MedienPädagogik
Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Medienbildung
www.medienpaed.com
ISSN 1424-3636

Special Issue Nr. 35:
Media literacy as intergenerational project: skills, norms, and mediation
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Parents' online self-disclosure and parental social media trusteeship

How parents manage the digital identity of their children

Thorsten Naab

Abstract

Although parents consider online privacy important, they insouciantly include personal information about their children. Reviewing research on the privacy paradox and online self-disclosure, this article suggests the concept of media trusteeship as an additional theoretical perspective to understand how parents shape the digital identity of their children. The results of 46 in-depth interviews indicate that parents are largely unaware of the described role duality and are only partially able to foresee the consequences of their activities. The analysis identifies three distinct types of parental media trusteeship: While some parents shield their offspring from social media, others appear unable to respond adequately to the risks of social media activities or seem to ignore them completely. Finally, it became clear that the parents surveyed had no idea how to teach media literacy and guide their children to a safe and careful use of social media.

Zwischen Selbstoffenbarung und elterlicher Social-Media-Treuhänderschaft. Wie Eltern mit den digitalen Identitäten ihrer Kinder umgehen.

Zusammenfassung

Obwohl Eltern versuchen ihre Privatsphäre zu schützen, offenbaren sie in sozialen Medien oftmals persönliche Informationen ihrer Kinder. Der Beitrag untersucht das «privacy paradox» und die Selbstoffenbarung in sozialen Medien und schlägt das Konzept elterlicher Medientreuhänderschaft als ergänzende theoretische Perspektive vor, um zu verstehen, wie Eltern die digitale Identität ihrer Kinder verwalten. Die theoretischen Überlegungen werden durch Ergebnisse von 46 Tiefeninterviews ergänzt. Sie zeigen, dass sich die Eltern der Verantwortung ihrer Treuhänderschaft kaum bewusst sind und die Folgen ihrer Social Media-Aktivitäten nur mit Einschränkungen abschätzen können. In der Analyse der Interviews lassen sich insgesamt drei unterschiedliche Ansätze elterlicher Medientreuhänderschaft identifizieren: Während (1) einige Eltern versuchen ihre Kinder weitgehend von sozialen Medien abzuschirmen, scheinen (2) andere nur eingeschränkt in der Lage zu sein, angemessen auf Risiken sozialer Medien zu reagieren oder (3) blenden diese weitgehend

Naab, Thorsten. 2019. «Parents' online self-disclosure and parental social media trusteeship. How parents manage the digital identity of their children». *MedienPädagogik* 35, (October), 97–115. https://doi.org/10.21240/mpaed/35/2019.10.21.X.

aus. Schliesslich wird mit Blick auf die elterliche Vermittlung von Medienkompetenz deutlich, dass die befragten Eltern keine konsistente Vorstellung davon haben, wie sie ihren Kindern einen achtsamen und verantwortungsvollen Umgang mit sozialen Medien vermitteln können.

Introduction

Living in a world of deep mediatization (Hepp 2016), media users' feelings, thoughts, and daily activities shape the contents of diverse Internet applications including social network sites, picture and video sharing platforms, blogs, and wikis (Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck, and Heirman 2012). Users frequently share personal and intimate information within globally spread communication networks: They usually disclose personal information (e.g. name, address) during registration processes of internet applications (Taddicken 2014; Qian and Scott 2007) and utilize personal and intimate information in social networks to form their online identity (Taddicken 2014; Qiu et al. 2012) as well as gain and maintain social capital (Lo 2010; Tufekci 2008). In this context, the social media behavior of parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers is a special case. Since an essential part of parents' everyday routines is concerned with aspects of parenthood, their social media activities not only affect their digital identity, but also passively disclose (personal) information about their children. This mediated parent-child entanglement is at the core of this article that aims to establish a link between parents' online self-disclosure and the challenges they face considering the responsibility for their children's digital identity. It reviews the theoretical framework of online self-disclosure and suggests media trusteeship as an approach to understand and describe parents' social media practices with regard to their children's digital identity. The theoretical considerations are augmented empirically by 46 in-depth interviews, which explore the different approaches of parents' media trusteeship.

