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Sharenting, digital parenting processes, and children's problematic internet use: A cross-sectional study

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Highlights:

- Digital awareness is reactive; higher awareness is associated with increased problematic child internet use.
- Emotional and escape sharenting increases PIU; cognitive–emotional shows a tentative negative association.
- Parental attitudes lose significance when sharenting behaviors are included, indicating a cognition–behavior gap.
- Child PIU explained by age, reactive awareness, and sharenting motivations (43.4% variance).

Abstract

The rapid integration of digital technologies into family life has transformed parenting practices, particularly through the widespread phenomenon of sharenting. While sharenting has primarily been examined as a matter of privacy and digital ethics, its potential association with children's problematic internet use (PIU) remains underexplored. Drawing upon social learning theory and a digital parenting ecology framework, the present cross-sectional study examined the associations among parental sharenting behaviors, digital parenting awareness, digital attitudes, and children's PIU. Participants consisted of parents of children aged 6–12. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for child age, gender, and daily screen time, was employed as the primary analytic strategy. The final model accounted for 43.4% of the variance in children's PIU (R^2 = .434, Adjusted R^2 = .401). Digital parenting awareness, specifically the Protection from Risks and Role Modeling sub-dimensions, emerged as the strongest predictors. A counterintuitive positive direction for these awareness dimensions is interpreted within a reactive parenting framework, suggesting that heightened awareness may develop in response to already-emerging problematic behaviors. Among sharenting dimensions, Emotional Needs and Escape Needs emerged as significant positive predictors, whereas Cognitive–Emotional sharenting was a significant negative predictor, suggesting a tentative negative association that may reflect more reflective and relationally oriented digital sharing practices; however, this preliminary finding requires cautious interpretation, as it may partly reflect statistical suppression arising from intercorrelations among sharenting sub-dimensions. Parental digital attitudes contributed incrementally but were attenuated in the final model. These findings advance the literature by integrating sharenting into the behavioral addiction framework through a hierarchical, multi-dimensional digital parenting ecology model.

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1. Introduction

Digital technologies have become deeply embedded in family life, transforming how parents document, narrate, and share their children's experiences. Sharing the challenges and joys of parenting, as well as showcasing children's daily lives, has increasingly become normalized in digital environments. Evidence indicates that a substantial proportion of parents actively share content related to their children on social media platforms (Brosch, 2016; C. S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2015). Frequently, a child's digital presence commences prenatally through shared ultrasound images and pregnancy documentation. While these practices are often motivated by pride, emotional expression, social connection, and memory preservation, significant concerns have emerged regarding children's privacy, consent, data permanence, and long-term digital footprints (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Steinberg, 2017).

The term sharenting, a portmanteau of "sharing" and "parenting", refers to the public sharing of content by parents regarding their children on digital platforms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). A recent systematic review of 61 empirical studies identified six major themes in the sharenting literature: characteristics of sharenting, children's privacy, professional sharenting, children's perspectives, factors affecting sharenting, and social media dilemmas (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Across these studies, approximately 75% of parents shared images or videos of their children on social media, and, on average, parents posted nearly 1,500 photographs of their child before the child reached age five (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Initially framed as a phenomenon of digital self-presentation and parental identity construction (Ammari et al., 2015; Kumar & Schoenebeck, 2015), sharenting has increasingly been examined through the lens of digital ethics and child protection. Scholars have highlighted potential risks, including privacy violations, reputational harm, identity foreclosure, and involuntary digital surveillance as children grow older (Hiniker et al., 2016; Ouvrein & Verswijvel, 2019; Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Excessive digital exposure during childhood may normalize online visibility and shape children's expectations regarding self-disclosure and digital participation (Steinberg, 2017). Notably, research has linked higher levels of sharenting with increased risk of cyberhate victimization and excessive internet use among children (Wachs et al., 2021, as cited in Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Despite growing ethical concerns, sharenting has rarely been examined in relation to children's behavioral outcomes, particularly problematic internet use.

Parallel to the rise of sharenting, digital parenting awareness has emerged as a central construct in understanding how families navigate children's online environments. Digital awareness encompasses parents' knowledge, attitudes, and regulatory behaviors concerning children's digital engagement (Manap & Durmuş, 2020). Closely related is the broader framework of digital parenting, which integrates awareness with mediation strategies such as supervision, boundary-setting, modeling appropriate digital behavior, and fostering open communication (Chassiakos et al., 2016; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Consistent empirical evidence suggests that increased parental digital awareness and mediation lead to reduced exposure to online risks (including cyberbullying and inappropriate content) and promote overall healthier digital adjustment (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2017). Moreover, parental modeling of appropriate digital behavior plays a critical role in shaping children's technology-related habits and expectations (Lauricella et al., 2015; Shin & Lwin, 2017).

Within the broader behavioral addiction framework, problematic internet use (PIU) is conceptualized as excessive or uncontrolled internet engagement that interferes with daily functioning (Kuss et al., 2014; Young, 1998). PIU has been associated with poor academic performance, sleep disturbances, and difficulties in emotional regulation among children and adolescents (Anderson et al., 2017; Chen & Gau, 2016; Erden et al., 2022). Recognized as sharing features with other behavioral addictions such as impaired control, persistence despite negative consequences, and functional impairment, PIU is understood as a multifactorial phenomenon shaped by individual, peer, and family-level factors. Consequently, identifying familial predictors of PIU has become a central concern in child development and media research.

