

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Instagram is a massive platform of social media and hugely popular all over the world. Founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010, Instagram allows users to take photos and videos, apply digital filters, and share them to various social networking services. Photos and videos can be uploaded via a smartphone as sophisticated as it is today, such as iOS or Android users (Frommer, 2010). With a variety of Instagram features for processing photos online, they make Instagram attractive to its users. Instagram users who love the world of photography can take advantage of this photo-sharing application to share their pictures and express themselves online.

Of the many social media on the internet, it turns out that Instagram is one of the world's most favourite one and is a part of the lives of various groups. The statistics show that 71% of Instagram users are Millennials or Gen Z (under 35 years old), 25-34 year-olds are the most present on the network (32%), just ahead of the 18-24 age group (31%), 51% of users are women, 15% of Instagrammers are women between 18 and 24 years old and 16% are men aged 18-24 with its monthly active users (MAU) that reached more than 1 billion in 2019 (Taher, 2019). Instagram's attractive features, such as the advantage of uploading photos easily through the camera or from a mobile album, allow users to directly use a variety of

filters to adjust the desired photo colouring. No wonder Instagram that can be used for all age groups is what makes this photo-sharing application increase rapidly over time.

The rapid development of Instagram is also followed by the phenomenon of micro-celebrities or influencers. The “microcelebrity” term was first coined by Senft (2008) in *Camgirls: Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social Networks*, Senft refines this concept by emphasizing the importance of branding, and she defines microcelebrity as “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same.” Moreover, as stated by Cultureshop (2015), micro-celebrities are defined as self-crafted and self-choreographed to give ordinary people a taste of fame, gaining an audience outside their circle of friends and acquaintances. The micro-celebrities that are easy to find nowadays because of the large number on Instagram are mom influencers. Mom influencers have become a regular phenomenon that occurs in the environment around us, where mothers on Instagram often use their smartphones to post or share photos and videos of or with their cute and adorable babies and children in various events is called *sharenting*. Based on Lisa et al. (2019), the “*sharenting*” term has found a place in Collins’s online dictionary and is defined as “the habit of using social media to share news or pictures of one’s children.”

Sharenting is the new way of parenting digitally, where parents, particularly mothers, feel driven to share their children’s images and life stories on the internet. Furthermore, *sharenting* is determined as the agency of digital self-presentation,

with the average child assuming an online identity by six months of age, while many start pre-birth with ultrasound images shared online (Brosch, 2016). *Sharenting* has become a social phenomenon to society; for now, most mom influencers who are exceptionally active on Instagram; they can use it easily as the platform to create *sharenting* contents all the time. *Sharenting* presents another way for mom influencers to post what they or their children are doing in a chronological timeline whatever and whenever they want.

In this case, *sharenting* is closely related to Goffman's (2008) self-presentation theory, fundamentally, self-presentation by Goffman is a metaphorical account of how individuals construct and maintain performance in society (about how one should act/present themselves to others). Because self-presentation through *sharenting* is seen as a form of testing one's identity when in various experiences, each individual consciously and unconsciously creates themselves to play specific roles as they wish. By definition, identity is the subjective feeling of an individual in themselves, which can be interpreted through physical and psychological characteristics, several kinds of social and interpersonal relationships, and social roles (Erikson, 1995). Boyd (2007) argues that each individual can write their own identities. Since *sharenting* is done through social media platforms such as Instagram, the individuals can establish an identity for themselves by creating any profile that they want and can freely share any information (Boyd and Ellison, 2012). By this, mom influencers who practice *sharenting* on Instagram manage their self-presentation with Goffman's 'impression management' which will regulate what they say and do by showing an attitude or behaviour by pretending

when in front of others. Moreover, Goffman's (2008) 'impression management' explains how people adopt a 'mask' when 'performing' in situations that the audience can judge them and that in such circumstances, people often project a desirable image of themselves: "the mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be."