Online self-disclosure and the privacy paradox

Like all people, parents disclose personal feelings, thoughts, and actions in all kinds of communicative acts to establish social ties and coordinate with other members of society. Against the background of this societal function (Wheeles and Grotz 1976), self-disclosure and privacy exist in a relation of tension between one another, where individuals need to balance risks and utilities of self-disclosure and privacy (Choi and Bazarova 2015; Dienlin and Metzger 2016; Petronio 2002; Sawyer et al. 2011). However, the conditions of this tension field differ in the context of online communication. In online contexts, users actively «write themselves into being» (boyd 2007, 12) and develop their digital identity through adjusting frequency, intimacy, contextual

broadness, valence and authenticity of their self-disclosure (Niemann 2016). Furthermore, users perceive the situation of disclosure to be anonymous and controllable (Schouten, Valkenburg, and Peter 2007), which leads them to be more willing to share personal information than in offline contexts. Therefore, the Social Web intensifies the causes and consequences of self-disclosure. Users' digital identity does not equal its offline counterpart (Gosling et al. 2011; Marriott and Buchanan 2014). For instance, social media users select photos that praise their physical merits (Siibak 2009) and emphasize positive aspects and emotions of their lives (Qiu et al. 2012). With regard to privacy, the nature of digitalized information intensifies the consequences of self-disclosure: Online content is persistent, searchable, and reproducible over space and time (boyd 2007, 2008; Taddicken, 2014). Therefore, self-disclosure is subject to continuous re-contextualization, which leads to a problematic «context collapse» especially in heterogeneous user groups (Marwick and boyd 2011, Vitak 2012). Self-disclosed information that is intended to stay, e.g., in the context of family and friends, can easily be transferred to other communicative settings, e.g., to colleagues. This situation might occur as accidental self-disclosure by the user himself or herself, but could also happen through the reckless dissemination of confidential content by others (e.g., grandparents, who forward pictures of their grandchildren to their friends). Furthermore, self-disclosed information is potentially searchable for third parties that can reproduce the content in communicative settings that are not intended originally (Taddicken 2014).

Social media users seem to be aware of the risks of self-disclosure and their responsibility regarding disclosed information (Qian and Scott 2007). They also know that their data could be aggregated to digital dossiers and utilized for targeting by social network services and security authorities as well as being the source for data-mining of third-party companies or the object of a potential data or identity theft (Niemann 2016). Consequently, users that worry about self-disclosure risks or that highly appreciate online privacy show a more conscious or less intensive self-disclosure (Chen 2013; Dienlin and Trepte 2015; Krasnova et al. 2009; Krasnova et al. 2010; Nemec Zlatolas et al. 2015; Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck, and Heirman 2012). Nevertheless, a vast body of research indicates a «disconnection between users' desire to protect their privacy and their actual behavior» (Acquisti and Gross 2006, 50–51). This so-called «privacy paradox» describes that users' self-disclosure behavior does not reflect their attitude towards privacy (Acquisti and Gross 2006; Barnes 2006; Taddicken 2014; Tufekci 2008). Arguably, users' perception of privacy risks declines against the perception of the potential benefits of self-disclosure (Ariyachandra and Bertaux 2010; Debatin et al. 2009; Tufekci 2008; Krasnova et al. 2009). For example, Hollenbaugh and Ferris (2014) show that users provide lots of information during the registration processes of social network sites due to the belief that this lets them appear more friendly and likable to others. Furthermore, users that generally trust social

media are more likely to disclose personal information (Lin and Liu 2012). Finally, the possibility of being able to countermeasure privacy risks technically through restrictive privacy settings might give users a false sense of security (Brandimarte, Acquisti, and Loewenstein 2013). While privacy concerns result in more restrictive privacy settings (Acquisti and Gross 2006; Tufekci 2008), they do not affect users' self-disclosure (Christofides, Muise, and Desmarais 2012; Dienlin and Metzger 2016).

