Sharenting: new pratice of parenting in digital age

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Sharenting: new practice of parenting in digital age

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Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become important platform in sharing everyday life and disclosing our personal image. Today, parenting and and the activities on SNS has become a visible and the term "sharenting" becomes common in everyday talk. Sharenting is a new term coming from the word share and parenting. It refers to the parents' activities on SNS such as posting their children's photos or their activities as parents. The phenomenon of sharing and disclosing information about children on SNS has grown rapidly. Social networking sites such as Instagram are full of information and photos potraying parenthood moments. There are many debatable isssues related to this activities such as the children's privacy and the risk they may experience. In Indonesia, the sharenting activities in Instagram are commonly practiced by new mothers including celebrities and influencer. This research aimed to find out two dimensions of self-disclosure- the breadth and depth of the shared information and the underlaying decision process which make parents share their children's personal photos and information.

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen to explore in depth information and data through interview and observation techniques. The analysis of data uses interactive analysis including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. There were ten young mothers as informants of this researh who regularly post their personal information especially their moments with their children on Instagram.

The result showed that most informants shared their children's photos, stories, anecdotes and products they used for their children. Most of them shared personal or intimate moment with their children, and only few limit the shared photos and privacy account system. Most of these young women shared the photos daily and some only in some special occasions. The motives which drove these young mothers to share their children photos and information were pride, stay connected with family and friends, receive social support and self actualization as new parents. Most of them had a lack of awareness of the privacy issue and the consequences of their actions.

Keywords: Sharenting, children's privacy, Instagram, transition to parenthood

Introduction

Becoming parents in digital era is totally different from parents in the era of 80's or 90's. The emerge of technology is unstoppable and it effects the way we interact each other including in the way of parenthood. Traditionally, a family involved mother as both the child and house keeper whilts father as the breadwinner. Parenthood is likely closer to motherhood. As a mother, a woman is expected to perform as a good mother. The society pressure is a lot bigger than the pressure to a father and his fatherhood.

So as to parenting, a mother will take more significant role in raising the children, keeping the house clean and make everything in order. In the past, most women who just became mothers would stick on the rules from their mothers, mothers in law or the sorrounded community. As a new mother with the high expectation from the society, most women will try their best to be good mothers. There were many myths limiting the role of new mothers to their babies. Those myths such as the yellowish breast milk at the early breastfeeding -what we call today collostrum- should not be given to the baby as it was poisonous. A new mother should not eat food with sugar, salt, meat, chilli because they could harm the baby. A new mother would only eat steamed food and vegetables, fried food was forhibited. With the low education and limited information sources, new mothers would believe those myths.

Today, the information technology has developed rapidly and the access to education for women are widely open. Gradually, some myths and supertitions are left behind. But will it make a parenthood easier? Parenthood is still close to motherhood which means a mother will take the same big role as before. According to a research, even in couples wherein both partners work, women still tend to shoulder more work related to the house and child care [1]. It means that a woman involves more in taking care of the children and family regardless she is a full time mother or a career woman. This is interesting since the need of support and guidance in parenting is also needed as much as before. How women get their support system to be mothers in a more individualistic society?

At the moment Social Networking Sites (SNS) has become popular as space for people to interact and to show their self existances. Motherhood in digital age also involves this platform in raising their children. Based on the research conducted by AVG Technologies, on average, children acquire a digital identity by the age of six months. About 81% of children under two years old have digital footprint with their photos posted online [2] Many new parents posted some photos or video to expose their children online in order to get recognition from the peers.

One of popular platforms used by parents to share their children's photos and videos is Instagram. With users of 55 million in Indonesia alone [3] it has put it as the most popular SNS. Indonesian users are also categorized as the most active Instragram story content creators [4] Instagram has may features which allows its user to explore and share their daily activities including parenting. So the term sharenting is getting common because more and more parents use this media to interact each other. They share their parenting in this platform. As a new mother, Instagram gives a new public space and a support system of the parenthood. The support system of parenthood in the past would be from the family and extended family but now it changes to a group of strangers in a social media.

This research aimed to find out two dimensions of self-disclosure- the breadth and depth of the shared information and the underlaying decision process which make parents share their children's personal photos and information.

Literature Review and Methods

Sharenting

Sharenting according to Collins Dictionary is "the habitual use of social media to share news, images, etc of one's children". Sharenting is getting common as the SNS gain their popularity too. In Indonesia, there are many celebrities who share their children's photo and their parenting method. Andien for instance, a young singer who regularly shared her pregnancy, waterbirth labour choice and her son's day-to-day growth. Some people think her way to raise her son is too extreme or not common but at the same time many people praise her motherhood. It is also become a trend from parents to make their children Instagram account and post every single activities of the children. Eventhough there were some cases when people misused the photos to gain profit but it does not stop people from posting their children's photo.The cases such as Ruben Onsu, a famous presenter and Ayu Ting ting, a dangdut singer whose daughters photos were posted in a social media for child trafficking [5] are just few of the examples.