Despite extensive work on sharenting as a privacy issue and digital parenting awareness as a protective factor, limited research has integrated these constructs within a unified explanatory framework (Brosch, 2016; Chassiakos et al., 2016; Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). As Tosuntaş and Griffiths (2024) noted in their systematic review, empirical studies have predominantly focused on ethical and legal issues concerning children's privacy, safety, and well-being, with the behavioral consequences of sharenting for children remaining largely unexplored. Sharenting has primarily been conceptualized as a digital ethics concern (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), whereas digital awareness has been examined in relation to risk mitigation and mediation

(Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Manap & Durmuş, 2020). However, the combined influence of parental sharing practices, awareness, and digital attitudes on children's susceptibility to PIU remains underexplored.

The theoretical rationale for the present hypotheses is grounded in two complementary frameworks. First, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) positions the family as the primary microsystem within which children develop behavioral dispositions, including those related to technology use. According to EST, children's development is shaped by nested layers of environmental influence, with proximal family processes exerting the most direct effect. Sharenting, as a normative practice within the family microsystem, may therefore establish early digital visibility scripts that children internalize and replicate, thereby predisposing them toward excessive internet engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research consistent with EST indicates that parental digital behaviors including content sharing, modeling, and mediation constitute influential microsystemic inputs that shape children's online habits and self-regulation capacities (Lauricella et al., 2015). Second, drawing on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), children may internalize parental digital norms through observation and modeling (Lauricella et al., 2015). Within the family microsystem, parents simultaneously model digital behaviors, establish boundaries, and communicate implicit norms about online engagement. When online sharing and constant digital visibility are normalized through sharenting, children may develop more permissive attitudes toward intensive internet use. From this perspective, sharenting may function as an ecological antecedent that predisposes children to problematic internet engagement, as those systematically exposed to high levels of digital sharing may come to perceive pervasive online presence as a normative default. Conversely, protective digital awareness and structured mediation strategies may function as regulatory mechanisms that buffer against problematic patterns (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012; Shin & Lwin, 2017). From this perspective, sharenting, digital awareness, and digital attitudes can be conceptualized as interconnected components of a broader digital parenting ecology that shapes children's online behavioral adjustment.

By focusing on a Giresun, Türkiye sample where digital transformation is rapid but structured parental media education remains limited, this study offers context-specific insights with broader relevance. Examining these constructs within a single framework allows for a more integrative understanding of how parental digital behaviors relate to children's problematic internet use.

The present study aims to examine:

(a) The association between parental sharenting behaviors and children's problematic internet use,

(b) The directionality of digital parenting awareness, evaluating whether heightened awareness constitutes a preventive ecological resource or, alternatively, emerges as a reactive parental response to children's pre-existing digital difficulties, and

(c) The contribution of digital parenting attitudes in explaining variability in PIU.

Grounded in Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), parents function as primary regulatory agents within the child's microsystem, shaping behavioral outcomes through proximal processes. Digital parenting awareness, conceptualized as parents' knowledge of digital risks and capacity to regulate children's online engagement, has conventionally been framed as a protective ecological resource. From a self-regulation perspective, higher parental awareness may facilitate monitoring, boundary-setting, and scaffolding of children's digital behaviors, thereby reducing the likelihood of dysregulated internet use. However, Ecological Systems Theory also foregrounds the inherently bidirectional nature of parent–child processes within the microsystem: children's behavioral difficulties may, in turn, elicit heightened parental vigilance and awareness. Accordingly, parental awareness cannot be assumed a priori to be a purely preventive factor; it may also constitute a reactive response shaped by children's emergent problematic behaviors. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that active parental mediation and digital literacy are associated with lower levels of online risk exposure and problematic internet behaviors (Livingstone et al., 2017; Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). In light of both the preventive and reactive pathways outlined above, the directionality of the awareness–PIU relationship is treated as an open empirical question in the present study. Accordingly:

H1: Parental digital awareness is significantly associated with children's PIU. Although the extant literature predominantly frames this relationship as preventive, we examined whether specific awareness sub-dimensions operate protectively (negative association) or reactively (positive association), given the bidirectional influence processes characteristic of the family microsystem.

Drawing on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), children acquire behavioral norms through observational learning processes within the family environment. Certain sharenting practices particularly those driven by habitual, affective, or escape motivations may implicitly communicate that constant digital visibility and online self-presentation are normative and socially valued behaviors, potentially increasing children's

susceptibility to excessive or dysregulated internet use. However, Social Learning Theory also permits an alternative pathway: sharenting that is cognitively deliberate and relationally motivated may model purposeful, reflective digital engagement, functioning as a template for intentional rather than habitual online participation. Accordingly, the relationship between sharenting and children's PIU is hypothesized to be motivationally differentiated rather than uniformly directional, with sub-dimensional analyses being essential to its interpretation. Although prior research has primarily framed sharenting as a privacy concern, emerging evidence suggests that parental sharing patterns and children's digital engagement are empirically linked (Tosuntaş & Griffiths, 2024). Therefore:

H2: Parental sharenting behaviors are significantly associated with children's PIU. Given the multidimensional nature of sharenting, this association is hypothesized to vary by motivational sub-dimension, with more reflective and relationally oriented forms potentially operating as protective factors while habitual or escapist forms may confer risk.

