Opinions of parents on social media shares about children[*]

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Abstract. With the increased use of smart phones, social media apps are now only a touch away. Our country is at the top in the social media usage rankings. Social media apps easily accessed by adults have also increased the frequency of shares posted by parents about their children on their social media accounts. This study aimed to determine the opinions of parents on the shares they post on social media about their children. This research was based on phenomenological research design which is one of the qualitative research approaches. The study was carried out with the participation of 42 parents, including 28 mothers and 14 fathers who have a child aged 0-8. An interview form was developed by the researchers with the aim to obtain data from the study. The findings obtained from the interviews conducted with the participant parents showed that 15 of them do not post social media content about their children, while 27 of them do share social media content about their children. However, of all the participant parents, 20 asserted that posts about children should not be shared on social media, whereas the other 20 stated that such posts should be shared, and 2 of them said that they do not have any opinion. In this context, it can be recommended to train parents about internet literacy.

Keywords: Social media, mother, father, parent, share, early childhood period

INTRODUCTION

In the last century, the use of internet has become widespread in parallel to the rapid technology evolution. Now, the internet is with us everywhere, including every house, every workplace, every pocket and every step. The internet has become an integral part of our lives and is now in the center of our lives. The internet is an indispensable element of our lives not just because we access information easily, but because our social media applications where our every step is being followed, and where we follow, show, like and comment on other people or look at their posts, are very influential in taking the internet at the heart of our lives.

The evolution of technology is a process that affects every area of life and that also brings along changes (Direkci, Akbulut and Şimşek, 2019). With the rapid changes in technology, communication tools have also gone through a transformation. This transformation emerges as an intensive use of internet tools in the era we live in. Among the internet-based communication tools is social media. While social media can refer to a single application for users, it can also refer to multiple applications where the user utilizes more than one application that involves communication. Such applications are of a virtual reality nature in which individuals can express their thoughts, share various things or in which they can interact with other users (Güleç, 2018).

With the increased use of smart phones, social media apps are now only a touch away. Our country is at the top in the social media usage rankings. According to Global Digital Report (2018), 70 percent of Turkey's population is an internet user. Moreover, 51 million persons in our country use social media. One of the things influenced and changed in the daily life due to this intense use of social media in our country is the presence of children on social media. Social media apps easily accessed by adults have also increased the frequency of shares posted by parents about their children on their social media accounts.

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The parents who make efforts to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology, want to archive the data and images related to their children's births, even their pregnancy period, and inform others of their children's growth, development, education etc. For this, parents use social media apps whereby they can reach large masses. In his study where he conducts a research as to why Polish parents share posts about their children on the social media, Brosch (2016) argues that the parents wish to express the excitement and happiness they feel about their children's developmental and learning moments and announce the events they attend; and therefore they share posts about their children on the social media.

Parents who share posts on the social media do not only share photographs, videos etc., but also share informative posts on subjects such as childrearing, child development and education. Today's parents are raising children in a digital-first culture (Brosch, 2016), and access information on parenting, childrearing, child education and child development via social media. According to Steinberg (2017), new generation parents attend various groups opened in the social media applications with the aim to be informed on childrearing, to share the problems they face with other people and to support one another in child related areas. Using these groups, some parents, for example, share a post about the learning problem their children experience at school, and this way other parents can be informed of the subject addressed.

The study of Davis (2015) which he conducted with the parents of 569 children between the ages of 0-4, 56% of mother and 34% of fathers share social media posts related to parenting. In addition, of parents who use social media, more than %70 share social media posts that might embarrass their children (%56), that might provide information on whereabouts of the child (%51) or that show their children's photographs that are deemed inappropriate (%27). Moreover, according to the "Report on Parents, Privacy and Technology Use (2015)" by Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI), nearly 20% of parents who use a social media account have posted something online about their child that the child may find embarrassing in the future. In the study by Karahisar (2017), it is emphasized that parents objectivize or commoditize their children with the social media posts (photographs, videos etc.) they share, showing a slice of their daily lives. In the same study, it is argued that mothers become famous with the shares they post on the social media and are called "instamom", "socialmom" etc. In a research conducted by AVG Technologies (2010) which is one of the cyber security enterprises, it was discovered that children gain a digital identity around the time when they are six. This clearly shows that children's right not to appear in the digital environment is not protected. It is mainly the parents who contribute to this violation of rights either deliberately or unintentionally through social media apps that are now intertwined with our own lives. This study was done in light of this information and aimed to determine the opinions of parents on the shares they post on social media about their children. To this end, the sub-problems of this study are determined as follows:

- Where are the parents at in terms of sharing social media posts about their children and what are their reasons for sharing such posts about their children?
- What is the situation of parents' taking the consent of their children before posting something about their children on the social media and what are their reasons for taking/not taking the consent of their children?
- What are the parents' opinions regarding sharing social media posts about children?
- What is the situation of parents' following social media accounts that share posts related to children and what are the content of these accounts?

METHODS

This section contains information on the research method and design, study group, data collection instrument and data analysis process.

Research Design

The most powerful feature of the interview, which is one of the data collection techniques in qualitative research, is that it provides the opportunity to learn about the situations that have

been overlooked and gives alternative explanations to the visible situations (Glesne, 2015). Since it included the descriptions about the parents' lives in the interviews conducted with them, this research was based on phenomenological research design which is one of the qualitative research approaches (Creswell, 2013). According to Merriam (2015), the philosophy of phenomenology research design emphasizes the experience itself and how the experience turns into consciousness. In this study, the focus is on underlining the importance of raising the awareness and consciousness of the social media user parents about their children.

Study Group

The study group consists of the parents of children studying in different schools and other parents reached through these parents. The study was carried out with the participation of 42 parents, including 28 mothers and 14 fathers who have a child aged 0-8. When the number of children the participant parents have was taken into consideration, it was seen that 26 parents had one child, while 16 parents had two children. Education status of the parents who participated in the study varies as lower secondary, upper secondary (high school), associate degree, undergraduate and graduate. Demographic information of the parents participating in the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic information of the parents*

Demographic information		N
Work status	Working	37
	Not working	5
Education status	Lower secondary school	2
	Upper secondary school (High School)	2
	Associate Degree	4
	Undergraduate	28
	Graduate	6
Perceived socio-economic level	Low socio-economic level	6
	Medium socio-economic level	34
	High socio-economic level	2
Use of social media	Using	42
	Not using	0

According to Table 1, 37 of the parents work while 5 of them do not work. Also, when the education level of the parents is analyzed, it is seen that 2 parents have lower secondary school degree, 2 parents have high school degree, 4 parents have associate degree, 28 parents have undergraduate degree and 6 parents have graduate degree. When the socio-economic level perceived by the parents who participated in the study was examined, it was determined that there were 6 parents perceiving themselves at the low socio-economic level, 34 parents perceiving themselves at the medium socio-economic level and 2 parents perceiving themselves at the high socio-economic level. All of the parents in the study said that they actively use at least one social media app.

Data Collection Instrument

An interview form was prepared by the researchers to collect the data of the study. The interview form included questions on determining the social media use of the parents, the posts they share about their children on the social media, and the social media posts shared about children in general. These questions were selected to determine the views of parents about the posts they share on their children as well as social media posts shared about children in general. In the interview form, questions regarding the parents' demographic information were also included. The questions in this interview form were evaluated by the experts and a pilot study was conducted with a total of 2 parents, one mother and one father, to test the functionality of the questions. After this pilot study, the interview form was finalized and the data collection process started. To enable the parents to answer the interview questions in a way to best reflect

their feelings and thoughts, they were informed that their personal information will be kept confidential and their answers to the questions in the interview form will be used only within the framework of this research.