Women identity

As a woman who becomes mother for the first time, she will also be attached with some new identities and social pressure. The identities as a mother, a wife, a nanny, a teacher, a chef and a playmate will be attached and embedded on a woman. The most crucial problem is the adaptation of reproduction role dan her productive role at work. At the beginning of human history women were put in domestic domain and hindered them from making-the-world role[6]. This makes a woman works harder to make her life in balance between personal life and social expectations. When a woman becomes a mother she will face various change such as biology, sense of identity and social relations. Additionally, a woman will lose or alter much of they think about herself by prior to motherhood in term of autonomy, physical appearance, sexuality and accupation [7].

Privacy in SNS

Privacy in SNS is difficult thing if may not be called as impossible. When someone register to SNS she must be ready to loose her privacy. Privacy is a big issue in almost all SNS. Just recently Facebook had to pay 5 US$ 5 million fine for violated its user private data[8]. It shows that SNS can actually use our personal data, photos and videos for their own benefit. Privacy in SNS is something vulnerable and people can easily violate it. In general, personal data is acceptable to be in private domain just as explain in Cambridge dictionary "someone's right to keep their personal matters and relationships secret". But when registering for an account in SNS we are asked to give our personal information eventhough it has a privacy setting but no one can actually

guarantee that the company will not misuse our data just like the case of Facebook mentioned earlier.

Methods

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. This method was chosen to explore in depth information and data through interview and observation techniques. The analysis of data used interactive analysis that includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. This research was conducted in Indonesia with 10 young mothers as informants. These young mothers regularly post their personal information especially their moments with their children on Instagram. The criteria for the informants would be mothers aged between 25-35 years old, living in urban areas of Surabaya, Malang, Denpasar and Pamekasan who have children under three years old.

Result and Discussion

Self disclosure

Social media or SNS has its own characteristic such as participation, disclosure, talks, community and connectivity [9]. Participation, disclosure and connectivity will be discussed further in this paper. The informants are young mothers who mostly first time as mothers and must take care of their children by themselves. Most of them did not really understand the meaning of sharenting but they admit they posted photos, video or parenting activities on Instagram. Instagram became their favourite platform because it offers simplicity, features and information they need.

a. Topic of the shared information

Most of these young mothers shared photo or video related to their children activities, children's pose such as smiling or funny face and their food. The topic are various as can be seen in Table 1. They also shared stories of the children and their achievement as mothers. Most of them only shared happy moments. Only few of them shared sad moment when their children got sick or something bad happened to their children.

Tabel 1. *Topic of the shared photo and video*

Topic	Description	Relevance (%_
Children activities	Playing, eating, bathing, sleeping, singing	50
Children expressions	Smiling, crying, funny expression	30
Parenthood activities	Preparing meals, choosing baby products, family gathering, sharing tips	20

From the topic shared we know that these young mothers disclose a lot of information about themselves and their children. They actively participate in sharenting and make connection to other people. To connect with others they can use some simple topics. Even the self disclosure does not have to be deep and meaningful, superficial disclosure such as just *basa-basi* or "small talk" sometimes matter to build a closer communication [10]. That small talks can be in form of giving comments and

emoticons or replying comments. By keeping up with that form of communication people who interact will keep updating their information and building an emotional relation eventhough they have not met in real life. In fact, gaining likes and positive comments make them happy and stimulate them keep posting and share the happiness.

Frequency

These young mothers actually were very active on Instagram for updating information, news or just stalking around but for sharenting activities especially posting the children's photo/ video they have various answers. Some of them frequently posted their children's photo daily, some once in 2-3 days while others were only in special occasions. In general they started posting parenting activities since they had children. So becoming a mother entittled them with the urge to post their motherhood activities on Instagram. The frequency of connectivity in Instagram will influence the number of information they shared. When a mother exposed their parenting activities daily it means that she gives more and more information about herself to public and the community of stragers named followers who can get to know her better without physically interact. Frequency also shows the breadth of information they shared, for instance Yolifta, a young mother who is also a business woman, shared her parenting activities once in 2-3 days. She would shared different things from her daughter's activities, baby products and the feeding she prepared. As can been seen in her account, she posted many photos of her parenting activities with interesting range of topics with a hope that they would inspire people especially new mothers who have the same stage of parenting as her. By gaining a lot of likes and comment, she is motivated to create a more interesting contents.

b. Privacy

Most of the informant agreed that privacy is important. But they have different understanding and limits for what is called privacy. The informants knew that posting naked pose of children would endanger the children and violated their privacy. They also aware that sharing the detail information about the children is also not good but some informants still gave the detail information of the their children such as complete name, birth date and weight. They also put the location of the events or the photos. Only half of them set the private account setting on Instagram, others let the account open to public. There is a contradiction between what they said and what they practiced. It might be caused by the different tolerance to what it is called as privacy. In Indonesia in real life or offline context, people also have different degree in defining privacy. It is totally acceptable for people to ask about age, marrital status, job or even salary to other people they have just known. Whereas in western countries those topics will be regarded as violation to their privacy. In online space or cyber space people can have different tolerance in sharing personal information. Half of the informants felt worried about the misuse of their children photos or videos but the other half did not. Agnes for instance said that she might be worry but she thought that she is just an ordinary person, who would misused her photos unless she was a celebrity.