Parental attitudes toward children's digital media use represent a cognitive framework that guides behavioral regulation practices. Within parental mediation theory, attitudes shape how parents interpret digital risks and determine appropriate levels of supervision and guidance (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Protective and guidance-oriented attitudes are likely to translate into more structured mediation strategies, including rule-setting and active engagement with children's digital activities. These practices have been linked to lower levels of problematic internet use by promoting adaptive digital habits and reducing unregulated exposure (Chassiakos et al., 2016). Accordingly:

H3: Parental digital attitudes (protective and guiding) are significantly associated with children's problematic internet use.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the associations between parental digital behaviors (sharenting, digital parenting awareness, and digital parenting attitudes) and children's problematic internet use (PIU). Given the goal of assessing the unique and incremental contributions of theoretically ordered parental constructs to PIU while controlling for relevant demographic variables, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was selected as the primary analytic strategy. This approach enables systematic partitioning of explained variance across theoretically ordered predictor blocks, allowing estimation of each block's incremental predictive value beyond previously entered variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, findings are interpreted as associative rather than causal.

2.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 254 parents recruited from the pediatric outpatient clinic of a public children's hospital. Only mothers or fathers were included, as nearly all caregivers presenting at the clinic during the data collection period were parents. All children were between 6 and 12 years of age and were completely healthy that is, they had no history of psychiatric or physical illness. Children were attending the clinic for routine pediatric health monitoring. Parents who volunteered to participate in the study were consecutively enrolled after data collection began. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants did not receive any monetary compensation. To ensure voluntary participation, each participant signed an informed consent form that provided comprehensive information on the study aims, procedures, and data confidentiality prior to data collection. A convenience sampling method was utilized; all dyads who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate were consecutively enrolled. Prior to multiple imputation, 4 participants were excluded from the final analytic sample due to excessive missing data on key study variables, yielding a final analytic sample of N = 250 on which all subsequent analyses were conducted. Inclusion criteria: child aged between 6 and 12 years, regular access to digital devices, no diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorder that could interfere with behavioral assessment.

2.3. Sample Size Justification

The adequacy of the sample size was evaluated based on recommendations for multiple regression analyses. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the minimum required sample size for testing multiple correlations is $N \geq 50 + 8m$, where m represents the number of predictors. With three primary predictors, the

recommended minimum sample size was 74. The current sample (N = 250) substantially exceeds this threshold. Furthermore, based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, a sample of 250 participants provides sufficient statistical power (> .80) to detect small-to-moderate effect sizes ($f2 \approx .05–.10$) at $\alpha = .05$. Therefore, the study is adequately powered to detect meaningful associations.

2.4. Procedure

Data were collected through face-to-face administration in a designated room within the pediatric outpatient clinic. After receiving detailed information about the study aims and procedures, parents provided written informed consent. Participation was voluntary and unpaid; no monetary or material compensation was provided to participants. Participants completed the survey battery in approximately 20–25 minutes. Sociodemographic information was obtained using a structured form developed by the researchers. The study was approved by the Giresun University Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2023/09), and adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.5. Measures

Sociodemographic Form

A structured questionnaire developed by the researchers was used to collect demographic and digital usage data, including parental and child age, gender, daily digital device use duration, and social media behaviors. Items were informed by prior research on digital parenting and problematic internet use (Kopecky et al., 2020; Manap & Durmuş, 2020).

Sharenting Scale

The Sharenting Scale (Kopuz, 2021) consists of 31 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and assesses five sub-dimensions: Cognitive, Emotional Needs, Cognitive–Emotional Needs, Integrative, and Escape Needs. The original validation study included exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses conducted with parents of children aged 0–13 years. Reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded .80 for all sub-dimensions, indicating good internal consistency. In the current sample, the total internal consistency coefficient was $\alpha = .86$, with subscale coefficients ranging from .78 to .83. Prior to scale administration, participants were provided with a standardized, behaviorally anchored definition of sharenting (i.e., the practice of parents sharing photographs, videos, and personal information about their children via social media platforms) without disclosing the technical term itself, thereby ensuring that limited familiarity with the terminology did not compromise the accuracy of self-reported sharing practices.

Digital Parenting Awareness Scale

Developed by Manap and Durmuş (2020), this 16-item scale measures parental digital awareness across four sub-dimensions: Effective Use, Protection from Risks, Role Modeling, and Digital Neglect. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses conducted in independent samples provided robust evidence for the scale's structural validity and factorial stability. The total reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .81$, with subscale coefficients ranging from .70 to .76. Higher scores on Effective Use and Protection from Risks reflect greater awareness, whereas higher scores on Role Modeling and Digital Neglect indicate lower awareness.

