

Mothers express their ideals in the fashion photos of their children in social media, says study

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Mothers often share fashion photos of their children on social media, a practice which combines the traditions of family photos and the

commercial symbolism of fashion images. A joint study of the University of Jyväskylä and Aalto University investigated how this phenomenon, which has become increasingly common in recent years, is connected to consumption, parenting and childhood as well as to children's privacy.

For the survey, 16 Finnish mothers were interviewed. These mothers have Instagram accounts concentrating on [children's](#) clothes, and they actively post content through these accounts. The findings are published in the journal *Young Consumers*.

According to the results, the [fashion](#) photos of children reflect the mothers' taste, aesthetic skills and values, but also help the mothers identify themselves with their own reference group and save memories of themselves and their children. A key concept in this study is "sharenting," a combination of "sharing" and "parenting." The concept refers to parents' practices of photographing their children and share the photos on social media. The photography practices include selecting the venue and clothes as well as taking, editing and posting the pictures.

"Photography practices highlight the character of the images as constructed representations," says doctoral researcher Minna Kallioharju. "For the mothers, the photos serve as a tool for expressing their own lifestyle and values as well as the prevailing commercial and [social media](#) trends. Through these, they can strengthen their own identity and parenthood and also build connection with other mothers."

Drawing on the visual symbolism of family photos and fashion advertisements, the photos communicate traditional childhood ideals such as an authentic and natural appearance. Although the mothers were aware that the pictures typically present the best sides of everyday life, the Instagram account was regarded as a diary and a photo album, also as a means to save memories.

"The mothers were aware of the potential negative consequences of sharing," Kallioharju says, "but fashion images were found to be mostly harmless due to their aesthetic and positive character. Some [mothers](#) took a more critical stance to the sharing of pictures of their children and avoided including portray their child's face, for example."

More information: Minna Kallioharju et al, Mothers' self-representations and representations of childhood on social media, *Young Consumers* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/YC-06-2022-1541](https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-06-2022-1541)

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