

Social Comparison and Sharenting: Effects on Maternal Mental Health in the Digital Era

Suci Windi Dewani¹, Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari²

Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia¹

Psychology Study Program, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia²

E-mail: suci.windi@ui.ac.id¹, elizabeth.kristi@ui.ac.id²

Correspondent Author: Suci Windi Dewani, suci.windi@ui.ac.id

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Abstrack

The rapid development of information technology, such as social media, can significantly impact daily life, including maternal mental health. Therefore, an overview of social media's positive and negative impacts on maternal well-being is needed. This article presents a literature review of 7 articles, screened using the framework for narrative reviews method from Ferrari (2015), to explore the impact of social media use, including sharenting and social comparison, on maternal well-being. The reviewed literature includes studies involving mothers across diverse contexts, allowing for a broader understanding of the global impact on maternal well-being. The analysis found that social media development has both positive and negative impacts on maternal well-being. Positive impacts include easier access to information and social support. On the other hand, negative impacts involve social media use, increased depressive symptoms, and decreased life satisfaction, mainly due to pressure to fulfil ideal parenting standards.

Keywords: housewives, intensive social media use, psychological distress

Abstrak

Pesatnya perkembangan teknologi informasi, seperti media sosial, dapat berdampak signifikan pada kehidupan sehari-hari, termasuk kesehatan mental ibu. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan gambaran tentang dampak positif dan negatif media sosial terhadap kesejahteraan ibu. Artikel ini berisi tinjauan literatur dari 7 artikel yang disaring menggunakan metode framework for narrative review dari Ferrari (2015) untuk mengeksplorasi dampak penggunaan media sosial, termasuk sharing dan perbandingan sosial, terhadap kesejahteraan ibu. Literatur yang ditinjau mencakup studi yang melibatkan ibu di berbagai konteks, memungkinkan pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang dampak global terhadap kesejahteraan ibu. Analisis menemukan bahwa perkembangan media sosial berdampak positif dan negatif pada kesejahteraan ibu. Dampak positif termasuk akses informasi dan dukungan sosial yang lebih mudah. Di sisi lain, dampak negatif melibatkan penggunaan media sosial, peningkatan gejala depresi, dan penurunan kepuasan hidup, terutama karena tekanan untuk memenuhi standar pengasuhan yang ideal.

Kata kunci: ibu rumah tangga, penggunaan media sosial yang intensif, tekanan psikologis

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become essential to everyday life, including parenting practices. Based on data from Databoks (2023), Indonesia's number of Instagram users reached 103.3 million, the fourth largest in the world. In addition, based on data from Goodstat (2023), most Instagram users are aged 18 to 24 years, around 30.8%, followed by the age group 25 to 34 years, as much as 30.3%. One of the growing phenomena among mothers who use social media is sharenting, which is sharing children's personal information through photo or video uploads. This practice is often done to build a self-image as a good mother, share experiences, or seek social support (Dwiarsianti, 2022). While sharenting can boost self-confidence and expand support networks, it also carries risks, such as violating children's privacy and potentially receiving criticism or negative judgment from other users.

One negative impact that often arises from sharenting is mom shaming, which is a form of cyberbullying that criticizes or judges a mother's parenting style. This can trigger stress, reduce self-confidence, and adversely affect the mother's mental health (Dewi & Istinabila, 2022). Mom shaming behaviour can appear as flaming, harassment, denigration, and exclusion (Williard, 2007). A BukaReview (2021) survey noted that as many as 88% of mothers in Indonesia have experienced mom shaming. This condition hurts mothers' mental health, including decreased self-confidence and the emergence of depressive symptoms (Dewi & Istinabila, 2022).

In addition, social media facilitates social comparison, the tendency of individuals to compare themselves with others who appear more successful or ideal. Festinger (1958) divides social comparison into two types: upward social comparison and downward social comparison. Upward social comparison is when individuals compare themselves to others considered superior, which can have adverse effects such as frustration and depression. At the same time, downward social comparison is when individuals evaluate themselves by comparing others who are considered inferior, which can have positive effects, such as a sense of pride and self-enhancement. In the context of mothers, upward social comparison to other mother figures who appear "perfect" on social media can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and even symptoms of depression (Festinger, 1958; Choi & Kim, 2020).