Digital Parenting Attitudes Scale

The Digital Parenting Attitudes Scale (Inan Kaya et al., 2018) comprises 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and two sub-dimensions: Effective Use and Protection from Digital Media Risks. Exploratory factor analysis identified a two-factor structure accounting for 46.1% of total variance, and confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated satisfactory model fit. In the current sample, the total reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .78$, with subscale coefficients of .75 and .73.

Internet Addiction Scale – Parent Form

The Young Internet Addiction Scale – Parent Form consists of 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (0–5). Total scores range from 0 to 100. Scores of 80 or above indicate Internet addiction, 50–79 indicate problematic use, and scores below 49 reflect average use. The Turkish adaptation of the scale demonstrated that item-total correlation coefficients were within acceptable ranges for both university students and

adolescents. Furthermore, t-test results comparing the mean scores of the upper and lower 27% groups were found to be statistically significant (Kutlu et al., 2016).

Reliability of the Instruments

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. According to established methodological standards, coefficients of .70 and above are considered acceptable for research purposes (Field, 2024; Hair et al., 2014). All instruments and sub-dimensions met or exceeded this threshold, confirming adequate internal consistency for subsequent regression analyses.

2.6. Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis) were computed to examine distributional properties. Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis indices (acceptable range ±1.5) and visual inspection of Q–Q plots. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate associations among variables. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with children's PIU as the continuous dependent variable. Four predictor blocks were entered in theoretically motivated sequence: Step 1 entered demographic control variables (child age, gender, daily screen time); Step 2 entered digital parenting awareness sub-dimensions; Step 3 entered digital parenting attitude sub-dimensions; and Step 4 entered sharenting sub-dimensions. This ordering reflects a conceptual hierarchy in which stable child characteristics are controlled first, followed by broad parental awareness, attitude-level cognitions, and finally observed sharenting behaviors. The R^2 change (ΔR^2) and associated F-change statistics were used to evaluate the incremental variance explained at each step. Missing data were handled using multiple imputation (20 imputation sets), and results were pooled across imputed datasets using Rubin's rules, yielding a final analytic sample of N = 250.

2.7. Assumption Testing

Prior to regression analysis, assumptions including linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were evaluated. VIF values below 5, tolerance values above .20, and condition indices below 30 indicated the absence of problematic multicollinearity. Model fit was evaluated using R2 and adjusted R2 values. Interpretation considered both statistical significance ($p < .05$) and effect size magnitude, consistent with established recommendations for regression-based analyses (Cohen, 1988). Given the cross-sectional design, statistically significant associations were interpreted as relational patterns rather than indicative of causal directionality.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Findings

Most parents reported sharing content about their children once a month (n = 216, 85.0%). Smaller proportions reported sharing biweekly (n = 20, 7.9%), once a week (n = 16, 6.3%), or several times per week (n = 2, 0.8%).

Table 1. Frequency of Parental Sharing

Value	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
A few a week	2	0.8	0.8	0.8
Once a week	16	6.3	6.3	7.1
Biweekly	20	7.9	7.9	15.0
Monthly	216	85.0	85.0	100.0
Total	254	100.0	100.0	100.0

Instagram was the most frequently used platform (n = 150, 59.1%), followed by WhatsApp (n = 62, 24.4%) and Facebook (n = 16, 6.3%). Regarding familiarity, 96.9% of parents (n = 246) reported they were unaware of the term "sharenting," and 92.9% (n = 236) had not received formal training on conscious social media use.

Table 2. Most Commonly Used Social Media Platforms for Sharing

Value	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Others	26	10.2	10.2	10.2
Facebook	16	6.3	6.3	16.5
Instagram	150	59.1	59.1	75.6
WhatsApp	62	24.4	24.4	100.0
Total	254	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Parental Awareness and Training on Sharenting

Question	Value	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you know the term 'sharenting'?	Yes	8	3.1
	No	246	96.9
Have you received training in conscious social media use?	Yes	18	7.1
	No	236	92.9
Is your social media account private?	Yes	218	85.8
	No	36	14.2

3.2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the independent and incremental contributions of digital parenting awareness, digital parenting attitudes, and sharenting behaviors to children's PIU, controlling for child age, gender, and parental social media time. The analysis was conducted on the pooled dataset (N = 250) following multiple imputation. Model diagnostics confirmed the absence of severe multicollinearity (Maximum VIF = 4.69 < 5), and residual diagnostics supported the assumptions of normality and independence of errors. The Durbin–Watson statistic for the final model was 2.394, indicating no evidence of systematic autocorrelation. The complete hierarchical regression results are presented in Table 4.

In Step 1, child age, gender, and parental social media time were entered as control variables. The model was statistically significant, $F(3, 246) = 7.14$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$. Child age was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .222$, $p < .001$), indicating that problematic internet use increased with child age. Parental time spent on social media demonstrated a significant negative association with children's PIU ($\beta = -.144$, $p = .015$). The effect of gender was marginally significant ($\beta = -.106$, $p = .045$).

