



Full length article

Why do adolescents untag photos on Facebook?

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ABSTRACT

Facebook users practice different strategies for managing their online self-presentation. Among the different available techniques, untagging is the most popular and frequently utilized. However, literature on the subject has not examined the untagging practices among adolescent Facebook users. In addition to this, there is no current knowledge of the differences between adolescent Facebook users who do and do not untag photos. The present study addresses this gap through a cross-sectional survey that involved 380 adolescent Facebook users (aged 12–18 years). The current study examines these differences in terms of adolescents' demographic attributes, digital imaging accessibility, online regret experience and management of digital photos. The study findings suggest that older males, extroverts, and those who perceive online information to be public, have more experience of taking and sharing photos, spend more time taking photos, practice strict protection of photos, demonstrate a negative perception of cloud storage, and rarely keep backups, are likely to untag photos. In addition to this, sociability and time lapse, in terms of realizing regretful experiences, significantly predicted the tendency among adolescents to untag photos. The study concludes by identifying various theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

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1. Introduction

Digital photos are no longer seen as an act of memory, but rather as a tool for constructing self-identity and communication (van Dijck, 2008). They are increasingly easily shared online with the masses, and they also empower people to shape their identities and memories. Facebook is regarded as the dominant Social Networking Site (SNS), with over 1.44 billion monthly active users as of March 2015 (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Facebook is not only the most popular photo sharing SNS, but is also the largest and fastest growing photo sharing platform (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012; Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012). Digital photos are shared on Facebook for the purpose of self-presentation and creating an online self-identity (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). However, when constructing online identities, users tend to actively self-disclose their personal information (Boyd, 2008). An individual's self-presentation strategy can, however, be disrupted by various social privacy issues (Lang & Barton,

2015), e.g. being tagged in an undesirable photo, unintended exposure to an unknown audience, negative comments from others about shared photos, etc. This disruption then results in negative feedback, which not only affects self-concepts, but also the individual's perceived social identity (Lang & Barton, 2015). In order to address these social privacy threats, Facebook users have developed different online self-presentation techniques, including deleting and untagging content, enabling strict privacy settings, and asking friends to remove a tagged photo.

Untagging or simply removing a tag on a shared photo is the most popular and acceptable strategy for managing undesirable photos on Facebook (Guernsey, 2008; Lang & Barton, 2015). When a photo is uploaded on Facebook, user features can be tagged in the photo. Once it is tagged, that photo is not only archived on the tagged user's profile, but it has the potential to be shared across the network of friends, with or without the knowledge of the tagged user (Lang & Barton, 2015). This action not only impacts on the user's self-presentation, but also on his/her social privacy management strategies (Strano & Wattai, 2010).

According to a recent estimate, over two billion photos are shared daily on Facebook alone (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Similarly, Instagram, another popular SNS, boasts storage of 40 billion photos, and over 80 million photos are shared per day (In-

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Table 1
Previous literature on photo untagging.

Author (Year)	Context	Study sample	Focus of the study
Pempek et al., 2009	Facebook	92 US undergraduate students (60 females with a mean age of 20.59 years). Diary measure and survey (with open ended and closed ended questions)	To understand how much, why and how college students use Facebook
Strano & Wattai, 2010	Facebook	Online survey and 30 in-depth interviews with US-based participants aged between 18 and 31 years.	Examination of the use of untagging and content deletion for managing online identity by Facebook users
Madden & Smith, 2010	SNS	Survey (1698 respondents) and interviews (2179 in English and 74 in Spanish)	Investigation of the age and gender differences in the different aspects of SNS reputation management, including self-presentation
Hoy & Milne, 2010	MySpace, Facebook & Xanga users	589 US-based 18–24 year old SNS users (72.7% female and 27.3% male)	Examination of the gender differences in content sharing on SNS, privacy beliefs and privacy protection
McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012	Facebook	Five Focus groups (26 participants with 53.8% males from senior year at university)	To investigate how SNS norms evolve over time and how these violations affect online self-presentation
Meyer, 2011	Facebook	183 women aged between 18 and 35 years	To examine the relationship between cognitive processes and regretted messages
Tufekci, 2012	Facebook	403 US undergraduate students (53.3% male, 45.6% female)	Investigation of the strategies adopted by SNS users for managing visibility and online social privacy
Young & Quan-Haase, 2013	Facebook	77 surveys (71% US females with a mean age of 19.68 years), 21 in-depth interviews (76% US females)	Examination of the social privacy strategies among Facebook users
Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013	Facebook	200 young adults (123 female, 77 male) with an average age of 20.91 years (17–29 years old)	To understand the relationship between Facebook use and self-esteem
Mabe et al., 2014	Facebook	960 US-based women answered the cross-sectional survey	To examine the relationship between Facebook use and eating disorder risk
Lang & Barton, 2015	Facebook	Focus groups (6 males and 13 females with an age range from 18 to 64 years) online questionnaire (112 participants (67% females with a mean age of 29.54 years)	To understand the different strategies adopted by SNS users for managing social privacy invasions, especially photo untagging

