



## **REPORT ON THE RESULTS DERIVED FROM THE SURVEY TITLED DATA PROTECTION IN A WORLD OF SHARENTING**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Gibraltar Regulatory Authority (**the “GRA”**), as the Information Commissioner, is committed to increasing awareness about the importance of privacy and the impact data protection may have on our daily lives, particularly in view of the highly networked and interconnected online world in which we live. The emergence of digitalised services, and widespread dependency on the online environment across all generations, demands as much attention as the more conventional data processing activities that take place in an offline setting.

Whilst the protection of your own personal data is highly important, protecting the personal data that you process of others, is equally as necessary. Whether it involves the sharing of a group photograph, a list of individuals attending a planned event, or the disclosure of seemingly harmless information about a family member’s likes/dislikes or whereabouts, you are likely to be processing personal data of others at some point. What were once private photographs, videos and anecdotes, now become publicly available online content for a greater audience to view and even store.

Since 2014, the Information Commissioner has engaged in annual Privacy Awareness School Campaigns<sup>1</sup> to examine the relationship between the use of digital technology and privacy matters amongst students in Gibraltar. Through this work, the Information Commissioner can conclude that the use of social networking sites (**“SNS”**) is widespread, and children are becoming increasingly fixated and dependent on showcasing their personal information in an online environment. Interestingly, during our office’s engagement with the student population, it was alleged that many parents and/or guardians follow suit by also engaging in online social practices, thereby giving rise to the latest phenomenon that is termed “sharenting”.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gra.gi/data-protection/privacy-awareness/school-campaign>

“Sharenting” is the practice of parents and/or guardians publicising content about their child(ren) on SNS. When images or information about children are posted on SNS, there is sometimes little understanding or regard for the fact that, in essence, a digital footprint is being created for the child(ren) in question. If appropriate safeguards are not in place, “sharenting” may have an impact on a child’s digital identity, privacy, and even safety.

With the above in mind, the Information Commissioner launched a public campaign to better understand and examine the prevalence of “sharenting” in Gibraltar **(the “Campaign”)**. The Campaign was titled “Data Protection in a World of Sharenting”.

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Initiated in July 2022, the Campaign’s preparatory work involved engagement and cooperation with His Majesty’s Government of Gibraltar’s Department of Education. The official launch took place in October 2022 with the publication of an online survey targeting parents and/or guardians in Gibraltar **(the “Survey”)**. The Survey consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions and was fully anonymised.

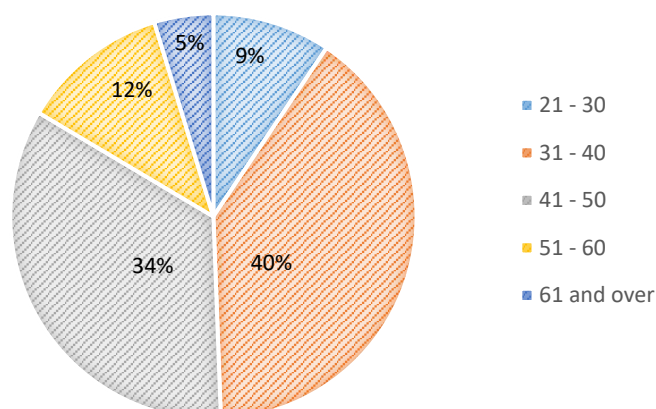
The Survey was shared on the GRA’s website and social media platforms and was also disseminated to parents and/or guardians of students attending local schools by email or via supported e-learning platforms (e.g., Seesaw).

The aim of the Survey was to explore the extent of sharenting in Gibraltar and assess the levels of data protection awareness amongst the target audience (i.e., parents and/or guardians). The Survey culminated and responses were collated in January 2023.

The Campaign also included the publication of a dual infographic (see Annex A) and an awareness-raising audio-visual ([click here](#)), which highlighted some pros and cons of the sharenting phenomenon. This too was shared on the GRA’s website<sup>2</sup> and the GRA’s social media platforms.

## SURVEY RESULTS

**Demographics** - In terms of gender, 67% of the responses pertained to the female population and 31% to the male population, with 1% of respondents preferring not to specify their gender. As for age demographics, Illustration A below shows that approximately three quarters of responses received related to individuals ranging between 31 and 50 years of age.