Data Analysis Process

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed with content analysis, i.e. one of the qualitative analysis methods. Parents' opinions were compared with one another. Codes and categories were identified through these comparisons. Guba and Lincoln (1982) draw attention to the fact that in studies conducted based on qualitative research method, trustworthiness should be focused on rather than validity-reliability. In this study, in order to ensure credibility, another researcher was included to examine the processes and results. Accordingly, the categories and codes were evaluated by the researchers separately and it was aimed to increase the credibility of the categories and coding processes. Then, the compatibility between categories was evaluated. The differences encountered were discussed and the existing disagreements were resolved. In addition, it was aimed to ensure credibility by using the quotes from the participants' discourses. In the process of preparing the reports of the study, mothers and fathers were identified with codes. For example, the code (M1) represents the serial number of the mother and the code (F1) indicates the serial number of the father.

RESULTS

In this section, the findings obtained from the analysis of the study data are given. The tables of the findings are presented with their descriptions and quotes of the participants' responses. Table 2 presents the findings regarding the social media usage purposes of the parents.

Table 2. *Findings on the parents' reasons for using social media*

Category	Codes	N
Reasons for using social media	Communication	19
	Information (about childrearing, professions and places)	13
	Entertainment	10
	Keeping up-to-date	8
	News source	7
	Spending time/Distraction	5
	Watching different lives	5
	Photo/video sharing	4
	Work	4
	Socialization	4
	Curiosity/Research	4
	Giving opinion	2
	Shopping	1

When Table 2 is examined, the most common reasons for using the social media are respectively as follows: "communication", "information", "entertainment", "keeping up-to-date", "news source", "spending time/distraction", "watching different lives", "photo/video sharing", "work ", "socialization", "curiosity/research", and the least common reasons are "shopping" and "giving opinion", respectively. Parents express their aims of obtaining information as "raising children", "obtaining information about the occupation and place". In Table 3, the findings regarding the status of parents in sharing social media posts about their child are presented.

Table 3. *Findings on the parents' sharing social media posts about their children*

Category	Codes	N
Parents' sharing social media posts about their children	Yes	27
	No	15
Persons with whom the parents share the social media posts about their child	Friends/Close circle	25
	Relatives	5
	Families	3
	Students	2
	Anyone	2

According to Table 3, 27 of the parents participating in the study share social media posts about their children with their friends/close circle, relatives, families, students or anyone on social media, while 15 do not share posts about their children. 8 of those who do not share posts are fathers, while 7 of them are mothers; 6 of those who do share posts are fathers and 21 of them are mothers. Parents' opinions about whether to share posts about their child on social media are as follows:

M23: *"Yes. I share photos with my close circle because I am proud of everything about him."*

M15: *"No. I see it unnecessary and also find it harmful"*

In Table 4, the findings related to the reasons that drive the parents to share posts about their children on social media are presented.

Table 4. *Findings on the reasons driving parents to share social media posts about their children*

Category	Codes	N
Reasons driving parents to share social media posts about their children	Showing their children to others	8
	Showing positive things about the child	8
	I have no idea	6
	Sharing their happiness	5
	Request of the friends and close circle	3
	Maintaining the strong bond with friends/relatives	2
	Sharing it as a memory	2
	Giving information about the child	1
	Using the child as a model	1
	Thinking that social media shares are normal	1
	Love felt towards the child	1

When Table 4 is analyzed, the reasons that drive the parents participating in the study to share social media posts about their children are respectively as follows: "showing their children", "showing positive things about the child", "sharing their happiness", "request of friends and close circle", "maintaining the strong bond with friends/relatives, "sharing it as a memory", "giving information about the child", "using the child as a model", "thinking that social media shares are normal" and "love felt towards the child". However, 6 parents did not explain the reason for sharing posts about their children on social media and did not express their opinion. Parents explain the reasons that drove them to share social media posts about their children as follows:

F1: *"I want his positive behavior and success to be known."*

M7: *"I just like to share it with my close circle when I have the desire to do so."*

M17: *"I usually share entertaining moments that I think would make my friends and acquaintances smile."*

Findings regarding parents' opinions related to the social media posts about other children are given in Table 5.

