sharing photos on social media affects your child's development and privacy (see if there is an impact)?
 - Are you aware of this before sharing a photo?
 - IF YES: Has this led you to make adjustments, such as posting only in a private group or with a private account?
- Can you tell me how your approach to sharing photos of your child on social media has affected your use of technology (e.g., do you spend less time on social media)?
- Can you tell me a bit about how your experiences with parenting have affected your technology use? (Do you use more devices or less?)

Questions - how technology affects the family feeling

Now I'm going to ask you some questions about how technology can affect the family feeling. I will ask questions about your relationships within the family, the technological devices you use as a family and how this, as specifically as possible, influences the family feeling.

Family identity

- Does technology help you have quality time together as a family?

- Are certain relationships within your family characterized by technology? (For example, one of the parents spends quality time with one of the children through a video game)
- Do you notice a change in forms of communication with each other due to the presence of technology in the family?
- Are there certain habits or routines in the family that involve technology? (e.g. watch Wie is de Mol together every Saturday evening)
- To the parents: Can you give an example of a situation in which you became frustrated with the children's technology use?
- To the children: Can you give an example of a situation in which you became a little angry with your parents because you were not allowed to play with a screen / look at a screen?
- Can you give an example of a situation in which you enjoy using technological devices together as a family? (TV, Nintendo Switch, reading from an e-reader)
- Can you give an example of a situation where the use of technological devices had a negative effect on the atmosphere in the family?
- Do you use technology during breakfast, lunch or dinner? (or other moments on a day when you are together as a family)

Family feeling

- Do you feel that you are really together as a family when one or more family members are sitting behind a screen? (Or do you have the feeling that everyone is in his/her own world? (Together alone))
- Do you feel that everyone can be themselves in the family with the presence and use of technology?

In my study I define family feeling as the ability to be fully yourself among other family members, the unconditional love and support for each other, and the feeling that you live as a collective instead of as an individual when you are at home with other family members.

- Would the family feeling be stronger or weaker without technology?
 - Why do you think so?

4. Wrap Up

Is there anything I have left out? Is there anything else you would like to add/discuss?

Anything else you like me to know about? Is there anyone you recommend I should talk to?

POST-INTERVIEW

- It is really helpful to take notes of your overall impressions of the participant and the interview you have just had.
- Note the setting of your interview (in-person) or what you saw in the video (online).
- Were there interruptions? (e.g., family members barging in, complaining about sneaker collection)
- Did you observe anything interesting when they interacted with their sneakers? Or bots on the screen?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form



Nijmegen School of Business
Department of Business Administration

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: *Technology and Families*

This is a student research project contributing towards the fulfillment of the requirements of the Master's degree of Business Administration - Marketing being completed by the student researcher, Britney Stoffels / Anne-Fleur Elsenaar / Maartje Spaanjaars.

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s):

Student Researcher:

Anne-Fleur Elsenaar, Department of Business Administration at Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University;

Email: (anne-fleur.elsenaar@ru.nl)

Maartje Spaanjaars, Department of Business Administration at Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University;

Email: (maartje.spaanjaars@ru.nl)

Britney Stoffels, Department of Business Administration at Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University;

Email: (britney.stoffels@ru.nl)

Supervisors:

Dr. P.J. Franco, Assistant Professor of Marketing at Nijmegen School of Management at Radboud University;

Email: (paolo.franco@ru.nl)

1. I consent to participate in this student project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve observations and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I understand that the data collected and analyzed in this project might also be used by the researchers in closely related research projects.
5. I understand that my participation may involve audio, photo, and/or video capture if possible and appropriate, and may involve a period of discussion with the researcher over the interview recorded.
6. I understand that persons under the age of consent (under 18) might be present during the interviews at home, and their responses may be collected, and their behaviors observed.
7. I understand that my participation includes:
 - This initial interview with the researcher(s).
 - A potential invitation for further interview(s) with the researcher(s).
This is at my discretion.