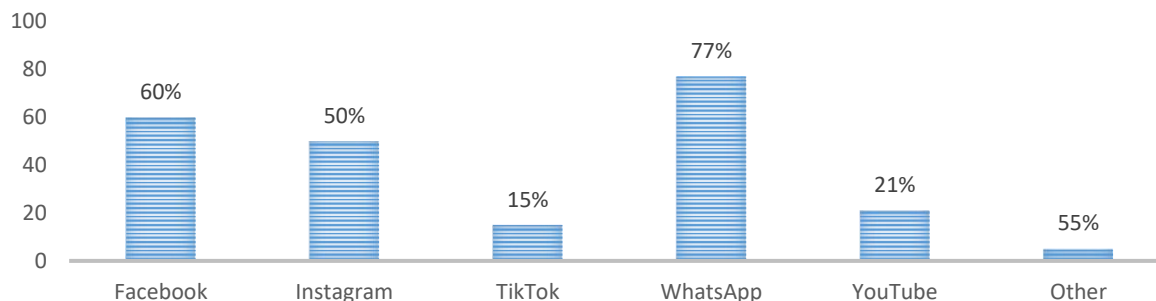
*Illustration A - Age demographics*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gra.gi/data-protection/privacy-awareness/data-protection-day>

Key findings and conclusions derived from the Survey are summarised below.

## 1. **Preferred SNS**

As shown in Illustration B below, the Survey concluded that the three most commonly used SNS in relation to Sharenting are WhatsApp (77%), Facebook (60%) and Instagram (50%).

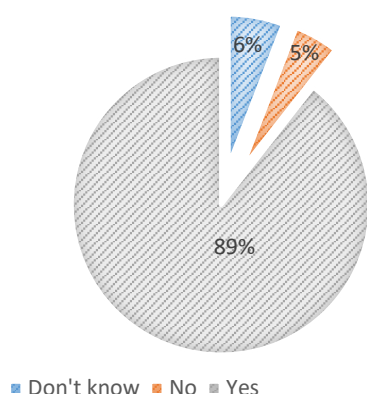


*Illustration B – Preferred SNS*

The results provide a stark comparison to those from last year's Privacy Awareness School Survey<sup>3</sup>, which targets a younger audience. The latter determined that YouTube and TikTok are amongst the most favoured platforms. The many in-built features and wide-ranging functions that these provide, for example allowing users to create their own media space to upload and publish self-produced musical compilations of videos and/or images, may be the reason for this preference amongst Gibraltar's youth. Further, YouTube and TikTok experiences focus more on indirect social engagement, whilst SNS such as WhatsApp centre around a more direct engagement.

The "Other" option, which allowed respondents to highlight any other SNS they use which had not been specified, listed Strava, Discord, LinkedIn and Twitter.

## 2. **The Use of Privacy Settings**



The Survey results show an overwhelming majority of 89% of respondents claiming to use the privacy settings available to them on SNS. This includes aspects such as having restrictions in place and only disclosing information to a specific audience.

It however remains that 5% of respondents confirm to have open profiles, indicating that they are not using the privacy settings available to them on SNS, and a total of 6% of respondents were unaware of their account privacy settings.

*Illustration C – The Use of Privacy Settings*

The Information Commissioner reiterates the importance of protecting yourselves and your personal data when using SNS. The uprising of SNS has resulted in a surge of people disclosing larger amounts of personal data, often unwittingly. When such data falls into the wrong hands,