Table 5. *Findings on the parents' opinions related to the social media posts about other children*

Category	Codes	N
Parents' opinions related to the social media posts about other children	Social media content should be shared	20
	No content should be shared	20
	I have no idea	2
Reasons for the presence of social media posts about other children	I have no idea	5
	Informing those who follow the developments of the child	2
	It merely containing special moments	2
	Child being with the parent all the time	1
	Child setting a good example for others	1
	The share being normal	1
	Being proud of everything the child does	1
	Worth of the shares posted with the child	1
	The account not being open to everyone	1
Reasons for the absence of social media posts about other children	Considering shares about children unnecessary	8
	I have no idea	8
	Considering those moments special to the child	2
	Deeming it inappropriate in terms of pedophile	2
	Not to make upset those who do not have any children	2
	Not to violate children's rights	1
	Considering such shares wrong	1
	It being related to child's privacy	1
	Not to leave any marks on the child's future	1
	It not being any concern to other people	1

According to Table 5, while 20 of the participant parents stated that "social media content should be shared" about other children, 20 of them said that "no content should be shared" about children on social media. However, 2 of the parents did not give any opinions on the issue. In addition, the parents were asked to state the reasons for the presence and absence of social media shares on children. In this regard, the parents listed the reasons for the presence of social media shares on children as follows: "informing those who follow the developments of the child", "it merely containing special moments", "child being with the parent all the time", "child setting a good example for others", "the share being normal", "being proud of everything the child does", "worth of the shares posted with the child" and "the account not being open to everyone". The parents stated the following reasons for not sharing any posts regarding other children: "considering shares about children unnecessary", "considering those moments special to the child", "deeming it inappropriate in terms of pedophile", "not to make upset those who do not have any children", "not to violate children's rights", "considering such shares wrong", "it being related to child's privacy", "not to leave any marks on the child's future" and "it not being any concern to other people". Parents' views related to the social media posts about other children are as follows:

M2: "*In fact, it should not be shared; it is not appropriate in terms of pedophilia.*"

M20: "*It should not be shared. It may be a violation of child privacy. It may also upset families who don't have children.*"

F9: "*It should not be shared; the shares should not leave marks that would remain with the child in his future life.*"

M22: "*I don't find it correct to share every moment of the child or some situations that need to remain special or to share posts directly highlighting their physical characteristics. I don't find it right to share the child's photo in environments such as Instagram or Facebook. I think photos can be shared with close friends or relatives; I don't see any harm in this.*"

M24: *"I don't think it would make difference if it is not shared, and I don't think it would make difference when it is shared. In fact, I think that this depends on what, how and with whom it is shared. I think that sharing something morally appropriate, educational and instructive, or fun does not make the child or us lose anything, but it can teach something to parents who read or watch them."*

M15: *"It should be shared, because it is worth spending time together and the good things done are worth sharing."*

M27: *"It should be shared. Children are in every moment of our life. If I share my own photos, my child is always with me. He is necessarily in the photo frame. I can't share it as if he wasn't there."*

The findings regarding parents' taking the consent of their children before sharing social media posts about their children are given in Table 6.

Table 6. *Findings on the parents' taking the consent of their children before sharing social media posts about their children*

Category	Codes	N
Parents' taking the consent of their children before sharing social media posts about their children	I do not take my child's consent	19
	I do not share posts	15
	I do take my child's consent	8
Reasons for taking the consent of the child before sharing social media posts about him/her	Child having moments s/he does not wish to share	3
	In order not to share anything the child does not like	3
	Child thinking that obtaining his/her permission is important	2
	To teach the child that one should respect one's choices	2
	I have no idea	1
Reasons for not taking the consent of the child before sharing social media posts about him/her	Child being little	11
	Child not being able to understand the situation/not being aware of social media	4
	Not feeling the need to obtain their permissions until the age of 18	1
	Not sharing the child's most private moments	1
	Sharing the posts the child like	1
	Having never considered the issue before	1
	Child sharing the posts by himself/herself	1
	Not feeling the need to take the consent of the child	1
	I have no idea	1