In respons to the questions about privacy, it was found that 70% of the informants expected their posting would be seen only by family and friends or people they know whereas the rest said they expected to be seen by everybody. Back again to the privacy issue, the bigger audience we have the bigger risk or possiblity of misuse will be. And the informants do not aware of this.

Parenting and Motherhood

a. Sharenting motives

For most people, sharing photos or video in SNS is related to the activities of keeping memory. They store those photos and video in digital storage so they will not loose the memory [11]. This basic reason was also explained by all the informants. But when it came to the motives of sharenting deeper, it revelead some motives that underlied the sharenting activities as can be seen in table 2 below.

Table 2.*Sharenting motives*

Reason	Description	Relevance (%)
Pride	Proud to have healthy and cute children	20
Stay connected	Giving update about the children's growth to family and friends	30
Social support	Learn from other mothers, feeling not alone as a mother	40
Self actualization	Presenting as good mothers	10

It can be seen that the biggest motive for sharenting is social support followed by stay connected with family and friends. As a new mother the needs to be supported by the society become crusial and parents in digital era use digital platform to get that support. The social support here is in form of following other young mothers, parenting account and active in reading the comment and replying.

From the tabel it can be concluded that the motives are divided into two factors; internal in form of pride and self actualization and external are social support and stay connected. The external factors can be bigger than the internal, this is inline with a previous research which mentioned that women generally form and view their identities within the context of their relationships and connections to others [12]. Relationship and connection to others become essential for a woman especially in transition to motherhood.

Identifying parenting in digital age

Parenting in digital era experiences a significance changes. With the development of communication technology the need of accesing media can be fulfilled in a tip of our finger. Smartphone has changed the way we interact with people. It turns to be one stop service provider for our needs. From the need to communicate and interact with others to the need of social support and self actualization. So how do modern parents define themselves as parents? Most of the informants believed that technology could not be avoided in parenting. They used smartphones and gadget to help them raising their children. In traditional parenting, due to the limited sources of information about parenting, parents got information and advice from family, friend, relatives and books. But today, parents can get support from unlimited sources in the internet. The informants really aware of that so they browse many information about parenting and child care from the internet. In the past, new parents would use advice or recommendation from older generation parents such as grandparents or older family member. They believed experience was the best lesson. However, it is

not applicable nowdays. New parents can get information easily and pretty much change the way of parenting. All of this research informants are new mothers who raise their children by themselves. Most of them decided the parenting style with their partners. They decided what can be used or not, what recommendation would be the best for their children such as choosing the feeding, medication or treatments. They used the information from the internet and parenting books as reference. Some other informants used their owns styles and combined with the old style. In this case, they would still obey the rules or advice from their parents but eliminate what is not relevant to today such as some myths or believes that old people practiced.

Sharenting in this case has relational and ritual function. It keeps the relation with others, to disting their status as parents. It can strenghten social bond, values and social capital [13]. As explained by Yozahara that sharenting could keep the connection with family and friends who lived far away. To keep them updated with the development of her child. Or other reason as mentioned by Sari that sharenting helped her to learn from other new parents about parenting and made her feel she was not alone. Sari's mother died when she was young so now as a mother she needed someone to look upto, so learning from others increased her confidence in raising her son. This is a form of social capital she needs as a new mother.

One consequence in sharenting is gaining comments, whether good or bad ones. Most people will be happy when they receive praise or positive comments from others since it can boost their confidence. But we have to be ready to when people give bad comments as form of participation in SNS. Two informants received negative comments when they posted M shape position in carrying their babies. The comments said that it was too early for the babies and could damaged the shape of the legs.

Parenting in digital age will be more challenging because the technology has influenced the way of raising the children. Involving technology such as gadget in parenting also can bring many consequences. Today children are more exposed to gadget and it become the third parent in the family. Sharenting as a new practice of parenting is unstoppable since many young parents feel the benefit of sharenting but there are several aspects that need to be considered. First is the media literacy, how young mothers can still get information from SNS but at the same aware of the information they consume. Literacy is defined as the ability to read, write and to place, evaluate, use and communicate through various resources of text, visual, sound and video [12]. The ability to place, evaluate and communicate can be a control for parents in sharing information to minimize the negative effects of SNS. Second is privacy, since sharenting is not only invloving parents but also their children, parents must be aware in sharing their children information, photos or video. We talk about a long term effect to the children not just the parents today's pride or satisfaction.

Conclusions

Sharenting is getting common among young mothers in digital age. As a form of new practice it will be more challenging since it involves technology and an online community. It can be concluded most informants (young mothers) shared their children's photos, stories, anecdotes and products they used for their children. Most of them shared personal or intimate moment with their children, and only few limit the shared photos and privacy account system.

Most of these young women shared the photos daily and some only in some special occasions. The motives which drove these young mothers to share their children photos and information were pride, stay connected with family and friends and receive social support and self actualization as new parents. Most of them had a lack of awareness of the privacy issue and the consequences of their actions.

Acknowledgement

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