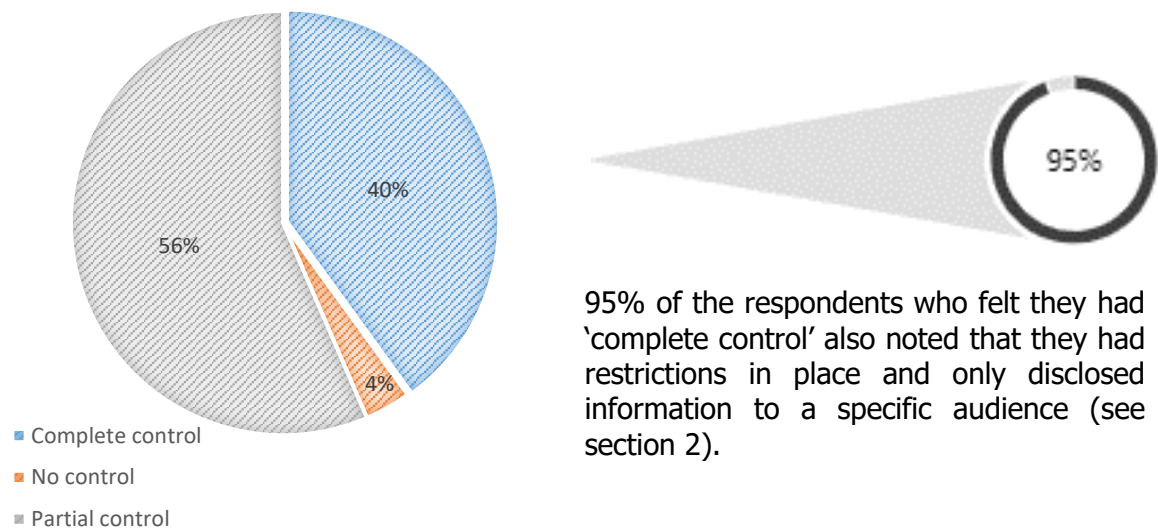
<sup>3</sup> [Privacy Awareness School Survey](#) (Refer to section 8 within the report).

it can be pieced together, and can result in account hacking, illicit accessing of bank accounts, and other types of fraudulent activity.

Privacy settings within SNS allow users to control who sees the information they share, and as a result, control how secure that information is. When uploading information to SNS, users should be aware of their privacy settings and should review them regularly as these may change as result of general software updates on devices or changes within the SNS itself.

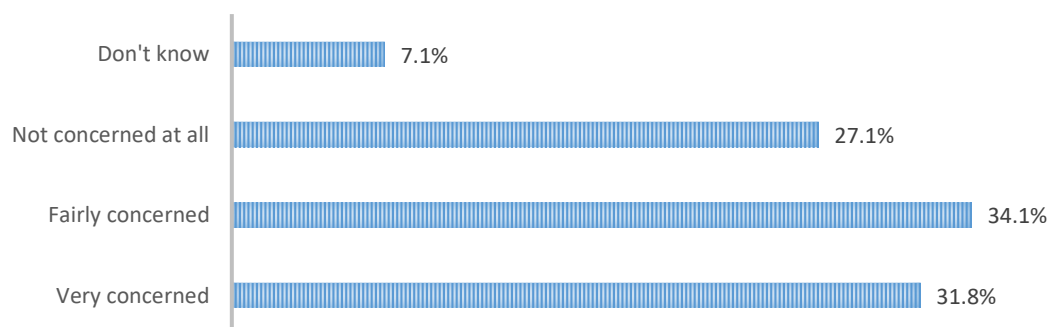
### 3. **Perceived Levels of Control Over Information Disclosed on SNS**

Whilst only 4% of respondents believed they had 'no control' over their personal data, 56% indicated that they had 'partial control', and 40% felt that they had 'complete control'.



*Illustration D – Perceived Levels of Control Over Information Disclosed on SNS*

The Survey also asked respondents to describe how concerned they were about losing control of an image/information shared on SNS about their child(ren). In this regard, over 65% stated that they were 'very' or 'fairly' concerned about a loss of control, with 27% not being concerned at all.

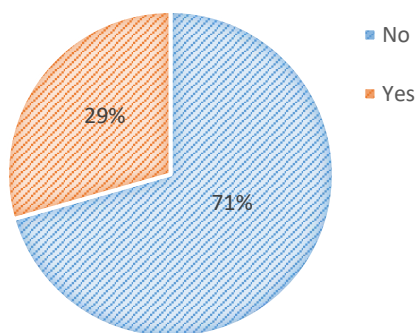


*Illustration E – Levels of Concern Regarding Loss of Control*

### 4. **Prevalence of Prenatal Disclosures**

A child's digital footprint often begins the day they are born, when parents and/or guardians share a photograph on SNS, along with other details such as their full name and birthday. Whilst this share is typically well-meaning and is merely perceived as a public introduction of the baby to the parents' and/or guardians' social circle, it may inadvertently heighten the baby's consequent risk of having their digital identities impacted.

In an attempt to better understand when the practice of sharenting actually begins, the Information Commissioner asked parents and/or guardians whether they habitually shared prenatal information about their child(ren) on SNS.