When it was investigated whether the parents take the consent of the child before they share posts about them on social media, it was determined that 19 of the parents posting social media shares about their children post these without obtaining the permission of their children, while 8 of them do obtain the consent of their children in Table 6. When the reasons for the parents to obtain and not to obtain the permission of the child were examined, among the ones for obtaining the consent of the child are: "child having moments s/he does not wish to share", "in order not to share anything the child does not like", "child thinking that obtaining his/her permission is important" and "to teach the child that one should respect one's choices". As for the reasons of not obtaining the permission of the child, the parents listed the followings: "child being little", "child not being able to understand the situation/not being aware of social media", "not feeling the need to obtain their permissions until the age of 18", "not sharing the child's most private moments", "sharing the posts the child like", "having never considered the issue before", "child sharing the posts by himself/herself" and "not feeling the need to take the

consent of the child" etc. Parents' opinions about whether to get permission before sharing social media posts on their children are as follows:

M18: "*Sometimes, yes. There may be situations that he does not like or does not want to show.*"

M12: "*I take his consent because I don't want to share something that he doesn't want me to share, as he is an individual himself, too.*"

F3: "*No. I haven't seen it necessary so far.*"

M28: "*No. We can make decisions about them until the age of 18. Besides, we don't share the most special ones anyway.*"

M22: "*He likes to see his own photos. Also, him being younger than 2 years old makes it difficult to take his consent. When he starts expressing himself more clearly, I don't think I would share photos that he does not approve.*"

F14: "*I am not getting his permission right now, but when he starts to realize the situation better, of course I will.*"

In Table 7, findings regarding parents' following social media accounts that share posts related to children are given.

Table 7. *Findings on parents' following social media accounts that share posts related to children*

Category	Codes	N
Parents' following social media accounts that share posts related to children	Yes	27
	No	15

According to Table 7, 27 of the parents, who took part in the study, follow social media accounts posting about children, whereas 15 of them do not follow such accounts. The mentioned 15 parents are the ones who do not share any posts relating to their children on social media. In Table 8, there are findings regarding the content of the accounts which parents follow on social media that share posts about children.

Table 8. *Findings on the content of the social media accounts that share posts about children*

Category	Codes	N
	Social activity and play	12
	Child development and education	11
	Child nutrition	6
	Its humor aspect	5
	Academicians' academic shares	4
	Children's books	4
Content of the social media accounts that share posts about children	Family life	3
	Child health	3
	Announcements and events	1
	Cartoons	1
	BLW methods	1
	Children's clothing	1

When Table 8 is analyzed, it is seen that the content of the social media accounts on children, followed by the parents who participated in the study, are as follows; "social activity and play", "child development and education", "child nutrition", "its humor aspect", "academicians' academic shares", "children's books", "family life", "child health", "announcements and events", "cartoons", "BLW methods", and "children's clothing".

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

It was determined that all of the parents (42 parents) used at least one social media application in this study, which aims to determine the views of mothers and fathers about sharing social media posts their children. All of the parents use at least one social media app, but only 27 parents share social media posts about their children. It is determined that these shares are made in the form of photos or videos and that they are mostly shared with friends/close circle. Most of the parents stated that they share social media posts about their child with the purpose of showing positive things about the child. In this context, it can be said that the photos or video sharing of the parents is mostly done in order to create positive emotions and thoughts about their children in others, especially in close friends. As a matter of fact, Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman and Kamp Dush (2012) revealed that both mothers and fathers shared more photos on social media apps after the birth of their children than they shared before becoming a parent. In addition, it was stated in the foregoing study that the rate of those who share their children's photographs on social media application reaches 98%. However, given the fact that adults are influenced by the faces of babies (Fullard & Reiling, 1976), individuals create a social media capital by sharing photos about their babies on social media apps and can be influential in engaging other people as well (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman and Kamp Dush, 2012). In his study, where he emphasizes the disclosure of privacy and that children are objectified on social media, Karahisar (2017) points out that children's photos are gradually becoming narrowed down between private and public space. In this study, it was determined that 6 of the parents who shared their children on social media apps were fathers and 21 of them were mothers. Based on this, it can be said that mothers share more posts about their children through social media apps. Jomhari, Gonzalez and Kurniawan (2009) stated that since communicating through sharing is easier and faster than telling a story, mothers prefer to share posts about their children through social media apps and are more willing to share posts.