Parental media trusteeship and the disclosure of child-related information

In contrast to users without children, parents' social media behavior is characterized by the duality of being responsible for their own and their children's digital identity. While extensive research corpus already deals with people's personal social media behavior, taking up the trusteeship concept helps to theoretically understand parents' responsibility for the digital identity of their children. Originated in socio-economic, political, and legal literature, the trusteeship concept deals with the idea of a «relationship in which a natural person or a legal person is responsible for the general well-being of one or more persons who are deemed to be incapable of directing their own affairs» (Bain 2016, 61). Following this consideration, parental media trusteeship describes a state, where parents take responsibility for their children's media-related affairs. It includes the management of their children's digital identity and associated possessions (such as image rights), and all media-related activities parents undertake on behalf of their children (e.g., setting up a social media profile). Moreover, parents' duty as their children's media trustee is «to preserve and enhance the value of the assets under his control and to balance fairly the various claims to the returns which these assets generate» (Kay and Silberston 1995, 92). It includes parents' explicit socialization mandate to impart to their children the skills that enable them to participate in a mediatized society. Furthermore, analogous to processes of parental mediation (Shin and Li 2017), parents try to foster possible positive outcomes of their social media activities for their children and aim to moderate negative effects.

However, the scope of parental media trusteeship is limited by three aspects: Analogous to the trusteeship of statehoods (e.g., Lake and Fariss 2014), parents exercise their authority on a temporal basis until their children can reflect and communicate their media-related needs and actions (Naab 2018).

Additionally, parents' subjective beliefs about the functioning of social media, about the valence of potential media effects, and social media's future development determine the specific nature of their trusteeship. Research indicates that parents reveal information about their children to foster relationships in their social network: Regarding this process, parents maintain the bonding capital of close relationships that depend on high degree of trust, intimacy and emotional support

with closer contact to their family of origin (Belsky and Rovine 1984). Furthermore, parents engage in networks of weak ties, developing bridging social capital to cope with the new challenges they meet in parenthood (Belsky and Rovine 1984; Madge and O'Connor 2006). They develop a network of peers who are in a similar situation and may provide resources that are not available among their close friends and relatives, including «parenting advice, child-care recommendations or commiserations about the difficulties of having an infant» (Bartholomew et al. 2012, 457). Particularly within networks of weak ties, self-disclosure positively affects the perceived quality of these relationships (Kwak, S. Kyoung Choi, and B. Gyou Lee 2014; Wang et al. 2014) and leads to higher support from maintained relationships (K.-T. Lee, Noh, and Koo 2013; Vitak and Ellison 2013). Finally, parents' engagement in social media compensates for a loss of relationships that were based on the conditions of their lives before their parenthood. It is most likely that information about their children is the currency that strengthens the ties within these networks, as it is the shared contextual bond. It might lead to parents to be more willing to disclose their children's personal information despite potential privacy concerns.

Finally, parental media trusteeship finds its limits in the doubtful ability of parents to reflect their role duality with regard social media activities. In this respect, it must be questioned whether new parents, in particular, succeed in distinguishing between themselves and their child when presenting themselves online. Caplan (2013), for example, states «that the mother continues to relate to the child as an extension of herself […] [as if the] child has no real personality of his own» (p. 107). Closely linked to this argument, parents might be unaware of their trusteeship. Both may lead to a passive disclosure of child-related information: since new parents, in particular, are experiencing a dramatic change in their daily routines, a significant portion of their social media activity revolves around challenges concerned with their parenthood (Bartholomew et al. 2012, 455).

In sum, two main arguments can be put forward against each other: On the one hand, the transition to parenthood could lead to further sensitization with regard to the protection of privacy in social media. Following this argument, parents would be aware of their role as trustees of their children's digital identity and therefore limit their social media activities for the benefit of the child. On the other hand, it could be argued that parents are either unaware of their trusteeship role or that, analogous to the privacy paradox, this awareness has no consequences for their actions.