Social comparison is essential in understanding how social media affects mothers' self-perceptions in parenting roles. On social media, mothers are often exposed to content that displays ideal parenting images, such as children who always look happy, neat homes, creative parenting activities, and mothers who look perfect. When a mother compares her life to these idealized images - especially if she feels inferior or fails to meet these standards - feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and reduced self-confidence arise. This aligns with research conducted by Wirtz et al. (2021), which confirmed that social media use can affect individual subjective well-being.

Meanwhile, maternal well-being can be explained through subjective well-being, which includes a cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction and a balance of positive and negative affect (Diener, 1984). In the context of motherhood, subjective well-being refers to the extent to which a mother feels satisfied with her life, her role as a parent, and how she manages emotions in the face of parenting challenges. Seligman's (2011) model of well-being also emphasizes five main elements of well-being or PERMA theory: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Positive emotions encompass feelings like happiness, gratitude, and hope, which are present in daily life, including caregiving activities. Furthermore, engagement is being fully involved and



feeling involved in meaningful activities, such as playing or caring for children. Then, relationships where individuals have supportive social relationships, including with partners, families, and parenting communities. The next concept is meaning, which refers to the feeling that motherhood has a greater purpose and meaning in life. Finally, accomplishment is having a sense of achievement in small things (such as successfully calming a child) and long-term achievements in parenting. These two approaches help explain how digital social pressures can affect mothers' emotional and psychosocial aspects.

When social media presents unrealistic standards or expectations, the digital pressure can interfere with these five aspects. For example, moms may lose positive emotion. They don't feel good enough or feel like they fail to achieve accomplishment because they often compare themselves to others. This imbalance can ultimately impact the overall subjective well-being. Thus, both the concept of social comparison and Diener and Seligman's model of well-being provide a strong theoretical framework for understanding how social media affects the emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of maternal well-being. This understanding is essential for formulating intervention strategies that target digital literacy and support mothers' mental health and parenting capacity in the digital age.

Against this backdrop, this study explores how sharenting and social comparison practices on social media impact maternal well-being. The primary focus of the research is to understand the interrelationship between the three concepts in the context of parenting in the digital era. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a basis for developing digital literacy and social support programs that are more adaptive to the needs of today's mothers.

METHOD

The method used in this research is Ferrari's framework for narrative reviews (2015). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to synthesize literature systematically and narratively on topics with diverse concepts and methodological approaches. The Framework for Narrative Reviews emphasizes critical evaluation and integration of findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the issue under study.

Conducting a literature review begins with searching by browsing terms in relevant databases. After that, selection criteria are established to determine which articles to include or exclude. Next, the articles are critically evaluated, and the findings are compiled and evaluated (Ferrari, 2015). This ensured the literature review included a comprehensive and structured analysis. The literature search was conducted by accessing online electronic databases from Scopus, Wiley Library, Sage Journal, SpringerLink, ProQuest, and Taylor & Francis. Articles were collected using specific keywords, namely "social media impact on maternal well-being", "online social comparison and mental health of mothers", "impact of social media on mothers' emotional well-being", and "the role of social media in maternal stigma and its impact on mothers' mental and emotional health".

The search for articles in the database was conducted using the following inclusion criteria: 1) the article discusses the relationship between social media use, social comparison, and its impact on maternal well-being; 2) a reputable and internationally indexed journal publishes the article; 3) the article was published in the last 10 years (2015 - 2025) because social media began to be widely used during the last 10 years along



with technological developments; 4) the article used is a journal article, not a thesis, dissertation, or book. The exclusion criteria for the articles to be reviewed were studies that only identified the experience of using social media and its effect on maternal well-being.

Based on the search results, 422 articles were obtained, of which 401 were not relevant to the topic of social media use and its influence on maternal well-being. Then, in the 21 articles considered, one could not be accessed, and 13 other articles were outside the inclusion criteria. Thus, the authors obtained seven full-text articles that met the requirements (Figure 1).