In Step 2, the four digital parenting awareness sub-dimensions were added, yielding a substantial and statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .207$, F change$(4, 242) = 14.31$, $p < .001$). The cumulative model accounted for 31.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .318$). Protection from Risks (Awareness 2; $\beta = .435$, $t = 6.12$, $p < .001$) and Role Modeling (Awareness 3; $\beta = .260$, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors of PIU. Effective Use (Awareness 1) and Digital Neglect (Awareness 4) were not statistically significant. The positive direction of the significant awareness dimensions represents a counterintuitive finding that is interpreted in the Discussion.

In Step 3, digital parenting attitude sub-dimensions were added, resulting in a modest but statistically significant incremental increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .042$, F change$(2, 240) = 4.62$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .360$). Attitude 1 (Guiding Effective Use; $\beta = .16$, $t = 2.03$, $p = .044$) was a significant positive predictor, whereas Attitude 2 (Protection from Digital Risks; $\beta = -.17$, $t = -2.07$, $p = .041$) was a significant negative predictor of PIU at this step.

In Step 4, the five sharenting sub-dimensions were introduced, yielding a further significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .074$, F change$(5, 235) = 6.14$, $p < .001$). The final model explained 43.4% of the variance in children's PIU ($R^2 = .434$, Adjusted $R^2 = .401$). Within the final model, Protection from Risks (Awareness 2; $\beta = .435$, $p < .001$) and Role Modeling (Awareness 3; $\beta = .260$, $p < .001$) remained robust significant predictors. Among sharenting dimensions, Emotional Needs (Sharenting 2; $\beta = .278$, $p = .006$) and Escape Needs (Sharenting 5; $\beta = .241$, $p = .010$) were significant positive predictors, whereas Cognitive–Emotional Needs (Sharenting 3; $\beta = -.325$, $p = .002$) was a significant negative predictor of PIU. Sharenting 1 (Cognitive) and Sharenting 4 (Integrative) did not yield statistically significant effects ($p > .05$). The attitude sub-dimensions that were significant in Step 3 became non-significant in the final model (ps > .05), suggesting that their apparent effects were partially absorbed by the shared variance with sharenting dimensions. All VIF values remained below 5 (Maximum VIF = 4.69), confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity.

Table 4. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Children's Problematic Internet Use

Variables	B	SE B	β	t	p
Step 1: Controls					
Age	0.058	0.015	.222	3.12	< .001
Gender	–0.416	0.301	–.106	–1.97	.045
Social media time (parent)	–0.020	0.159	–.144	–2.44	.015
Step 2: Digital Parenting Awareness					
Awareness 1 (Effective Use)	0.075	0.119	.055	0.63	.527
Awareness 2 (Protection from Risks)	0.442	0.091	.435	6.12	< .001
Awareness 3 (Role Modeling)	0.176	0.073	.260	3.89	< .001
Awareness 4 (Digital Neglect)	0.079	0.070	.089	1.11	.266
Step 3: Digital Parenting Attitudes					
Attitude 1 (Guiding Effective Use)	0.180	0.089	.160	2.03	.044
Attitude 2 (Protection from Digital Risks)	–0.182	0.088	–.170	–2.07	.041
Step 4: Sharenting					
Sharenting 1 (Cognitive)	–0.015	0.082	–.019	–0.18	.855
Sharenting 2 (Emotional Needs)	0.233	0.084	.278	2.77	.006
Sharenting 3 (Cognitive–Emotional)	–0.290	0.092	–.325	–3.16	.002
Sharenting 4 (Integrative)	0.061	0.097	.068	0.63	.530
Sharenting 5 (Escape Needs)	0.229	0.088	.241	2.60	.010

Step	R^2	ΔR^2	F change	p
1	.11		7.14	< .001
2	.32	.207	14.31	< .001
3	.36	.042	4.62	< .001
4	.43	.074	6.14	< .001

Note. N = 250 (pooled dataset following multiple imputation, 20 imputation sets). β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

4. Discussion

The present study employed hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the independent and incremental contributions of digital parenting awareness, parental digital attitudes, and sharenting behaviors to children's PIU, controlling for relevant demographic variables. The final model accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in PIU (R^2 = .434, Adjusted R^2 = .401, $F_{(14, 235)}$ = 12.888, p < .001), indicating that parental digital practices collectively constitute a meaningful ecological layer in explaining children's internet-related behavioral adjustment. The findings support a nuanced, multi-dimensional understanding of digital parenting that transcends global construct-level analyses and highlights specific sub-dimensional mechanisms. Given the study's cross-sectional design, the observed associations should not be interpreted as causal. The positive association between parental awareness and children's PIU may reflect a reactive process; however, alternative explanations (e.g., reverse directionality) are equally plausible. These findings are consistent with a bidirectional interpretation rather than a unidirectional causal mechanism.