*Illustration F – Prevalence of Prenatal Disclosures*

Approximately a third of the respondents acknowledged to have previously shared prenatal images and/or information about a past/present pregnancy.

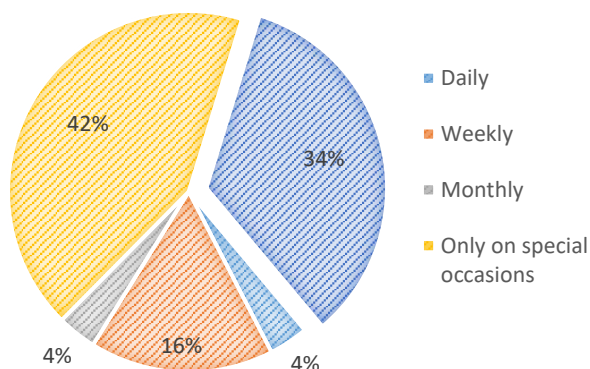
The Information Commissioner found that 52% of respondents who answered “Yes” for this question agreed that they were ‘fairly concerned’ about losing control of an image/information that they had shared on SNS about their child(ren). See section 3 above.

Whilst sharenting may begin before a child is born, over 71% of respondents stated that they (or their partner) have refrained from uploading prenatal images and/or sharing information about a pregnancy on SNS.

## 5. **Frequency of Information Sharing on SNS**

Parents and/or guardians engage in sharenting for many reasons. Some reasons may include pride in their child(ren)’s achievements or milestones, a willingness to seek support from and offer advice to other parents, or a simple means to store memories on their preferred SNS. Decisions about whether, where, and how much to share online may pose a dilemma for many parents and/or guardians. Some may find themselves confronted by an uncomfortable paradox: knowing that sharenting may have implications for their child(ren)’s privacy but finding social media to be an important source of support and connection to others.

When assessing the prevalence of sharenting in Gibraltar, approximately 66% of respondents indicated that they have uploaded images and/or shared information about their child(ren) on SNS. 42% of this quota claim to only upload images and/or share information about their child(ren) on special occasions (e.g., school/sporting achievements, birthdays, holidays) whilst 4% and 16% of respondents respectively post daily and weekly.

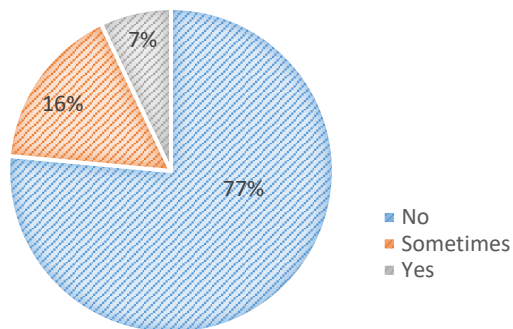


*Illustration G – Frequency of Information Sharing on SNS*

The remaining 34% of respondents claimed they have never uploaded images and/or shared information about their child(ren) on SNS. Interestingly, 90% of this quota claimed they do not upload prenatal images and/or share information about a pregnancy on SNS, as discussed in section 4 above.

Further analysis of the results shows that the entirety of the 4% who post daily felt that they had ‘complete control’ over the information shared on SNS (see section 3). Also, all 16% of those who claimed to post weekly stated that they had restrictions in place and only disclosed information to a specific audience (see section 2).

## 6. How Much Information Is Too Much Information



*Illustration H – Self-reporting of Oversharing*

Whilst it did not explore the motives for sharenting, the Survey did ask respondents for their views on whether they felt they generally overshared their child(ren)'s personal data on SNS.

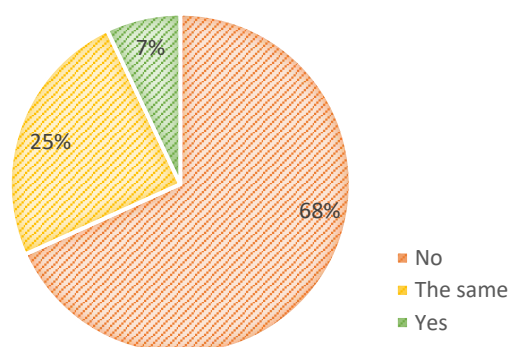
Of the three available responses, 77% said they did not feel they overshared, whilst 7% and 16% said 'yes' and 'sometimes', respectively.