stagram Stern, 2015). Despite this massive growth in the digital photography database and the ever-increasing popularity of digital photo sharing, including photo tagging, almost no research has examined the differences between those who do and do not untag photos. Furthermore, the limited available literature focusing on Facebook untagging suffers from various limitations, including predominantly US-based study samples, low sample sizes and datasets comprising mostly undergraduate students or young adults (aged 18–24 years) (see Table 1). To address these gaps, the present study has examined the differences between adolescents who do and do not untag photos. This study chose Indian Facebook users as the target user group since India currently hosts the world's second largest number of Facebook users, and is expected to be home to the highest number by 2017 (The Economic Times, 2015). Furthermore, over 82.8% of the Facebook user base is outside the US and Canada, so investigating Indian users provides a good opportunity for understanding the behavior of Facebook users from a different cultural background (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). The main research question of this study is: How can demographic attributes, digital imaging accessibility, online regret experience and management of digital photos predict the tendency among adolescent Facebook users to untag themselves?

2. Background literature

2.1. Facebook untagging

Untagging of photos is regarded as the most pervasive, relevant and frequently utilized online self-presentation strategy adopted by SNS users for getting rid of inappropriate or embarrassing photos (Lang & Barton, 2015; Strano & Wattai, 2010; Young & Quan-Haase, 2013). Untagging is regarded as privacy protection behavior (Hoy & Milne, 2010), a form of self-cleaning (Wang et al., 2011) and a corrective strategy that aims to minimize or erase a potential threat (Lampinen, Lehtinen, Lehmuskallio, & Tamminen, 2011). In addition to this, untagging is seen as a “stealth form of suppression” when a photo cannot be completely removed, since the complete deletion of the photo requires negotiation with the tagger, which includes open acknowledgment of the suppression (Strano & Wattai, 2010). Therefore, by untagging, one can limit the circulation of undesirable photos and associated messages (Strano & Wattai, 2010).

Therefore, by untagging, one can limit the circulation of undesirable photos and associated messages (Strano & Wattai, 2010).

A systematic review of the previous literature dealing with untagging activities on SNS was carried out in this study (see Table 1). SNS users often manage their online reputation by untagging unflattering photos, for example, 40% have untagged themselves and 79% have regulated access to tagged photos (Madden & Smith, 2010). The previous literature includes varying results regarding the percentage of those who have untagged themselves. The studies by Strano and Wattai (2010), Tufekci (2012) and Lang and Barton (2015) found that 55.6%, 73.9% and 84%, respectively, of SNS users had untagged photos in the recent past. Furthermore, Lang and Barton (2015) also found that 75% of the participants in their study chose untagging as the most frequently practiced management strategy. However, in comparison, Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) concluded that only 7.33% of participants in their study had performed untagging in the past, while 33.70% agreed that they had rarely untagged photos. A year later, Madden and Smith (2010) concluded that 30% of adult SNS users had untagged photos. The possible reason for the increase in the percentage of those who perform untagging over the years could be the rising popularity of untagging among SNS users over the course of the past few years.

Strano and Wattai (2010) noted different reasons for untagging, including avoiding misidentification or misrepresentation (e.g., *I was not present in the tagged photo, tagger has wrongly tagged me instead of another person, I want to untag the duplicate photos*), a photo is unrecognizable, or in order to suppress an unattractive physical depiction (e.g., *I am tagged but if others can't see my complete face then I untag it; I am tagged but I don't look physically attractive*); they also noted that people untag to hide actions which they disapprove of (e.g., *when a user is tagged in order to play jokes and make fun of him or her*) and to disassociate themselves from a specific social group.

The study by Meyer (2011) suggested that 56% of the respondents perform untagging of photos for privacy reasons, 66% do so in order to prevent employers/school from seeing their photos, 70% do so in order to prevent others from seeing physically unappeal-

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