4.1. Digital Parenting Awareness: A Reactive Rather Than Preventive Mechanism?

Digital parenting awareness emerged as the strongest predictor block in the hierarchical model (ΔR^2 = .207). Consistent with the reactive pathway articulated in H1, both Protection from Risks (Awareness 2; β = .435) and Role Modeling (Awareness 3; β = .260) were positively associated with PIU in the hierarchical model, after controlling for demographic variables a pattern that diverges from the preventive pathway posited in much of the prior literature. Within a developmental psychopathology framework, this positive direction is best understood as consistent with a reactive parenting hypothesis: parents whose children already exhibit elevated levels of problematic internet use may develop heightened awareness of digital risks and increase protective role-modeling efforts in response to observed difficulties. In other words, awareness may function as a parental response to emerging PIU rather than as a temporally antecedent preventive mechanism. This interpretation is particularly plausible given the cross-sectional design. Temporal ordering between parental awareness and child behavior simply cannot be established here. From an Ecological Systems Theory perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the family microsystem is not a unidirectional conduit of parental influence but rather a dynamic, bidirectional relational context: children's behavioral difficulties may reshape parental cognitions,

monitoring orientations, and role-modeling practices over time, constituting a feedback loop within the microsystem. The elevation of Protection from Risks and Role Modeling awareness both dimensions that are intuitively reactive rather than proactive in nature is precisely what this bidirectional model would predict when children's problematic digital behaviors are already manifest. The absence of significant associations for Effective Use (Awareness 1) and Digital Neglect (Awareness 4) further corroborates this interpretation: these dimensions may reflect stable baseline parental orientations rather than active regulatory responses to perceived and observed child-level risk. Longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to disentangle the temporal ordering of this relationship and to empirically test whether awareness functions as a cause, consequence, or co-occurring correlate of PIU within a formal bidirectional model.

These findings become clearer when considered alongside evidence reported by Zulfiqar and Khan (2024), who found that authoritarian parenting emerged as the strongest predictor of internet addiction, followed by permissive parenting, whereas democratic parenting functioned as a protective factor. Notably, their regression analyses indicated that a one standard unit increase in maternal and paternal authoritarianism was associated with a 64% and 62% increase in internet addiction, respectively, with authoritarian parenting explaining a substantial proportion of variance (23–25%). These findings point to the robust role of controlling and dysregulated parenting environments as distal risk configurations for problematic internet use. However, when juxtaposed with the current results, a more dynamic interpretation of parenting processes becomes necessary. Specifically, while Zulfiqar and Khan (2024) capture relatively stable, structurally defined parenting styles, the positive associations observed in the present study between digital parenting awareness dimensions particularly protection from risks (β = .435) and role modeling (β = .260) and problematic internet use suggest that these dimensions may not function as antecedent protective factors but rather as reactive responses to already elevated levels of child difficulty. In this sense, increased parental awareness may reflect compensatory regulatory efforts within a context where maladaptive digital behaviors have already emerged. This interpretation is consistent with a bidirectional framework, in which parenting behaviors are not only causal but also responsive to child-level risk. The comparable explanatory strength observed across studies authoritarian parenting accounting for up to 25% of variance (Zulfiqar & Khan, 2024) and digital parenting awareness contributing a substantial incremental variance (ΔR^2 = .207) in the present model underscores that both stable parenting styles and context-sensitive parental reactions operate as meaningful, yet functionally distinct, components in the etiology of problematic internet use. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of differentiating between trait-like parenting configurations and state-like regulatory adaptations, and call for longitudinal modeling approaches capable of disentangling temporal precedence and reciprocal influence.

4.2. Digital Parenting Attitudes: Limited Incremental Utility

Consistent with H3, digital parenting attitudes contributed a modest but statistically significant incremental increase in explained variance (ΔR^2 = .042) in Step 3. At this stage, Guiding Effective Use (Attitude 1) was positively associated with PIU (β = .16), while Protection from Digital Risks (Attitude 2) was negatively associated (β = –.17). The positive direction of Attitude 1 may initially appear paradoxical; however, it is interpretable within parental mediation theory (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008) as reflecting over-permissive guidance that is, parents who hold strong orientations toward fostering children's effective digital use may grant broader access and engagement opportunities, inadvertently increasing exposure intensity and the risk of dysregulated use (Chassiakos et al., 2016). The negative direction of Attitude 2 aligns with theoretical expectations: protective attitudes translate into more restrictive mediation strategies that limit unregulated internet access. However, both attitude dimensions became non-significant in the final model following the introduction of sharenting variables (Step 4). This pattern of attitude attenuation constitutes a theoretically pivotal finding. It suggests that the predictive relevance of parental cognitive predispositions toward digital media is substantially absorbed once enacted behavioral practices specifically, the motivational structure of sharenting are accounted for. Consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, it is observable behavior rather than cognitive attitude that constitutes the primary channel through which parental digital norms are transmitted to children. Attitudes may thus function as distal antecedents that shape behavioral practices, which in turn carry the proximal influence on children's internet-related outcomes. This attitude-to-behavior mediation pathway is consistent with broader literature documenting a persistent gap between parental attitudes and enacted digital mediation behaviors (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), and with research among Turkish families specifically corroborating the challenges of translating protective digital attitudes into consistent behavioral mediation (Tural Büyük et al., 2022). Practically, this finding implies that intervention efforts directed solely at

shifting parental attitudes are unlikely to yield downstream improvements in children's PIU unless they simultaneously promote the enactment of specific, reflective behavioral practices.