Sharenting can become a cause of concern when parents and/or guardians overshare or share with too wide an audience. For example, if a parent and/or guardian reveals identifying information about a child on SNS (e.g., full name, home address and date of birth) and a malicious actor (e.g., hacker) has obtained other personal data through another means, this could result in identity theft. Additionally, universities and employers are increasingly checking applicants' online activity, and as a result, information posted by parents and/or guardians could become a source of embarrassment or influence a potential university's or employer's assessment of their child(ren).

## 7. Sharenting and COVID-19

The Information Commissioner was also interested to learn whether the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the levels of sharenting. With lockdowns and social distancing measures implemented in Gibraltar, the internet proved vital information affording people a means of staying connected, entertained, and educated. Similarly, at a time when it was impossible to meet with fellow parents, friends, and family, SNS provided a means to share lockdown experiences.

The Survey asked parents and/or guardians whether they posted/shared more information about their child(ren) after the COVID-19 lockdowns in Gibraltar.



*Illustration I – Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Levels of Sharenting*

Only 7% felt that they posted more after this point, with a 68% majority stating that they do not feel they have done so. A quarter of the respondents stated that their behaviour remained unchanged.

The Survey results indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has not had a distinguishable impact on the levels of sharenting in Gibraltar.

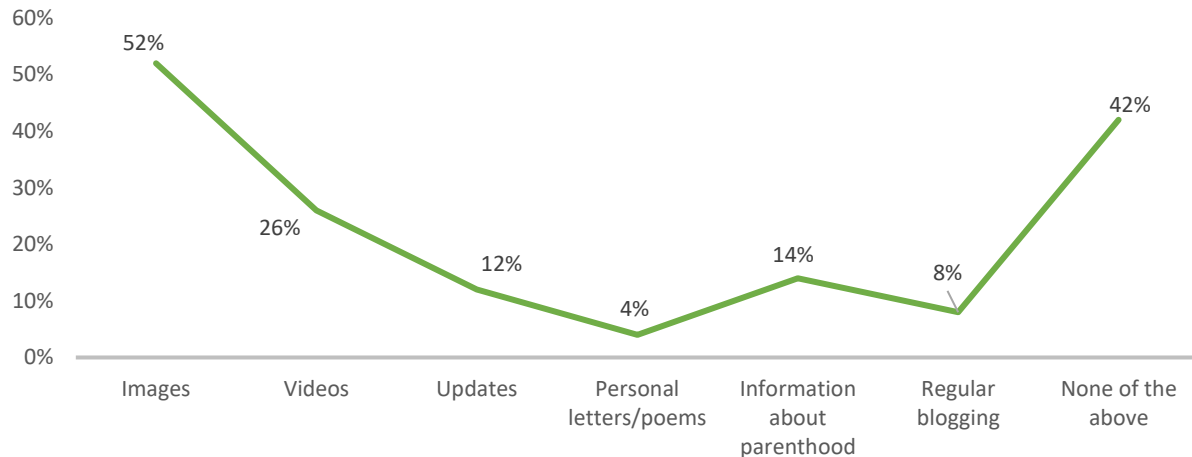
## 8. Forms of Sharenting

Parents and/or guardians may share personal data in different forms and for different reasons. In this Survey, our target audience was asked to describe what media they frequently 'sharented' by selecting all applicable options from the following list –

- Images (including of your child(ren))

- Videos (including of your child(ren))
- Status updates involving/identifying your child(ren)
- Personal letters/poems involving/identifying your child(ren)
- Information about parenthood and/or your parental identity
- Regular blogging/vlogging
- None of the above

The results are illustrated below.



*Illustration J – Forms of Sharenting*

52% of respondents stated that the most common form of sharenting is by way of images. Less common activities in this regard are status updates, regular blogging/vlogging and uploading personal letters/poems.