Research Questions and Research Strategy

This paper's previous sections outlined that social media play an essential role in everyday life of young people, including new parents. In contrast to users without children, parents bear a double responsibility in balancing privacy and self-disclosure. They act as trustees of their children's digital identity. However, the findings of research on self-disclosure and the privacy paradox cannot be fully generalized to describe how parents approach their responsibility of media trusteeship. The present study therefore adds an empirical perspective on this issue addressing the following guiding research questions:

- RQ1: What contents do parents share about their children in social media?
- RQ2: What motivates parents to share child-related contents online?
- RQ3: What risks do parents perceive regarding the online communication about their child?
- RQ4: What strategies do parents apply to face perceived privacy risks with regard to child-related contents?
- RQ5: What factors influence parents' media trusteeship?

These questions were inspected by investigating parents' child-related social media behavior on the microscopic level of individual media practices. The study aims to reconstruct the considerations that form parent's attitudes (RQ2 and RQ3) towards privacy and lead to specific social media behavior (RQ1 and RQ4). It attempts to evaluate parents' awareness of their role as trustees, the sustainability of their trusteeship and potential influence factors that help to distinguish different trusteeship models (RQ5).

Method

Design

The study's procedure focuses on qualitative face-to-face in-depth interviews with 46 selected parents with at least one child aged between zero and ten years old. This approach allows the detailed reconstruction and understanding of parent-specific social media considerations and behavior. A first series of 32 face-to-face interviews was carried out from December 2016 to August 2017. A second series of 14 interviews was conducted from May to July 2018 to deepen the insights gained in the first series of interviews.

Participants

All participants were permanent residents of Germany at the time of the interviews and had at least one child in the age between zero and ten years. This rather wide age range was chosen to consider parents' role development in different stages. Literature indicates that parents' role perception changes substantially, when their children enter elementary school at the age of six (Mowder et al. 1995). A further important break in the child's development can be situated at the time of leaving primary school at the age of 10, when the children's reading ability allows them to access texts independently (Graf 2011). In order to include parents with different social backgrounds and different social media behavior, potential interview partners were recruited via posters and flyers that were displayed on the notice boards of 29 kindergartens in the social service region Augsburg Central in Southern Germany, with a total of 1909 childcare places for children aged one to six years. Furthermore, posters and flyers were distributed in post-natal care courses of seven midwife practices in the same social service region. All posters and flyers contained a summary of the research topic, a call for participation, and contact information (email and telephone). This rather non-invasive procedure was applied for two reasons: First, while kindergartens and midwife practices seem to be good places to contact parents of newborns, infants, and preschoolers, they allowed the contact only via notice board due to privacy reasons. Second, from a research ethics perspective, the immediate environment of participants should be touched as least as possible – especially in the case of children. However, due to this approach, the overall response of 136 replies was rather low. 32 interview partners were selected for the first interview series based on the principle of theoretical saturation. A total of 102 potential interview partners were excluded: 14 persons were excluded as (1) they had no children within the specific age group (eight persons) or (2) they were no permanent resident in Germany (six persons). In further 57 cases, potential interview partners did not respond to our messages or could not realize an interview appointment. Finally, we excluded 31 parents with regard to the already achieved theoretical saturation of the previous interviews. For the second interview series, those 31 parents and 19 parents who could not realize an interview appointment in the first series were contacted again. From these, an interview appointment for the second interview series could be realized in 14 cases.

Procedure and Interview Guidelines

The interviews were conducted at a place of the dialogue partners' choice to ensure their comfort within the interview situation: Three interviews were conducted in a Kindergarten, ten interviews were carried out in a public coffee shop, and 33 conversations have been held at participants' homes. The interviews lasted between 22 and

105 minutes. All sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed. The names of the dialogue partners were replaced by aliases.