8. I acknowledge that:
- (a) the possible effects of participating in the *observations* have been explained to my satisfaction;
 - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any data I have provided;
 - (c) the project is for the purpose of academic research;
 - (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
 - (e) I have been informed that with my consent the *observations may be recorded and transcribed. Recordings* will be destroyed after transcription (but no less than six months after the fieldwork). The transcriptions will be retained indefinitely in safe storage;
 - (f) I am aware that all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses will be taken, including the removal of personal information in audio transcripts and using a pseudonym instead of my real name while the interview is being recorded.
 - (g) Due to the small sample size of this study and in consideration of all reasonable measures to de-identify my responses, I have been informed that there is still a risk that my responses and I may be identified through the outputs of this study.
 - (h) I am aware that there are legal limitations to the confidentiality of the data collected from me after all measures to de-identify my responses have been taken. This includes that the data provided can be subject to subpoena, freedom of information requests, or mandated reporting by some professions.

(i) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings can be forwarded to me, should I desire.

I consent to the researcher observing behavior

yes **no**
(please tick)

I consent to interviews being audio-taped

yes **no**
(please tick)

I consent to the use of a pseudonym instead of my real name after the interview has been transcribed and the usage of this pseudonym in resulting outputs of this study.

yes **no**
(please tick)

I wish to be notified when outputs of this research project are published and receive a summary of research findings (If yes, please also provide your email address below)

yes **no**
(please tick)

Participant signature:

Date:

Participant contact email:

Appendix C: Plain Language Statement



**Nijmegen School of Management
Department of Business Administration**

PROJECT TITLE: *Technology and Families*

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

Dear Sir/Madam,

We invite you and your family to take part in this student research project being conducted by the student researchers Anne-Fleur Elsenaar, Maartje Spaanjaars, and Britney Stoffels through the Department of Management & Marketing at Radboud University. This student research project contributes towards the fulfillment of the requirements of the Master's degree being completed by the student researcher.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the way families view current-day technologies and how they manage them in their everyday family life. We are interested in examining the types of technology that impact you as a family and use in everyday life (e.g., phones, iPads, computers, wearables, gaming systems, Internet, applications, social media, etc.). We hope this project will help us better understand the way that technology fits into everyday family life at home.

Research Process: The researcher will ask your family questions about the ways you view and use technology, ranging from your attitude towards the privacy concerns regarding technology, how technology affects the family's feelings, to how you view and manage the technology paradox. Please note that this will likely require you to talk about the technologies you and your family are consuming and your personal views on them. Since we are carrying out these interviews in person at your home, the researcher will observe the family dynamics and interactions relating to technology usage.

The length of these interviews is expected to be around one hour and is contingent on how long you are all willing to participate in this study. This is at your discretion. Further interviews following the initial interview are possible and may allow your family and the researchers to continue our discussions. Participation in any future interviews is at your discretion. All interviews including any further interviews, as well as your family's overall participation are voluntary; you can withdraw at any time, and you can withdraw any data you have supplied (up to the point of analysis/publication).

Confidentiality and Data Use: Only the researchers involved in the project will have access to the raw data in this study. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal restrictions. We audio-record the interviews for research purposes. Once we have transcribed and analyzed the recordings we remove any personally identifiable information from the transcript documents to provide you anonymity. In resulting research publications you will be referred to by a pseudonym. A copy of the results – in full or redacted form - of the study, or a summary of the research findings are available to you if you wish to be sent a copy.

Possible Effects: No physical or psychological risks to you are foreseen. You will not be audio-recorded or your personal details collected without consent. With the small sample of participants in this study, there is the possibility that you and your responses may be identified through the outputs of this study. However all reasonable measures will be taken to mitigate this risk, including de-identification of any personal information in transcriptions of recorded audio and reference to you using a pseudonym in any written outputs produced from the research.

Providing Consent: Each member of your family over the age of 18 will be required to fill out a consent form to participate in the research or provide verbal consent at the start of a research interview.

Researchers:

Anne-Fleur Elsenaar (student researcher)	anne-fleur.elsenaar@ru.nl
Maartje Spaanjaars (student researcher)	maartje.spaanjaars@ru.nl
Britney Stoffels (student researcher)	britney.stoffels@ru.nl
Dr. Pao Franco (supervisor)	paolo.franco@ru.nl

Any Questions?

For more information or for a request for the final report to be sent to you in an electronic format, please contact the student researchers.

Thank you for your assistance,

Anne-Fleur Elsenaar, Maartje Spaanjaars and Britney Stoffels