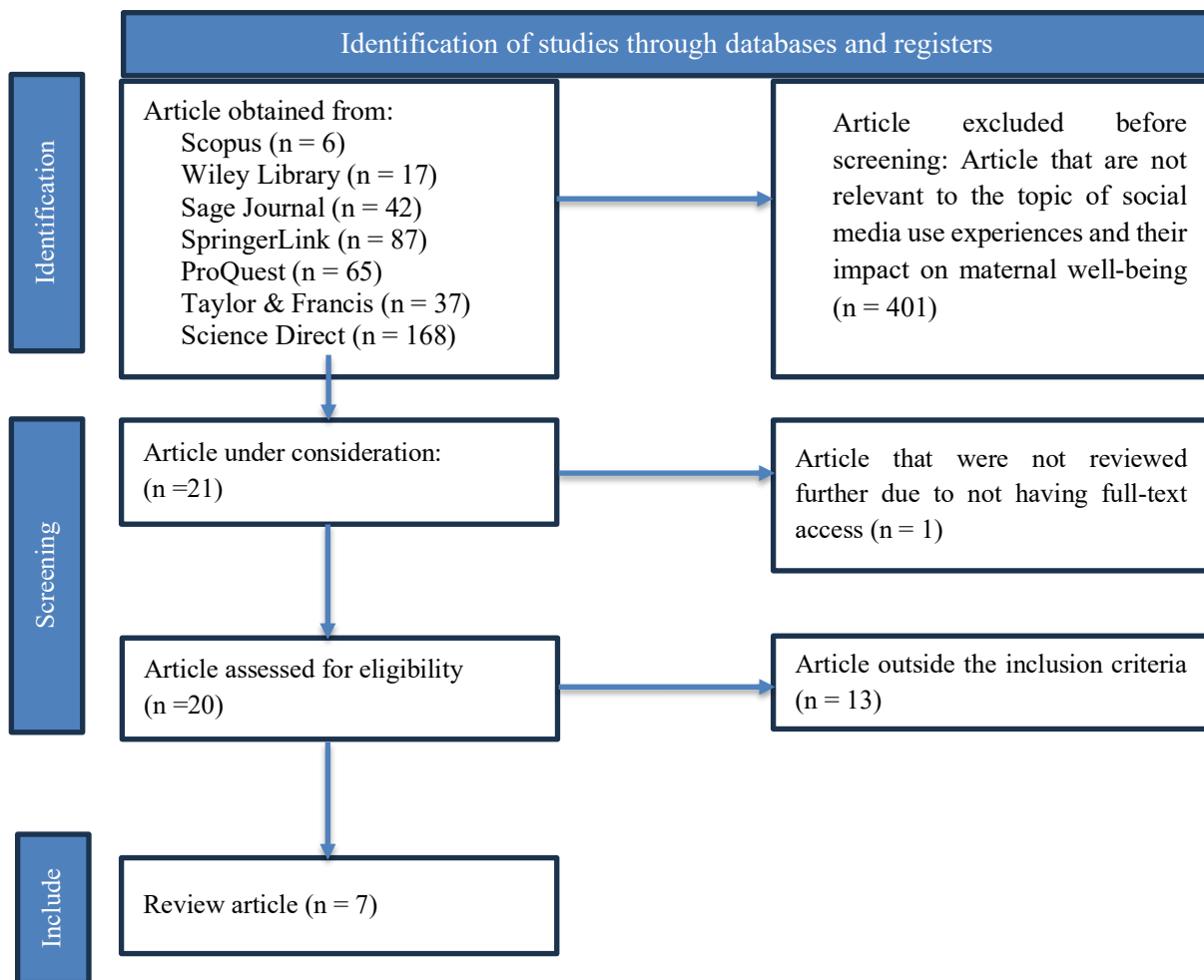


Figure 1. PRISMA Models



To ensure the quality of the secondary data used, an assessment of content validity was conducted through expert judgment, involving one academic in psychology to review the article's suitability with the research focus. In addition, the content reliability of the articles was also strengthened by comparing findings across studies and ensuring consistency of themes. Each article was analyzed manually using a data extraction matrix that included the following elements: researcher, year published, title, method, subject, data collection technique, and main findings. Analysis was conducted thematically, identifying emerging patterns related to the impact of sharenting, social comparison, and aspects of maternal psychological well-being.

A limitation of this study is the potential article selection bias of using only English-language articles published in specific journals, which may have excluded essential studies from non-English literature or local journals. In addition, as a narrative review study, findings cannot be generalized statistically.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents a summary of seven articles that discuss in depth how the practice of using social media, especially sharenting and social comparison, impacts the well-being of mothers in carrying out their role as a mother.

