Children, Children on our Wall. An Inquiry among Experts and Influencer Parents to Explore the Risks, Current and Desired Practices Related to Influencer Sharenting on Social Media

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Standard submission

Keywords: *Influencer sharenting, kidfluencer, social media influencer, social media, privacy concerns, risk perceptions, child labor, children's rights*

The number of social media influencers who try to monetize their underaged child(ren), by sharenting (i.e. an aggregation of 'sharing' and 'parenting') on their social media profiles is on the rise (Porfírio & Jorge, 2022). The popularity of all these influencer profiles is accompanied by a huge stream of income, consisting of diverse monetization strategies such as sponsorships, give-aways and merchandise (Burroughs & Feller, 2020). The revenue stream that is tied to the online depiction of children, however, raises a number of concerns with regard to the commercial exploitation of children (Saragoza, 2019).

In recent years, multiple cases of child abuse, as a result of their parents' influencer activities, received attention in the media. For instance, YouTuber Jordan Cheyenne had to delete her YouTube account because she received a huge backlash after filming her eight-year old son when they just got the news that their dog had a potentially deadly illness (Abrahamson, 2021). In the video, viewers could see how she forced her sad son to act more upset and get closer to the camera. Despite this anecdotical evidence, it remains unclear whether influencer's children suffer from their parents' influencer activities, since detection is very difficult to conduct in a systematic way, given the private sphere of family life. Next to potential physical harm, influencers' children may suffer from emotional harms as their participation in influencer activities may cause stress and lead to violations of their privacy given the many personal details that are disclosed of them on social media (Saragoza, 2019). Accordingly, a number of legal scholars identified gaps in current regulation (e.g., concerning child labor) and expressed the need to better protect the children that are exploited on influencer channels (van der Hof et al., 2019). Hence, it is important to identify the variety of risks those children are exposed to and how they can avoid be avoided by sharenting more safely. Revealing (parts of) one's private life, however, is an essential feature of a successful influencer status, as sharing intimate details contributes to an influencer's authenticity and makes one more relatable

(Audrezet et al., 2020). The implementation of safe sharenting strategies (e.g., strict privacy settings or not including the child at all) may therefore be hampered by these requirements attached to an influencer's career. Besides, influencer parents may have biased knowledge on the risks associated to sharenting, which may represent a barrier for them to act more prudently.

Hence, this study employed a mixed-method design to examine the perils of influencer sharenting. In a first study, thirteen problem-centered expert interviews revealed four perils for influencers' children. First, these children are at risk of being commercially exploited by their parents and commercial parties. Next, an online identity is constructed for them, potentially hindering identity development processes. Third, the disclosure of personal details can violate their privacy and be misused by criminals. Fourth, children's well-being can be harmed as they might suffer from stress and hate speech. In order to reduce those hazards, the experts identified nine sharenting suggestions to depict children more safely on influencer accounts, alongside with three barriers withholding influencers to sharent in a safer way. In a second study, 89 parent influencers were asked why they engage in (monetized) sharenting and how often children participate in those activities with an online survey. Results show that these parents do not fully share the concerns identified by the experts and, although they reflect upon safe sharenting, they do not actually convert this into safer sharenting actions.

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