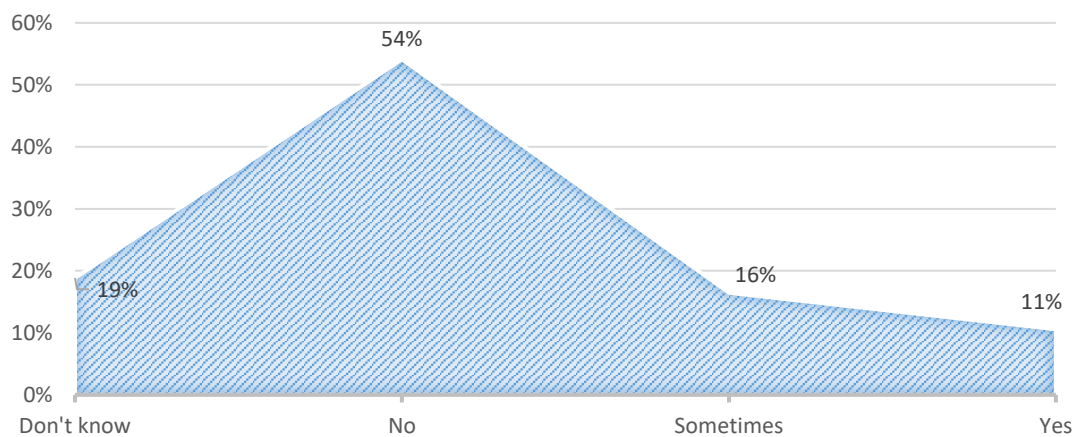
Interestingly, 42% of respondents stated that they do not frequently use any of the above referenced forms of sharenting. In this regard the Information Commissioner notes that there may be other forms of sharing personal data which have not been listed in the Survey. Alternatively, it may be the case that a combined total of 76% of respondents either never upload images and/or share information about their child(ren) on SNS, or claim they only do this on special occasions (see section 5 above). Sharenting using the media identified in the Survey may not be prevalent in such cases.

## **9. Parent (and/or Guardian) Perceptions of the Child(ren) Concerned**

Parents and/or guardians may often become self-appointed arbiters of their child(ren)'s personal data. Whilst the repercussions may not be immediately felt, sharenting can have an effect on a child(ren)'s digital footprint. The Survey explored this by asking parents and/or guardians the following questions –

- Do you believe your child(ren) worry about their personal data being shared online by others including you?
- Have you spoken to your child(ren) regarding how they feel about having their images and/or information shared on SNS?

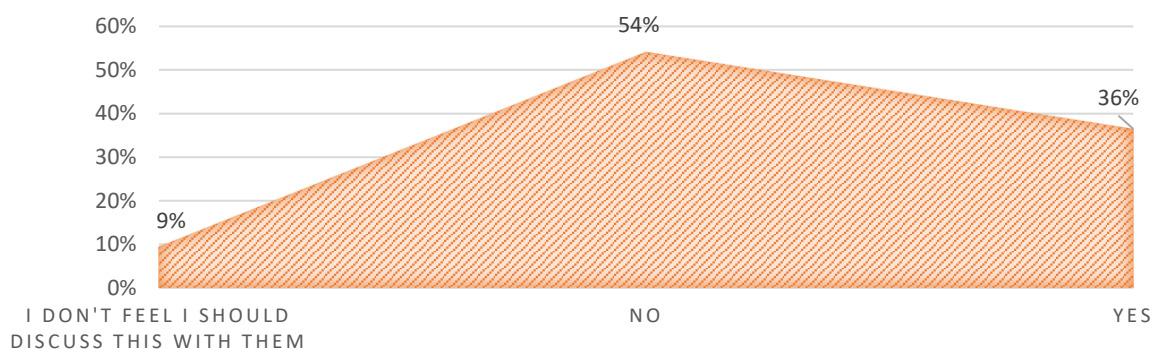
In relation to question (a), 54% of respondents answered 'No', leaving the remaining 46% split between 'I don't know' (19%), 'Sometimes' (16%) and 'Yes' (11%). Results are portrayed in the chart below.



*Illustration K – Parents/guardians Perceived Level of Worry*

The Information Commissioner found that 94% of the respondents who answered 'No' to this question acknowledged they had restrictions in place and only disclosed information to a specific audience (see section 2). Further, 85% of the respondents who answered 'No' also said that they did not feel they overshared their child(ren)'s personal data on SNS (see section 6).

In relation to question (b), 54% of respondents answered 'No' and 36% answered 'Yes'. A minority of 9% stated that they do not feel they should discuss 'sharenting' with their child(ren). Results are portrayed in the chart below.



*Illustration L – Engagement with Children About Sharenting*

The percentage of respondents who have not discussed sharenting with their child(ren) is higher than those who have. Noting that the rationale for such decision was not posed as a question, the Information Commissioner considers that reasons for not discussing this with their child(ren) could be that they feel their children may be too young to understand, or that the relevant parents and/or guardians are using appropriate restrictions and privacy settings and thereby do not feel the need to discuss this.