Table 1.
 Summary Of Seven Articles

No.	Researcher Name	Year	Research Title	Research Methods	Research Subject	Data Collection	Results
1.	Betul Orhan Kilic, Serhat Kilic, & Betul Ulukol	2024	Exploring the relationship between social media use, sharenting practices, and maternal psychological well-being	Quantitative	130 mothers who actively use social media instagram, have children aged 0-13 years and are willing to be research participants.	Data collection with questionnaires that include: 1) social media use (duration, frequency of use, and activities shared on social media); 2) depression scale using Beck Depression Inventory (BDI); 3) life satisfaction scale with Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS); and 4) resilience with Cognitivr Triad Inventory (CTI) scale	The results showed that: 1) Generally, mothers share content about children on social media at most once a month with the type of content that is often shared is photos of children. The average time spent on Instagram is 75 minutes per day. 2) Mothers who used Instagram more frequently and longer had higher depression symptoms. In addition, mothers who shared content that violated children's privacy or contained children's identifying information had higher depressive symptoms than mothers who did not share such content. 3) Mothers who share content that violates children's privacy or contains children's identifying information have lower levels of life satisfaction



							4) No significant relationship was found between sharenting habits and the level of maternal resilience	
2.	Catherine Archer & Kai-Ti Kao	2018	Mother, baby, and facebook makes three: does social media provide social support for new mothers?	Qualitative focus group discussion approach	with	Mothers of WA playgroup members who have children aged 0 - 4 years and have social media	Semi-structured interview	<p>The results showed that:</p> <p>1) Mothers' motivations for using social media are contact with the outside world and maintaining relationships with family and friends, fear of being left behind if they do not use social media, easier to get information, can join organizations or businesses, and social support that provides a sense of togetherness and emotional comfort.</p> <p>2) The negative impacts felt by mothers when using social media such as addiction to playing social media, triggering depression and anxiety, the content shared sometimes does not reflect the reality of their lives, there are privacy issues, namely losing control of photos and personal information related to their children, and habits in using smartphones will be imitated by their children.</p>



3.	Jaime E. Sidani, Ariel Shensa, Cesar G. Escobar-Viera, & Brian A. Primack	2020	Associations between comparison on social media and depressive symptoms: a study of young parents	Quantitative	528 parents who have children under 18 years old and actively use social media.	Data was collected using a questionnaire that measured: 1) Social media use (time used and platform); 2) Parental social media comparison measured by adaptation of several scales namely lowa-netherlands comparison orientation measure, fear of missing out scale, and facebook envy scale; 3) Depressive symptoms measured using patient health questionnaire - 9 (PHQ-9).	The results showed that: 1) Parents who use social media for long periods of time are associated with increased depressive symptoms. 2) Parents who frequently compare themselves on social media are more likely to experience symptoms of depression.
4.	Kelly M. Weikle	2023	“Have you been in this position? Because your comment does not make sense.” Discourse	Qualitative with action-implicative discourse analysis (AIDA)	-	Data was collected through two Facebook pages by looking at the most relevant comments.	The results showed that: 1) One of the high prevalence and negative impacts of social media is mom-shaming, which is the negative evaluation given to mothers towards ideal parenting practices. Negative comments received



strategies and
situated ideals
of interaction
on social
networking
sites for
mothers

on social media cause
mothers to experience a dilemma
on how, and if they should
respond.

- 3) The form of support provided by mothers to mothers who experience mom shaming through discursive strategies is by asking antagonistic questions, sharing personal experiences, providing feedback with negative comments, and providing reactions with negative emojis.
- 4) Providing antagonistic questions such as responding by questioning the authority or ability of the person who made the negative comment.
- 5) Share personal experiences to make statements, refute claims against negative comments.
- 6) Giving feedback with negative comments, known as "shame the shamer", and reacting with negative emojis such as sad and angry emojis.
- 7) The discursive strategies used can reduce the practice of mom shaming on social media and



							increase support and well-being in online communities.
5.	Ciera E. Kirkpatrick & Sungkyoung Lee	2022	Comparisons to picture-perfect motherhood: how instagams idealized portrayals of motherhood affect new mother's well-being	Quantitative with experimental design and stimuli	464 mothers aged at least 18 years old, with children aged 3 years or older.	Data collection was carried out with an online experiment by looking at participants' assessment of the stimulus displayed, namely Instagram posts that describe the role of mothers. Then participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that measured: 1) state of social comparison as measured by a scale adapted from Tiggemann & Anderberg 2020; 2) Perceived similarity measured by one item "how similar do you think you are to the mother you saw in the instagaram post?"; 3) anxiety	The results showed that: 1) Posts describing non-idealistic maternal roles led to higher social comparison compared to posts describing idealized maternal roles. This is because non-idealistic posts are more realistic and easier to understand as a legitimate comparison. 2) Non-idealistic posts result in greater perceived similarity, as the experience displayed is more like the participant's real experience. 3) Idealistic posts increased envy and anxiety in participants. Idealistic posts were perceived as providing an unrealistic picture that increased anxiety about how the participant's experience fit into the idealized picture.