Parents' social media postings about children, their personal experience and their behavior concerning these topics were each interview's entry point, since these issues were specified as study topics on our posters and flyers. During conversations, we utilized an interview guideline that based on the mentioned research questions. We further refined the research questions into sub-dimensions and corresponding guiding questions:

Shared Contents (RQ1)
In addition to parent's social media postings about their kids that were utilized as the entry point of our interviews, participants described typical situations that lead them to share child-related content in social media and the response they obtained to their actions. Furthermore, interview partners with children aged five years or above were asked whether their kids perform own postings in social media.

Motivations (RQ2)
Considering parents' motivations, the interviewees were asked to talk about perceived gratifications of child-related social media postings for themselves, their children as well as their audience. In addition to that, the interviewer guideline included the question about whether other parents have different motivations for social media postings.

Risks (RQ3)
With regard to the perceived risks for their social privacy, participants were asked whether they have received negative response to their postings and whether they have perceived losses of control over the flow of their communication. Considering risks for their institutional privacy, the interview guideline encourages participants to report on whether they ever have experienced a loss of control over the further spread of their initial postings or other provider related problems with the protection of personal data. Furthermore, the interviewer asked about perceived threats to the social and institutional privacy of their infants and newborns in general that may have been caused by the interviewees' postings.

Strategies (RQ4)
As previous research suggests that social media users have developed cognitive and behavioral strategies to cope with the privacy risks of social media postings, this study aims to reconstruct these strategies' key elements. Therefore, the interview guideline included questions about participants' current measures of privacy protection and requested their processes of consideration with regard to perceived risks and specific postings.

Influence Factors on Parents' Trusteeship Role (RQ5)
Factors that influence the specific characteristics of parents' media trusteeship were not asked directly in the interviews. Instead, they were reconstructed analytically based on their statements with regard to the dimensions above.

Data Analysis
The interview transcripts were analyzed utilizing inductive category development (Mayring 2000). In this process, we used the dimensions of our interview guideline as an analytical starting point and conducted repeated rounds of coding to develop and refine the categories with each round (Kelle and Kluge 2010). «This method provides direction for the analysis and increases the likely conceptual relevance of the resulting coding scheme to the research questions» (Agosto and Abbas 2017, 353). During the first round of coding, the relevant statements of the participants were identified on the basis of the guide's categories and supplemented by those aspects, which were highlighted as particularly important by the participants during the discussions. The statements collected in this way were assessed in terms of subjective importance, valence, degree of reflection (in the sense of a disclosed rationalization in the statement context) and intrapersonal consistency (degree of contradiction to other statements of the person). Subsequently, the participants worked out argumentative links between their individual statements. This made it possible to reconstruct the central argumentation chains for each interview. In a final analysis step, these chains of argumentation were condensed into essential types of argumentation.

Results
The interviews provided a comprehensive pool of information about parents' social media behavior, their privacy concerns, and their strategies to cope with perceived risks. They provided insights into the mechanisms of parents' media trusteeship associated with their social media behavior. However, although each dialogue partner substantiated the trustee role differently, the following section can only reflect a selection of particular findings in the light of the main argument made in this article. Since parents demonstrated similar argumentative patterns, interviewees' perspectives were summarized to three main types of trusteeship roles that parents tend to take: cyberwall hermits, re-activists, and social media optimists.

Cyber-Wall Hermits

The colloquial term «cyber-wall» refers to a situation of absolute control of digital communication, while the term «hermit» describes a person that withdraws from social interaction. Considering this meaning in the context of parental media trusteeship, it is associated with parents who possess a comprehensive knowledge of privacy issues as well as the technical and social correlations of the Social Web and use this knowledge to shield themselves and their family from any privacy threats that may arise from social media. In addition to technical countermeasures, they intensify their hermitage by minimizing social media use in general. Most of the cyber-wall hermits work in an academic context or are professionally concerned with information technology. Considering their profound knowledge, these parents have developed a rather restrictive approach to social media activities with regard to themselves and her children. They justify this behavior with their belief that