Notwithstanding, the Information Commissioner generally encourages parents and/or guardians to talk to their child(ren) about sharenting unless there is good reason not to do so. In this regard, the Information Commissioner highlights the following recommendations -

- Discuss with your child(ren) who sees the images/videos or information that you are sharing on SNS about them.
- Discuss privacy settings and ensure the information you are sharing is targeted to a restricted audience. If necessary, amend your privacy settings accordingly so your

child(ren) know that only your friends/followers can see your posts. If you would like to implement further restrictions, consider creating a friends list on Facebook or a close friends list on Instagram for example.

- Explain to your child(ren) how they can protect themselves as they grow up in an increasingly online world, particularly if they are already engaging in social media activities. The Information Commissioner recommends having conversations that are appropriate to your child's level of development and maturity, including discussions about oversharing, appropriate information to share, and the potential negative consequences of actively sharing on social media.

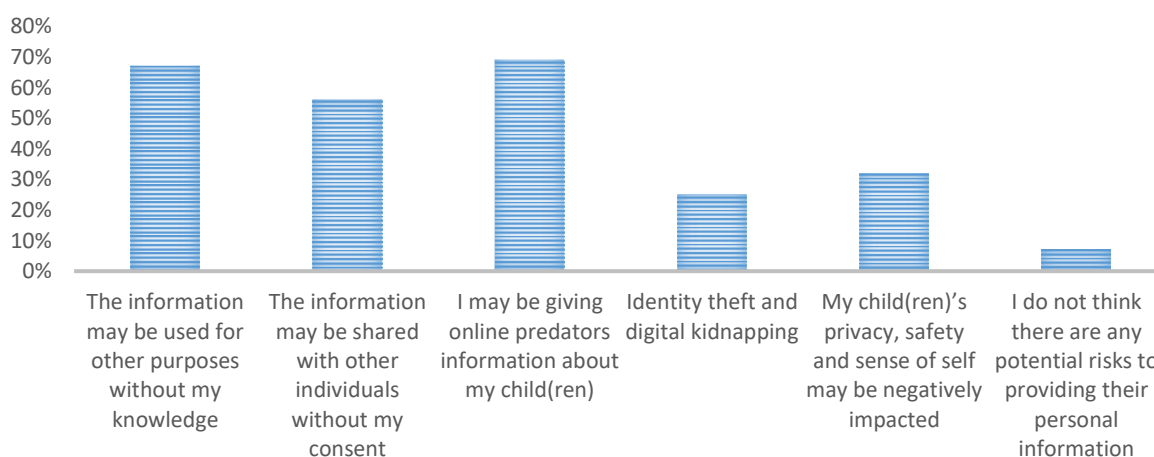
## 10. **The Potential Dangers of Sharenting**

Parents and/or guardians are responsible for their child(ren)'s privacy, especially if they are too young to consent. The dangers of sharing images or information about child(ren) online can cast a fairly wide net, with differing ranges in terms of risks posed and probability of occurring.

In an attempt to better assess how aware the target audience is in respect of these risks, the Survey asked respondents to select a maximum of three answers from the following options, indicating what they felt were the most prominent dangers:

- I may be giving online predators information about my child(ren)
- The information may be used for other purposes without my knowledge
- The information may be shared with other individuals without my consent
- My/my child(ren)'s privacy, safety and sense of self may be negatively impacted
- Identity theft and digital kidnapping
- I do not think there are any potential risks to providing their personal information

Interestingly, almost all respondents recognised that sharenting did carry certain risks. 69% perceived the most serious potential risk is giving online predators information about their child(ren). This was closely followed by 67% who felt that the information may be used for other purposes without their knowledge, and 56% who acknowledged the information may be further shared without their consent.



*Illustration M – Potential risks of sharing children's personal data*

Surprisingly, concerns about 'identity theft and digital kidnapping' or a 'child's privacy and safety' were not amongst the top items considered as particularly serious risks of sharenting. The Information Commissioner expresses some concern that the dangers of such an outcome do not appear to be fully acknowledged, viewing this as an area which may benefit from

greater awareness locally. The Information Commissioner will continue efforts to monitor existing and emerging risks to online safety, providing guidance to parents and/or guardians, children and the wider public, as appropriate.

