

Is 'sharenting' the new normal? How 'influencer' mum bloggers and 'ordinary' mums frame presenting their children online

The rise of mum/mom/mommy bloggers has been a worldwide trend, with some mum bloggers now earning money from their personal 'brand' and role as online influencers. As 'prosumers' (that is consumers turned producers), mum bloggers are now courted by many international brands and organisations. While mum bloggers were early adopters in the digital landscape, simultaneously 'ordinary' (non-blogging) mums have embraced technology and have become avid prosumers themselves of social media, in particular Facebook. Many of the pro-am mum bloggers use their families (in particular their young children) as characters in their story posts and also co-opt them in sponsorship and other money-making opportunities. These posts help the bloggers increase their social capital and influence. 'Ordinary' mothers are also now 'sharenting' images and stories related to their offspring, often from the first ultrasound scan. This paper investigates and compares the motivations, hesitations and justifications of both mum bloggers (MBs) and 'ordinary' mothers (OMs) related to sharing their children's images and stories. The major research question is: What motivates MBs and OMs to share their children's stories and images and are there any ethical concerns related to this? A secondary research question is: Are there differences between the two groups of mothers, MBs and OMs? A total of 45 interviews with Australian MBs and a complementary netnography of their blogs were employed for the MBs. Ten focus groups with OMs in Western Australia were also conducted. Analysis of the MBs interviews and the focus group transcriptions was then carried out. For the MBs, while there are some hesitations related to privacy of their children, they seem less concerned with the rights of their children when the children are younger and unable to speak for themselves. It is also argued that MBs may view their children as 'brand extensions' of their own blog/personal brand. For OMs, a range of views showed that while there were some concerns with privacy, many were sharing their children's photos but were struggling to understand the complexities of laws, issues and technology related to social media. As MBs are considered influencers of OMs, their online behaviours (and those of other internet celebrities) may well be affecting the choices made by OMs related to digital parenting.