

Title on added title page: Sharing fetal information on social networks : differences between sharing and non-sharing expectant mothers

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Abstract

Background

In recent years, a flurry of research has been published around the nexus of parents, children, and digital communication technologies. Most studies raised questions regarding surveillance, privacy, and children's rights, and the potential risk of sharing children's photos was also examined. In the present study, a comparison was made between two groups of expectant mothers: those who share information about their fetuses on social networks and those who do not share such information. The purpose of this comparison is to realize the personal differences, the self-image, the perception of the threat and the challenge, and the reasons that lead the different groups to decide whether to share fetal information and to examine the motivations that drive them and the perception of privacy and that of their fetus. To this end, we examined the sharing of fetal information on three social networks: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Today, social networks are the main arena where it is possible to share information and manage ordinary communication in different social settings, such as workplaces, schools, and even within the family. With the penetration of social networks into every field through smartphones, sharing information - photos, text, video, and more - has become a routine and automatic action that we perform on a daily basis. The penetration is so deep that a lack of information sharing may be perceived as unsocial behavior, and the expectation of sharing encompasses every social group - including expectant mothers who are expected to share every bit of information about their fetus.

The keyword that describes all actions of sharing information about children in general and information about fetuses, in particular, is called 'Sharenting,' which comprises two words: sharing and parenting. The types of information shared on social networks are mainly ultrasound images and videos as well as accompanying information, such as the age of the fetus, the sex of the fetus, its length, the name of the ultrasound institute, etc. Parents use hashtags like #ultrasound and #sonogram for two reasons: firstly, to indicate that these are pictures related to pregnancy, and secondly, to reach as large an audience as possible. The second reason is related to the change in the transition from printed photo albums to sharing on social networks - the family albums, as opposed to the networks, were not aimed at a large audience but at a more limited and intimate

audience. Moreover, when expectant mothers share information about their children and fetuses, they create a digital shadow for the child - information of the child that he himself did not share and did not even give his opinion about sharing the information. When dealing with fetuses, the question arises as to whether the fetus should be treated as small but conscious children are treated or if, because he is not yet born, he is not entitled to rights such as the right to privacy.

The question of sharing a fetus's information has not received sufficient research attention, and it raises new questions about the feeling of threat and challenge from the situation, questions about privacy, self-image, reasons for sharing information, and personal traits. In order to answer these and other questions, we divided the research into three phases, and in each, we used a research method suitable for the questions.

Research Methods

This research is the first to examine the phenomenon of sharing prenatal information across three major social networks, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, using a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The use of a mixed research framework stems from a desire to delve deeper into the subject, as combining the two methods provides a richer view of the phenomenon of sharing prenatal information by prospective parents and allows for a comprehensive look at the field.

In the study's first phase, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 450 posts shared on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, 150 posts from each platform. We categorized the posts and examined the types of content shared and the level of engagement in each category and platform. This phase aimed to lay the empirical foundation to familiarize ourselves with the phenomenon of prenatal information sharing by future parents, understand its implications and pave the way for formulating and designing the interview questionnaire.

In the second phase, we conducted a survey measuring self-image, personality traits, feelings of threat or challenge, and reasons for sharing prenatal information among expectant mothers. The survey included 159 women. Initially, they were asked to indicate whether they do not share prenatal information on social networks (Group A) or if they do (Group B). At the end of the survey, we asked, "Would you agree to be interviewed on the subject?" We recruited participants for the third part of the research from the respondents who agreed.

In the third phase, we conducted 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews with expectant mothers, 15 from each group – non-sharers and sharers. In this part, we adopted a phenomenological approach. According to this approach, the focus is on the personal experience of the research participant. The phenomenological method dictates an "in-field grounded theory" approach, asserting that the researcher approaches the field without prior assumptions, and research questions evolve, refine, and even change as the researcher becomes familiar with the field and its subjects.

Through the interviews, we sought to understand the worldviews of the two groups regarding the phenomenon of sharing prenatal information on social networks. Qualitative interviews also play a crucial role when integrated with other methods and have the potential to enhance and strengthen the interpretation of surveys.

Main Findings

The initial findings of the research led to several notable conclusions: We found that the phenomenon of sharing fetal information is spreading across various social networks and is expanding daily. The most common social network for this phenomenon is Instagram, where the most frequent content is ultrasound images. On the other hand, Facebook has the lowest frequency of this phenomenon, with fewer types of information observed than on other platforms. Meanwhile, YouTube has the highest level of engagement, followed by Facebook and Instagram.

The level of involvement coincides with how the platform invites users to engage. Instagram is primarily based on visual content, such as images, so these posts are the most common and have the highest engagement. In contrast, Facebook centers around written text, so the most frequent content related to fetuses is advertisements or for a social cause. On YouTube, video is the primary content type, while text briefly describes the video, and images are not possible.

In the second part of the study, in which we conducted an online survey among prospective mothers from both groups, we found differences in the extraversion trait. Expectant mothers from Group A, who do not share fetal information, are more extroverted than those from Group B, who do. In the threat and challenge questionnaire, we found that the challenge is significantly higher among the group that shares fetal information than the group that doesn't. We also found a significant difference in the openness index between participants with high incomes and those with medium incomes. In this section, we also explored the reasons for sharing fetal information on social networks and found a distinct difference between the two research groups. Prospective mothers who share fetal information value the social reason for sharing (gathering likes and comments) more, whereas those who don't disregard the social motive.

In the third and final stage of the research, we found differences between the groups, especially in terms of privacy perception. While group members who don't share information are concerned about infringing on their privacy and their fetuses, expectant mothers from the sharing group explained that the debate about privacy is irrelevant in a privacy-less age. However, both groups agreed that if any semblance of privacy remains, it lies in family intimacy or sharing information on platforms they define as more intimate, such as WhatsApp. It turned out that sharing fetal info on WhatsApp is common among both groups: those who share on other social networks and those who refrain. Another difference, shedding light on the quantitative findings, was found in the priority order of considerations for sharing or not sharing information on social networks. Group A

explained they have no social incentive to share but pointed out this motive as a reason Group B shares. What's common between the two groups is the awareness of privacy breaches due to sharing. Still, neither attributed great importance to it – those who didn't share believed they weren't exposed to this breach, and those who did, explained they neutralized the problem through changing privacy settings and exposure to information using available tools on social networks.

The Importance and Contribution of this Study

Many studies have focused on the relationship between information sharing, social networks, privacy, young children, and teenagers. Few have addressed the topic of fetal information. To our knowledge, no study has combined quantitative and qualitative research methods to interdisciplinarily examine the phenomenon of sharing fetal information on social networks, dividing the subjects into two groups: a group that shares fetal information and a group that does not. Dividing the population into these two groups allowed us to understand the differences between the two in terms of the participants' personalities and their perceptions of privacy related to information sharing. The current study aimed to fill this research gap by using various theories, such as "Uses and Gratifications," privacy, personality traits, treat and challenge, and self-image. By integrating these research methods, which are interconnected and complement each other, yet each unique and raising its own significant issues, we reached meaningful findings and conclusions that contribute to understanding the phenomenon and laying an empirical foundation that will serve future research in examining the phenomenon from different angles and on additional platforms.

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