Developing Goffman's self-presentation (2008) theory into the social media world, Hogan (2010) argues that while Goffman's approach focused on situations, social media frequently employs exhibitions; "the world is not merely a stage but also a participatory exhibit." When mom influencers choose to participate in social media like Instagram, they will manage their impressions through performances. Here, Instagram is a form of self-presentation where mom influencers often maintain performance by *sharenting* practice where they are viewed positively and how they protect their sense of self through 'impression management' and performances. In this case, Instagram posts can be seen as their performance where self-presentation is done through *sharenting* in the form of picture contents. In other words, mom influencers on Instagram make *sharenting* practice as a medium of self-presentation and can be concluded as an attempt to present themselves to the society that someone does to get the impression from others.

The researcher has found several popular mom-influencers names who conduct *sharenting* for their self-presentations on Instagram to analyze, which often show the life portraits about the world of parenting to their lifestyle as mothers. With *sharenting* practice, they can present themselves in a visual form such as pictures and captions (texts) on Instagram, and they even do not only communicate with

pictures and captions (texts) to their audience (followers); “hashtags” and “emoticons” are also frequently used. Indeed, Instagram puts forward the visual in its use, coupled with the editing features available on Instagram, which makes them have a characteristic in presenting themselves on social media. The creation of self-presentation allows Instagram users to choose the best versions of themselves through pictures and videos in ways that are more strategic than face-to-face interactions (Ellison et al., 2006).

The *sharenting* practice by mom influencers who have similar beauty, fashion, entrepreneur, influencer and modelling backgrounds on Instagram, for instance, occurs by showing the pictures of their children’s daily activities, such as going on a vacation with their family, showing off their outfits, to what they look like on Christmas morning or Mother’s Day. Firstly, Chiara Ferragni, an Italian fashion blogger, influencer, designer, and entrepreneur who has collaborated with fashion and beauty brands, ranked first on the Forbes “Top Fashion Influencers” list with 17.4 M followers. Secondly, Catherine McBroom, an actress and social media star who has more than 7.4 million followers on her Instagram handle and her family vlogging channel, ‘The ACE Family,’ has over 10 million subscribers on YouTube. Thirdly, Savannah LaBrant, an American YouTuber, fashion blogger, businesswoman, social media celebrity from California with 5.7 M followers. Last but not least, Madison Bontempo, an American YouTuber, and actress who is known for running the family vlogging YouTube channel ‘Kyler and Mad’ with 1.1 M followers on Instagram.

Seeing the high number of followers and the high level of popularity of mom influencers on Instagram, by their *sharenting* practice, they are often glimpsed by a variety of mother and child brand products as endorsers who help promote these products to their followers or viewers on Instagram. Therefore, it can be said that their existence in the social media world does not only have a social impact but also financially. Exploring this issue, Banet-Weiser (2012) argues that women are increasingly encouraged to brand themselves through normative and hegemonic ideals of femininity and that women's self-presentation is shaped according to the "commercial context of branding and advertising." Hence, mom influencers have been using their motherhood lifestyles as a way of expressing their identity as well as cultivating a commercially successful influencing career.

The reason why the researcher has chosen to analyze *sharenting* as the self-presentation way of mom influencers as mothers that have quite a broad audience and strong influence on Instagram is that as a new vogue in parenting, *sharenting* practice that is rapidly developing distributes mothers' identity due to mediated representations through Instagram. As a new model of digital parenting, *sharenting* occurs when mothers share pictures and videos of or with their children to social media presenting motherhood lifestyles as a way of expressing their identity. Moreover, *sharenting* through Instagram provides a vehicle for self-presentation and belonging for the mothers, where the online representation of children is motivated and mediated by the mothers. Lately, because this *sharenting* practice has become a social phenomenon, the researcher has become more interested and finds this issue necessary to be furtherly explored.

A previous study conducted by Blumross and Livingstone in their article entitled “*Sharenting*,” parent blogging, and the boundaries of the digital self” (2017) has discussed *sharenting* as a way of digital self – representation parent bloggers defining the borders of their digital selves by drawing on interviews with 17 parent bloggers. They find that parent bloggers wrestle with ethical dilemmas, as representing their identity as parents while putting the public aspects of their children’s lives at risk. They feel a sense of responsibility for themselves and their children, plus evaluating what should be shared by *sharenting* in the present and the imagined future to the community. This study has shown the parent blogging culture is governed by overlapping “areas of obligation,” shaping everyday decisions about what, where, and how much to share. Nowadays, parent bloggers are having mixed feelings as they worry about the dilemmas of self-representation; they encounter in today’s digital genres of popular cultures, such as *sharenting* practice.