> «once posted, the content lands up at a server located in America. It stays there forever and will be rolled out at some point in the future for whatever reason. I do not know; maybe I am too paranoid» (Patrick)

This need for control leads to a significant inequity between consuming and sharing. While cyber-wall hermits access other users' content with great interest, they disclose only limited information about themselves and their family. Furthermore, some of them invest considerable time and effort to realize electronic data security by themselves as well as to select persons that are allowed to access their data:

> «Although there exists a gallery with numerous digital photos, it is not accessible from a public network. Instead, I have set up my web server with a physical storage unit that I own. The picture gallery is self-programmed and secured with a password that is only known by close relatives – e.g., the kid's grandparents – or close friends. That is under my control» (Caroline).

Considering their trustee role, two aspects seem especially noteworthy: Cyber-wall hermits are aware of the temporal limitation of their responsibility. Regarding their children's future development of social media activities, some of them

> «consider it normal today if my son wants to share information via social networks at some point in the near future» (Pascal).

To promote their childrens' self-determined social media use, cyber-wall hermits try to maintain their restrictions as long as possible. However, they have to admit that their protective measures are critically questioned by school-aged children in particular. Furthermore, although cyber-wall hermits are fully convinced of their approach to social media privacy, they have not yet developed a strategy to pass on their beliefs and responsibilities to their offspring gradually. Although they hope that their children understand the meaning of the restrictions, they are also afraid that their children will test ways to cross the boundaries over time. Therefore, it seems arguable whether they can transform their comprehensive media knowledge into educational measures during situations of parental mediation.

Re-Activists

Different but similar is the case of how the majority of the dialogue partners substantiates a re-activist role of media trusteeship. In contrast to cyber-wall hermits, the parents in this group have no explicit professional reference to the media. Expertise in this group is rather expressed by an adept user knowledge in the area of media use. They share a substantial amount of child-related content via different social media applications. The essential motivation for this is to preserve memorable childhood moments for different audience groups as well as to maintain and further develop their social network. It is particularly important for them to let the immediate family participate in the child's growth. In addition, the disclosure of information about one's own child is unconsciously used to obtain new information oneself (e.g. for advice on illnesses) or to coordinate one's own actions with other parents. In this context, child-related reasons for participation or non-participation are equally cited. Re-activist parents' child-related social media activities strongly revolve around one specific application. While most parents named either Facebook or WhatsApp as their main application, others share child-related content directly on a baby-homepage or blog that they maintain since pregnancy with regard to childhood documentation and socializing with peers. However, the handling of the respective application has made a significant transition over the last years. At the time when parents initially started sharing child-related content, they did not restrict the access to the contents as

> «you have these 'mother feelings' that define you at this moment. This feeling is what I want to share» (Louise).

Furthermore, the openness of personal information about their children helped them to befriend with other parents. Re-activist parents started to reflect problems of data accessibility and loss of control over data only after incidents that occurred to either them or in their circle of acquaintances. E.g., Nadine reported that she limited the access to her homepage with a password after discovering that someone had copied and re-published family photos from a friend's Facebook account. Furthermore, in another instance, she

> «was shocked as I found a picture of my sick child visible for anyone using a regular online search engine. Anyone could have accessed this photo although I posted it in a secured area of a baby-forum» (Nadine).

As an immediate consequence, she quitted her forum membership and demanded deletion of the photo from the search engine operator. Even though each of the re-activist parents outlined several of such cases, they seem unable to combine these pieces of a privacy-puzzle into a whole: Despite their worries about data accessibility and the experienced loss of control, they believe that

> «there isn't much you can do wrong if your child is dressed and you cannot see embarrassing details that are embarrassing in the future» (Martha).