4.3. Sharenting as a Multidimensional Construct: Differential Associations with PIU

Sharenting behaviors contributed a further significant increment in explained variance (ΔR^2 = .074) in the final step. Consistent with H2's sub-dimensional framing, the association between sharenting and PIU was demonstrably heterogeneous across motivational dimensions, firmly refuting the treatment of sharenting as a monolithic risk construct. Among the five sharenting sub-dimensions, three reached statistical significance. Emotional Needs (Sharenting 2; β = .278, p = .006) and Escape Needs (Sharenting 5; β = .241, p = .010) were significant positive predictors of PIU, indicating that affect-driven and avoidance-motivated sharing may model dysregulated digital engagement. Cognitive–Emotional Needs (Sharenting 3) emerged as a significant negative predictor of PIU (β = –.325, p = .002). Cognitive–Emotional sharenting reflects a more reflective, intentional, and relationally motivated form of digital sharing: one grounded in conscious appraisal of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the parent–child relationship rather than driven by impulsive, habitual, or escape motivations. Crucially, this motivational profile represents precisely the form of digital engagement that Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) would predict to function as a protective behavioral template. Within Bandura's observational learning paradigm, children do not merely replicate parental behaviors; they internalize the motivational and affective contexts within which those behaviors are enacted. When children observe parental online sharing that is purposeful, deliberate, and emotionally attuned hallmarks of Cognitive–Emotional sharenting they are likely to internalize corresponding norms of intentional, regulated digital engagement, thereby developing a dispositional orientation toward purposive rather than habitual internet use. This buffering mechanism would plausibly attenuate the risk of escalating toward dysregulated patterns characteristic of PIU. Furthermore, within an Ecological Systems Theory framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the communicative and bonding functions embedded in Cognitive–Emotional sharenting may strengthen the relational quality of the parent–child microsystem, enhancing parental responsiveness and open communication around digital experiences both of which are established protective factors against PIU (Livingstone et al., 2017). The negative association observed for the Cognitive–Emotional sharenting dimension suggests more reflective and relationally oriented sharing practices are associated with lower levels of problematic internet use. Although multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF values) were within acceptable limits, moderate associations among sharenting dimensions may have influenced the direction and magnitude of regression coefficients. Future studies employing latent variable modeling approaches (e.g., structural equation modeling) are needed to clarify these relationships. Alternatively, it must be acknowledged that this negative association may partly reflect suppression dynamics: the presence of moderate intercorrelations among sharenting sub-dimensions (particularly Sharenting 2, 3, and 5, which approached but did not reach significance) may produce sign reversals and coefficient inflation for specific predictors under simultaneous entry. The significant effects of Emotional Needs (β = .278, p = .006) and Escape Needs (β = .241, p = .010) further corroborate the interpretation that affect-driven and escapist sharing behaviors constitute risk-conferring inputs within the family digital ecology. The collinearity diagnostic warning from prior analyses (with smaller N) has been substantially resolved in the fully imputed dataset; however, future research employing structural equation modeling with latent variable parceling is needed to clarify these structural interdependencies and to obtain more stable sub-dimensional estimates.

4.4. Theoretical Integration: A Digital Parenting Ecology Model

The hierarchical structure of the findings supports a multi-layered digital parenting ecology model in which awareness, attitudes, and sharenting behaviors operate as distinct yet interrelated components of the family microsystem. Digital parenting awareness functions as the most potent explanatory block, though its directionality positive rather than negative signals a reactive rather than preventive dynamic; attitudes provide an incremental cognitive layer whose effects are substantially contingent on behavioral parenting constructs; and sharenting contributes meaningfully but heterogeneously, with specific motivational sub-dimensions exhibiting divergent and theoretically interpretable associations with PIU. Two classical frameworks help make sense of these findings together. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provides the structural scaffolding: the family microsystem is not a unidirectional transmission belt of parental influence but a relational field in which parent and child behaviors are mutually constitutive. The reactive awareness pattern identified here is a textbook illustration of proximal bidirectionality within the microsystem children's problematic digital behaviors reshaping parental cognitions and awareness orientations over time. Bandura's

(1977) Social Learning Theory provides the mechanistic complement: the content, motivation, and affective quality of parental digital behaviors not merely their frequency determine the behavioral norms children internalize through observational learning. Reflective Sharenting (Cognitive–Emotional dimension) and escapist or affect-dysregulated sharing (Emotional and Escapist dimensions) constitute qualitatively distinct learning environments with divergent implications for children's developing orientation toward internet use. This conceptualization advances prior work that has examined digital parenting constructs in isolation (Chassiakos et al., 2016; Duerager & Livingstone, 2012) and responds to Tosuntaş and Griffiths's (2024) call for research linking sharenting to children's behavioral outcomes within integrative frameworks. The significance of this contribution is underscored by the observation that none of the 61 empirical studies reviewed by Tosuntaş and Griffiths (2024) directly linked sharenting to PIU as a measurable behavioral outcome. By simultaneously testing sharenting, awareness, and attitudes within a unified hierarchical model grounded in EST and SLT, this approach offers a more integrated account of parental digital behavior than prior studies. In practice, these findings suggest that intervention programs targeting PIU in middle childhood should move beyond generic risk-awareness campaigns to address the motivational architecture of parental digital sharing. Clinically, fostering Reflective Sharenting through psychoeducation on purposeful, relationally attuned digital engagement may represent a novel and scalable mechanism for buffering children against dysregulated internet use, warranting evaluation in randomized controlled trials.