## **11. Public Awareness**

The final question in the Survey asked respondents about the GRA's awareness-raising initiatives and provision of guidance. The results were relatively equally split, with 51% of respondents aware of the GRA's advisory role. Results shows that there is scope for the Information Commissioner to expand the reach of awareness-raising initiatives and extend the provision of guidance and support to a wider audience.

### **CLOSING STATEMENT**

Posting on SNS comes with its risks, with some dangers being specific to sharenting. However, sharing information about your child(ren) on SNS conscientiously and responsibly is possible if using appropriate security and privacy settings, and having relevant restrictions in place.

To conclude, the Information Commissioner provides his key findings of the Survey -

- 89% of respondents used the privacy settings available to them on SNS.
- Only 4% of respondents felt they had 'no control' over the information shared on SNS.
- Over two thirds of respondents stated having engaged in sharenting to a certain degree, with 42% acknowledging they do so only on special occasions.
- Sharenting occurs even before a child is born, with 29% of respondents claiming they (or their partner) have shared prenatal images/information on SNS.
- 77% of respondents felt they did not overshare their child(ren)'s personal data online.
- Only a minority of 7% felt that they posted more after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, with a quarter of respondents stating that their online behaviour remains unchanged.
- 50% of respondents stated the most common form of sharenting to be images.
- 54% of respondents believe their child(ren) do not worry about their personal data being shared online.
- 9% of respondents do not feel they should discuss 'sharenting' with their child(ren).
- 69% of respondents acknowledged that the most serious, potential risk of sharenting is giving online predators information about their child(ren).
- 7% of respondents deem there are no potential risks to providing personal data online.

## ANNEX A



# SHARENTING

## HOW MUCH OF YOUR CHILD'S PERSONAL DATA DO YOU SHARE ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES?

Whilst parents and/or guardians love to post about their children, the increased use of social networking sites ("SNS") means that, what were once private photos, videos and funny stories, now often become publicly available, for a greater audience to appreciate.

Conclusions from the Information Commissioner's annual Privacy Awareness School Campaign, have repeatedly shown the use of SNS as widespread. Children are becoming increasingly fixated and dependent on showcasing their personal information in an online environment.

Interestingly, many parents and/or guardians are following suit, giving rise to the latest phenomenon that is "sharenting". **Sharenting is the practice of parents and/or guardians publicising content about their child(ren) on SNS.** In essence, through online sharing of their data, a digital footprint is being created for children. If appropriate safeguards are not implemented, this may impact a child's digital identity, privacy and even safety.

| PROS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | CONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>SNS provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A platform for parents/guardians to share the joys of parenthood.</li> <li>A source of online help regarding the uncertainties of parenthood.</li> <li>A stage on which to share parenting advice/opinions and receive validation for parenting decisions.</li> <li>A means of staying connected with friends and family, near and far.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revealing too much information or sharing inappropriate/embarrassing content can have a negative impact on a child.</li> <li>The digital footprint created may not be one the child likes, or agrees with, in the future.</li> <li>Information about a child's location, hobbies and interests may be inadvertently disclosed, which may impact their safety.</li> <li>Children may be increasingly exposed to the risk of identity fraud.</li> </ul> |



# DATA PROTECTION

## IN A WORLD OF SHARENTING

As part of ongoing awareness-raising efforts, the Information Commissioner has initiated a new public campaign to focus on the prevalence of "sharenting" in Gibraltar. **Sharenting is the practice of parents and/or guardians publicising content about their children on social networking sites.** At times, parents/guardians may upload images or share information about their child(ren) online with little understanding or regard to the fact that they are, in essence, creating a digital footprint for the child(ren), and may potentially be impacting the child(ren)'s digital identity, privacy and safety.



**The campaign includes:**

- 1**  
SHORT  
MULTIPLE-CHOICE  
ONLINE SURVEY
- 2**  
REPORT HIGHLIGHTING THE  
SURVEY'S KEY FINDINGS AND  
CONCLUSIONS - TO BE PUBLISHED  
ON DATA PROTECTION DAY 2023  
(28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023)
- 3**  
AWARENESS-RAISING  
INFOGRAPHICS AND  
AUDIO-VISUALS

For more information visit [www.gra.gi](http://www.gra.gi) or contact us by email using [privacy@gra.gi](mailto:privacy@gra.gi)