					measured by Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory; and 4) Envy which was measured by a scale adapted from Chae 2018.		
6.	Danielle Wagstaff, Natalie Wolf, and Naomi Smith	2024	Comparing, competing, and the good mum ideology: maternal well-being in the context of social media	Quantitative	242 mothers who have at least one child under 12 years old and are Instagram users.	Data were collected using questionnaires measuring: 1) social comparison as measured by The Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure; 2) emotional investment in Instagram as measured by The Instagram Investment Scale; 3) Intensive mothering ideology such as good mothering as measured by a scale adapted from Chae's 2015; 4) Maternal competitive as measured by the maternal	The results showed that: 1) Social comparison significantly predicts emotional investment in Instagram, where mothers who compare themselves more often with other mothers on Instagram tend to be more emotionally involved in using Instagram. In addition, social comparison also affects good mother ideology, meaning that the more mothers compare themselves with other mothers on social media Instagram, the stronger they internalize a very intense parenting ideology. 2) Emotional investment in Instagram does not directly influence good mother ideology, meaning that even though mothers spend more time on



competitiveness questionnaire; 5) parenting competence as measured by the parenting sense of competence scale; 6) parenting stress as measured by the parenting stress scale.

instagram it does not make them believe in good mother ideology. In addition, emotional investment in instagram does not affect parenting competence, meaning that even though mothers spend a lot of time.

- 3) Social comparison affects mothers' well-being, leading to a sense of inadequacy as a parent and less satisfaction with their parenting role. In addition, good mother ideology has a negative impact on well-being, leading to less satisfaction and more stress in parenting.
- 4) Maternal competitive influences social comparison and good mother ideology. In addition, maternal competitive has an indirect effect on parenting competence through social comparison. Mothers who feel more competitive tend to engage in more frequent social comparison, which reduces their sense of competence and satisfaction in parenting.



7.	Brandon T. McDaniel, dan Laura A. Stockdale	2017	“Do you dare to compare?” associations between maternal social comparisons on social networking sites and parenting, mental health, and romantic relationship outcome	Quantitative	749 moms who are part of iMom (Internet Mom Project) and have children.	Data were collected using questionnaires measuring: 1) social comparison and frequency of use; 2) parenting competence with the parenting sense of competence scale (PSOC); 3) role overload; 4) depressive symptoms with the center for epidemiological studies-depression scale (CES-D ₁₀); 5) life satisfaction with the satisfaction with life scale; 6) conflict over SN site use; 7) social support with the relationship with other people scale; 8) relationship satisfaction with quality of marriage (QMI); 9) coparenting quality with the coparenting	The results showed that: 1) Mothers who frequently engage in social comparison report high levels of role overload, meaning that the more they compare themselves to others on social media, the greater the burden they feel related to caregiving and other responsibilities. 2) Mothers who often do social comparison tend to experience symptoms of depression. 3) Mothers who often do social comparison tend to feel less capable and less competent in carrying out their role as a mother. 4) Mothers who frequently engage in social comparison tend to feel low support and low-quality coparenting relationships.
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relationship scale
short form (CRS).



Based on a literature review of seven research articles, it can be concluded that the use of social media - especially platforms such as Instagram - has a significant impact on mothers' psychological well-being in carrying out their parenting role. Social media is often utilized to express oneself and seek information (Archer & Kao, 2018). Fiqiah & Muarifudin (2024) research also showed that mothers perceive various positive benefits from social media, such as ease of communication, quick access to information, time efficiency, and the opportunity to expand their network of friends. However, behind these benefits, social media also presents its own challenges. Digital platforms provide a fertile space for social pressures to emerge, such as excessive sharenting (sharing too much personal information about children) and the tendency to make social comparisons with other mothers

As explained by Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals tend to evaluate themselves through comparison with others. In the context of mothers, this practice occurs when they compare their parenting with other mothers' parenting images on social media. Results from the research of Coyne et al. (2017), Sidani et al. (2020), and Wagstaff et al. (2024) showed that the more often mothers made social comparisons, the higher the levels of depression, parenting stress, and feelings of parental inadequacy. This suggests that parenting standards displayed on social media become unrealistic benchmarks and reduce mothers' subjective well-being.