Moreover, a study by Davies (2017) entitled “Consuming the Self: A discourse analysis of the self-representation of Instagram bloggers and its relationship to consumer culture” also has discussed how fashion bloggers on Instagram, use self-branding techniques to promote and construct their self-representations in a way that is entirely reflective of consumer, capitalist ideologies by conducting a discourse analysis of 10 commercially successful Instagram bloggers with Foucault’s use of discourse and power methodology. The findings offer of how Instagram bloggers articulate a form of femininity that draws upon postfeminist, neoliberal sensibilities around female self-branding and self-

commodification that reinforces a disciplinary control onto the female body. This study argues that the self-representation of Instagram bloggers is closely related to consumer culture through the purchase and fetishization of consumer goods, which rebuild normative ideals of beauty into the online realm.

In alignment with their study, Lisa et al. (2019) in their article entitled “*Sharenting*: pride, affect and the day-to-day politics of digital mothering” has sought to explore the practice of “*sharenting*” with the notion of Foucauldian technologies of the self as a gendered practice with the conceptualization of pride, affect, online expressions of influence and everyday politics of mothering in a neoliberal context. This study has found that *sharenting* practice by the mothers has a series of implications; that is, something can be understood as achievement-oriented or narcissistic practice in the traditional psychological framework. The pride shown by mothers with “*sharenting*” is rooted between claims about representation that they are “good mothers” to their children.

Nonetheless, the previous studies that the researcher has mentioned above have not explicitly analyzed and covered the analysis of how *sharenting* relates to the self-presentation of mom influencers on Instagram. Hence, the researcher conducted research entitled “The Self – Presentation of Mom Influencers on *Sharenting* Practice on Instagram.” Furthermore, it is essential to consider how self-presentation of mom influencers by *sharenting* is presented on Instagram through the lens of Goffman’s Self-Presentation, Kress and van Leeuwen’s Social Semiotics to discuss forms (signifier) such as vector, modality, gaze, composition, perspective, line, and colour, as well as how these forms are used to realize

meanings (signified) in the making of signs and M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) focusing on the ideational metafunction, which has a decisive influence on visual communication grammar, by seeing the image as a resource for the representation and thus will display culturally produced meanings by analyzing their posted pictures and captions (texts).

1.2 Research Question (s)

1. How is the self-presentation of mom influencers by *sharenting* practice presented on Instagram?
2. What types of identities, meanings, and values are being portrayed by the mom influencers with *sharenting* practice on Instagram?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To find out how the self-presentation of mom influencers by *sharenting* presented on Instagram.
2. To investigate the identities, meanings, and values being portrayed by the mom influencers with *sharenting* practice on Instagram.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Based on the problems of the study, the limitation of this study is:

This study will focus on analyzing 8 *sharenting* practice pictures, including the captions (texts) posted by mom influencers on Instagram, they are Chiara Ferragni, Catherine McBroom, Savannah LaBrant, and Madison Bontempo.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher hopes that this study will give some importance as follows:

1. Theoretical Significance

The result of this study is expected to contribute to all individuals who want to study more about cultural studies, especially with the use of social media like Instagram as a form of new culture in this digital era. Specifically, with the micro-celebrities or influencers phenomenon where the average/ordinary person can taste fame by gaining an audience. Therefore, the result of this study provides more explanation about the self-presentation of *sharenting* practice by Instagram mom influencers.

2. Practical Significance

- a. For the researcher, this research can improve the researcher's ability to comprehend this study and understand about the self-presentation of *sharenting* practice by Instagram mom influencers.
- b. For the reader, the result of this study can be used as a reference to study the self-representation of *sharenting* practice by Instagram mom influencers.

- c. For other researchers, the result of this research can be used as one of the references and information for further researcher related to the field.