When the views of parents about sharing posts about other children in social media apps are examined, it is seen that the number of parents who say sharing should be done and should not be done is equal. The remarkable point here is that although there are 27 parents who share posts about their own child and 15 parents who do not share such posts, 20 parents stated that posts about other children should be shared and 20 parents said that such posts should not be shared. Therefore, while 5 parents do share posts about their child on social media, they stated that posts should not be shared on social media about other children. Parents who have the opinion that social media apps should not be used for sharing posts about other children stated the reasons as; sharing posts about children is unnecessary, there are special moments for children, it is not suitable in terms of pedophilia and it may upset those who do not have children. O'Neill (2015) emphasizes a dangerous phenomenon about sharing child related posts that exists in social media applications, called "digital kidnapping", where some people steal baby photos and re-share them on the internet as if they were their own child. In addition, Brosch (2016) stated that there is a risk of violating children's privacy with the posts shared on social media. In the same study, it was observed that there are parents who associate this view - that sharing should not be done- with child privacy.

Considering the situation of 27 parents, who shared posts about their children in social media apps, in taking their children's permission before sharing these posts, it is seen that 8 parents got permission and 19 parents did not. In this study, most of the parents underlined that there may be moments which the child may not want to show and that posts that are disliked by the child himself should not be shared on social media. However, most of the parents who shared posts in social media applications but did not get permission from their child stated that their children being younger was effective in not getting their permission. While the age of the child is not an obstacle to sharing posts for these parents, the fact that it is seen as an obstacle to get permission from the child for sharing such posts may make us think that children are not considered individuals. Karahisar (2017) states that parents posts shares without the consent of their children. Stating that today's actions will shape the online experience of children tomorrow, Brosch's (2016) study conducted with Polish parents identified that many

of the parents endangered the privacy of the children, and their photos were kept open to the public without their consent.

When the situation of parents' following accounts that share posts about children was examined, it was determined that 27 parents who shared posts about their own children followed the accounts that shared posts about other children, and 15 parents who did not share posts, did not follow such accounts. It is seen that the content of the social media accounts on children, followed by the parents varies as; social activity and play, child development and education, child nutrition, its humor aspect, academicians' academic shares, children's books, family life, child health, announcements and events, cartoons, BLW methods, and children's clothing. In this context, it would be safe to say that parents who do not share posts about their children act carefully when it comes to social media practices and sharing posts about children.

By sharing social media content about children, the parents actually create digital footprints that might have unpredictable consequences for children in the present and the future. Eric Schmidt is of the view that one day, every young person would be allowed to change his/her name in order to disown embarrassing moments on social media (Holman, 2010). According to the research findings, there is the need for training programs aimed at parents on social media usage that would raise child-oriented awareness. In such training programs, unpredictable and possible consequences that may stem from social media usage as well as the ignored rights of the children (not to be present in the social media etc.) could be addressed.

One of the parents in the study group stated that nearly 3 weeks after the interview, s/he deleted all the shares posted about his/her child on the social media accounts that are open to everyone. Thus, various researches may be planned with a focus on social media, child, parent and teacher, and attention and awareness can be raised on the issue. Although this research was conducted with the parents, it is a known fact that social media usage is prevalent among very small children. Accordingly, qualitative and quantitative studies involving children can be planned to examine children's social media use. Thus, in addition to having information about children's internet usage, measures can be taken for excessive internet use in line with the research results.

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