Furthermore, Kirkpatrick & Lee (2022) research supports this argument by showing that social media content featuring idealized images of parenting creates anxiety and jealousy due to the discrepancy between reality and expectations. In contrast, content featuring realistic (non-ideal) images of parenting created higher perceived similarity and reduced comparison pressure. This finding is important as it suggests that the “ideal mom” narrative widespread on social media is often toxic and stress-inducing.

Tate (2023) literature review also showed that making social comparisons after exposure to intensive parenting ideas negatively impacts maternal well-being. In the context of Social Comparison Theory, the personal characteristic of the tendency to compare oneself as a mother act as a mediating factor that determines how much influence social media has on maternal mental health. When a mother tends to compare herself as a mother with others, the negative effects of exposure to idealized parenting content on social media become stronger. Every post about someone else's parenting success can be a trigger for stress or a sense of inadequacy, especially when not coupled with a healthy capacity for self-reflection.

A mother's health not only affects her own well-being but is also crucial for the health and development of her child and society at large. These social comparisons can bring benefits, such as increased parenting efficacy and reduced parenting stress, if they are based on assimilation and benign envy. However, conversely, such comparisons can also exacerbate parenting stress if they lead to feelings of inadequacy and malicious envy, which decrease parenting efficacy (Lee et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, in the context of sharenting, research by Orhan et al. (2024) found that mothers who frequently share their children's personal information (such as photos and identity) tend to have higher levels of depression and lower life satisfaction. Parents upload photos of their children without realizing that they are shaping their child's digital footprint and sacrificing their privacy and right to manage their own digital identity (Donovan, 2020). This phenomenon can be explained through the affective balance aspect of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984), where stress from harmful exposure to social media decreases positive affect and increases negative affect in mothers' lives.



While sharenting can be a means of social validation, when not done ethically, it can hurt mental health.

The emotional and psychosocial aspects of PERMA theory (Seligman, 2011) suggest that elements such as positive emotion, relationships, and accomplishment are disrupted by social expectations that arise in digital media. For example, mothers who are overly focused on presenting an image of perfect parenting experience emotional distress, loss of meaning, and do not feel an authentic sense of accomplishment in their role as mothers. This is in line with the findings of Wagstaff et al. (2024) that the internalization of good mother ideology, which is the view that mothers must always be perfect and fully oriented towards children, can lead to reduced parenting competence and increased stress. In other words, idealized standards of parenting spread on social media can reduce mothers' psychological well-being (Chae, 2015).

In addition, mom shaming becomes a negative dynamic that exacerbates the pressure. Weikle's (2023) research identified how social interactions in the media often lead to negative judgments and comments on mothers' parenting practices. Strategic responses, including antagonistic discourse, sharing personal experiences, and symbolic actions like negative emojis, can serve as forms of resistance and solidarity among mothers in online communities. This suggests that, despite its positives, digital social support should be critiqued in the context of its vulnerability to abuse and social pressure (Archer & Kao, 2018).

Compared to other studies showing the benefits of social media as a source of emotional support and information, Archer & Kao (2018) highlighted the flip side of social media use that leads to unhealthy emotional investment and exposure to unrealistic parenting standards. Thus, it is essential to balance the use of social media wisely, limit the intensity of sharenting, and build digital literacy for mothers.

CONCLUSION

Social media use has a complex impact on maternal well-being. While it provides benefits such as access to information and social support, it also triggers social comparison, sharenting, and mom shaming, leading to increased depressive symptoms, decreased life satisfaction, and feelings of incompetence in motherhood. The pressure of good mother ideology also creates unrealistic parenting expectations. Therefore, educating mothers about digital etiquette, social media literacy, and building supportive online communities is essential. Educational institutions and families can also provide active support to help mothers cope with social pressure healthily. Theoretically, these findings enrich the literature on maternal well-being by highlighting the critical role of social comparison in the psychological dynamics of social media use. This study has limitations in that the articles reviewed came from different social and cultural contexts, so generalization of the results to the Indonesian population needs to be done by considering the social and cultural norms of parenting in Indonesia. In addition, this literature review was conducted with a general approach and has not discussed in depth individual factors such as maternal age, education level, employment status, or psychological conditions that may influence responses to social media.

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