Furthermore, the interviewed parents ensured that they would delete certain publications in later life if their children disagree with them. This reactive perspective on their children's privacy rights exemplarily indicates the main problem of this rather common type of parents' media trusteeship: Children's digital identity is neither actively shaped nor consistently controlled. Instead, parents deploy countermeasures to repair or conceal the damage of possible incidents of trusteeship violations. Not surprisingly, those interviewees that share the re-activist concept of media trusteeship with Nadine have demonstrated only insufficient considerations about how they assign those responsibilities which they currently take care for to their children. Against this background, it is not surprising that parents with older children at the same time report more blatant cases of social media problems and a lack of reference to their own social media actions and those of their children. In addition, an older sibling effect can be observed: While parents of single children or their firstborn reflect more intensively on the consequences of social media use, this is decreasing among younger siblings. In spite of the rapid change in the range of services, the parents concerned refer to the older child as evidence that «everything has been done correctly» (Nadine).

Social Media Optimists

At first glance, the social media optimist-type of privacy trusteeship appears similar to those of re-activist parents. Both groups have no professional relation to media and share a substantial amount of child-related content in the Social Web. Considering their motivation, the optimists focus above all on their own benefit. They consider their child as part of their own life, which they want to express through social media. Consequently, social media optimists seemingly neglect the responsibility for their children's digital identity instead of counter-measuring potential consequences of privacy threats.

> «I believe there are so many children out there, why should my child be affected?» (Manuela)

Although they have personally experienced critical privacy incidents (e.g., unwanted accessibility to her data, loss of control over posted content) and should be aware of at least some privacy risks of social media use, they seem to blind out any privacy concerns due to excessive demand:

> «I do not want to be worried because this can drive you crazy because you cannot completely protect yourself. If you would follow this line of argument consequently, then you would end up not taking any photos at all – and I take many photos. To be quite frank, I do not know whether it is good or bad, but I trust the Messenger. How else should I share photos of my daughter?» (Andrea)

At this point, it may be alternatively argued by following the privacy-calculus model that social media optimistic parents might value their benefits higher than the need to protect their children' s digital identity from privacy risks, describing a willful default of media trusteeship. The finding that parents often withdraw their reasoning to a seemingly future-oriented position supports this argument:

> «I put up a Facebook account for my son because he will definitely grow up with PC, Facebook and so on» (Alexander)

Furthermore, these parents argue that their children should decide later in life on what specific contents should be posted or not and whether existing content should be deleted. However, most of the social media optimistic parents do not seem to be able to substantiate this consideration. Instead, e.g., Andrea points out that

> «I would shout all the things that I have posted in Facebook and WhatsApp across the street. I do not care if people want to hear this. […] Maybe [my daughter] will become a famous actress and would question my decision to share a picture of her sitting in the bathtub, for example. I mean, people will find these things anyway» (Andrea).

Finally, social media optimistic parents' privacy considerations tend to emphasize an online privacy specific biased optimism. Although they have encountered negative privacy incidents, they tend to believe that privacy dangers will not apply to themselves and their children.

Discussion

This paper makes a significant contribution to the analysis of parents' online self-disclosure with regard to the digital identity of their children. The literature review suggested that online self-disclosure is part of people's everyday routines. Particular reference was made to the privacy paradox: Even though people consider the protection of personal data to be important, they nevertheless disclose a considerable amount of personal information about themselves. Taking this consideration into account, it was argued that parents' social media behavior passively shapes children's digital identity, since a significant part of their daily activities is associated with their children. In order to better differentiate the dual role of parents' social media behavior, the article proposed the concept of parental media trusteeship. It was elucidated that parents act as trustees of their children's media-related claims and take care of their digital identity. In the overall view of this paper's theoretical considerations, parents' rather liberal online self-disclosure is contrasted by their privacy concerns and their role as media trustees of their children. While the literature on the privacy paradox suggests that parents' concerns about privacy rarely affect their online behavior, the trusteeship concept substantiates their responsibility for their children's digital identity. The empirical contribution of this article shows

that this dilemma cannot be solved in principle: Parents' media trusteeship roles range from a strongly restrictive use of social media by social media hermits to the liberal behavior of the social media optimists, who appear to largely ignore possible consequences of social media actions for the digital identity of their children. This is also reflected in the type of content shared (RQ1). While social media hermits try to reveal as little of themselves as possible, social media optimists let a broad audience participate in their activities and thus in the world of their children. These two groups, thus, represent the possible extreme points of child-related social media behavior, whereas most of the surveyed parents position themselves within the third group of re-activists in between.