The proportion of variance explained by the final model was substantial (R^2 = .434), and the adjusted value (Adjusted R^2 = .401) indicates minimal shrinkage following multiple imputation on the pooled dataset (N = 250), substantially improving upon the estimates derived from the listwise-deleted analytic sample. This convergence between R^2 and Adjusted R^2 enhances confidence in the stability of the reported model. Problematic internet use is shaped by a constellation of factors encompassing individual temperament, peer influence, emotional regulation, and broader sociocultural dynamics (Anderson et al., 2017; Chen & Gau, 2016). Accordingly, parental digital behaviors represent one ecological layer within a complex developmental system rather than a singular or dominant explanatory mechanism. These findings call for further longitudinal investigations into how parental digital sharing practices shape children's developing relationship with the internet.

4.5. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant consideration in interpreting the present findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; the observed associations should therefore not be interpreted as indicative of directional effects. Longitudinal research designs are necessary to clarify the temporal ordering and developmental trajectories linking sharenting, digital parenting processes, and children's PIU and, critically, to test whether the reactive parenting dynamic identified here is temporally antecedent to or consequent upon the emergence of PIU. Second, missing data in the original dataset were addressed through multiple imputation (20 imputation sets), yielding a pooled analytic sample of N = 250. While this approach offers substantial advantages over listwise deletion in terms of statistical efficiency and reduced bias, it relies on the assumption that data are missing at random (MAR). Although this assumption is statistically reasonable given the observed patterns, it cannot be formally verified. Future research employing prospective designs with minimized item-level dropout would further strengthen the robustness of estimates. Third, all variables in the present study were assessed via parent-report measures, raising the possibility of common method variance (CMV) and shared reporter bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Of particular concern is the assessment of children's PIU exclusively via parent report: because both predictor variables (sharenting behaviors, digital awareness, and attitudes) and the outcome variable (children's PIU) were reported by the same informant, the observed associations between parental digital practices and PIU may have been artificially inflated by shared reporter bias rather than reflecting true behavioral relationships. Future research should incorporate multi-informant designs, including child self-reports and objective behavioral indicators (e.g., device usage logs), to disaggregate true associative signal from shared-method inflation. Related to this concern, the non-significant finding for the Digital Neglect sub-dimension (Awareness 4) may partly reflect social desirability bias: given that digital neglect carries normative implications of inadequate parenting, parents may have systematically underreported behaviors corresponding to this dimension, thereby attenuating its variance and limiting its capacity to predict children's PIU. This interpretive caveat should be considered when evaluating the null result for this sub-dimension. Future research using behavioral observation, ecological momentary assessment, or peer-informant ratings would help circumvent this limitation. Fourth, children's problematic internet use was assessed via parent-report, which may not fully capture the subjective and experiential aspects of children's digital engagement. Parents may

either underestimate or overestimate their children's internet-related difficulties, potentially introducing measurement bias. Fifth, given the number of predictors included in the final regression model relative to the analytic sample size, the possibility of model overfitting should be considered. Although adjusted R^2 values were reported to account for model complexity, replication in larger samples is necessary to confirm the robustness of the observed patterns. Furthermore, given the inherently sensitive nature of assessing children's problematic internet use and parental digital neglect, the findings may be subject to response bias, insofar as parents may tend to underreport behaviors perceived as socially undesirable or normatively suboptimal. The use of multiple imputation on the pooled dataset (N = 250) addresses earlier concerns about sample reduction, and the convergence of R^2 and Adjusted R^2 values supports model stability. While the hierarchical model explained a substantial proportion of variance in children's problematic internet use, these results are best understood as associative in nature. Future research employing longitudinal, multi-informant, and methodologically robust designs is necessary to validate and extend the present findings. Despite these limitations, we make a substantive contribution to the literature by integrating sharenting into the PIU framework, conceptualizing digital parenting processes within a unified ecological perspective, and extending research beyond isolated variable-level analyses. The findings carry practical implications for the design of digital literacy programs and family-based prevention initiatives aimed at fostering healthier online adjustment among children.

5. Conclusion

Parents who shared content online for emotional or escapist reasons had children with higher PIU scores. Those whose sharing was more reflective and relationally oriented showed the opposite pattern, though this finding warrants replication. Digital parenting awareness, rather than acting as a protective buffer, appeared to develop reactively in response to children's existing difficulties. Parental attitudes mattered less once actual sharing behaviors were taken into account.

These results point toward a shift in how intervention programs are designed. Raising awareness alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Programs that address the motivational quality of parental digital engagement, specifically fostering more reflective sharing practices, may be more effective in reducing children's risk of PIU. Longitudinal and multi-informant studies are needed to confirm these patterns.

Statement of Researchers

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