The motives behind this gradation of social media behavior (RQ2) reflect the dilemma of the private sphere paradox. While the desire for social participation and social self-expression predominates among the social media optimists, the behavior of social media hermits is determined by their desire to protect the private sphere. In this context, interviews with parents who apply a re-activist type of media trusteeship suggest that the step-by-step gradation in behavior is not due to a theoretical weighing of arguments, but to negative practical experiences that parents themselves experience or their environment makes in the sense of a proxy.

Accordingly, clear differences can be observed in the risk perception (RQ3) and coping strategies (RQ4) of the three trustee groups: The risk perception of social media hermits is essentially based on their comprehensive, mostly professional knowledge of the functioning of media. They cope perceived risks with restrictions which, in the following, largely exclude their own practical experience or only make it tangible in their social environment. In contrast, the risk assessment of re-activists is essentially based on negative experiences in their social media practice, which subsequently lead to the introduction of situation-specific behavioral changes. In most cases, however, it must be questioned whether further reflection and rationalization of what has been experienced takes place and leads to a more differentiated social media strategy. The situations described by the interviewed parents rather suggest that the measures taken serve to solve or conceal the specific problem and to prevent the recurrence of this specific event. For example, one's own social media behavior is not fundamentally questioned due to an experienced or observed violation of privacy, but only the activities of the specific provider are reduced or discontinued. The social media optimists, on the other hand, seem either not to perceive existing risks or to appear largely to ignore them. This group focuses on the positive aspects of social media. For the interviewed parents, the (lack of) personal involvement with negative consequences seems to be the frame of reference for their argumentation. A part of these parents, for example, do indeed address the fact that negative social media experiences from their environment are certainly negative, but relativize their significance by referring to the low probability of occurrence for themselves. In the

overall view on risk perceptions, it cannot be reconstructed – at this point – to what extent re-activists are former social media optimists who have been converted to a certain extent through a personal experience in their trusteeship.

In light of the previous arguments, the observed variation in parental media care seems to be mainly due to the interplay of three factors (RQ5): The existing knowledge about the functioning of media, the personal experience of negative consequences, and the children's age. The results are, thus, in line with the existing research on the privacy paradox. With regard to the importance of media care in this context, the results suggest that the perception of media care is essentially determined by the subjective convictions of the parents about the specific benefits or harms of social media activities. What is interesting here, is the low degree of penetration in the rationalization of this responsibility. Almost all parents surveyed stated that the rules they set only apply until their children can decide for themselves. However, none of the three groups seems to think much about teaching their children how to deal adequately with social media. The age of the children is the third influencing factor. However, two aspects have to be separated. On the one hand, the fiduciary relationship between parents and child changes with increasing childhood, since the child can express its wishes and, also, improve its abilities in dealing with media, and thus also social media. Parents with older children in particular point out that their social media behavior and especially restrictions are critically questioned and, if necessary, renegotiated. In contrast, however, most of the parents surveyed equate their children's participation in social media activities with the end of their trusteeship, i.e., the point in time when their children can decide for themselves. This contradiction cannot be resolved from the interviews conducted. Rather, it makes it clear once again that parents are aware of their responsibility, but do not have a consistent strategy for the development of a planned social media education.

Conclusion

There is no question that social media play a central role in the everyday lives of young people. Moreover, one generation is currently experiencing the transition to parenthood, which itself can hardly if at all, remember a time without the Internet. This article thus provides important insights into the interplay between digital media experienced parents and their offspring against the background of parental social media activities.

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