



Full Length Article

Online privacy concerns: A broad approach to understanding the concerns of different groups for different uses



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 December 2014

Revised 21 May 2015

Accepted 14 July 2015

Available online 23 July 2015

Keywords:

Online privacy concerns

Misuse of personal information

Representative survey

ABSTRACT

Questions regarding personal privacy are becoming increasingly relevant, and the discussion continuously arises regarding what digital tracks we leave. Intrusive use and manipulation of personal information not only affect people's behaviour, but also they could have important implications for political and civic society. Previous research has relied on convenience samples and has often focused on one or only a few areas of use. The presented study, based on a probability sample, gives an overall picture of how privacy concerns are perceived in different online contexts and how socio-demography, internet experience, trust, and political orientation contribute to the understanding of privacy concerns in different settings. The results clearly point to privacy concerns as being very diverse and dependent on the applications in question. All dimensions that are used to explain privacy concerns are partly supported in the study. But their explanatory powers differ and not all areas of concern are affected by the same explanatory factors. Trust in other people is the single most important factor explaining privacy concerns when using digital media and applications. The more people trust others, the less concern they have for misuse of personal information.

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1. Introduction

In digital surroundings, personal information has become hard currency. While using different digital applications, we leave traces, which are collected, compiled, and used for purposes – sometimes unknown to us. Questions regarding personal privacy and security settings are becoming increasingly relevant, and the discussion continuously arises regarding which digital tracks we leave. Expressions of concern about the violation of information privacy have proliferated (Preibusch, 2013; Turow & Hennessy, 2007).

Every communication leaves a trace, and information about visited websites can be reported back by cookie software and transformed into data (Woo, 2006). Some data collectors are not easily identified and cannot be dealt with. Online users are also frequently faced with no choice but to send some kind of information if they want access to sites or services (Woo, 2006), building a tension between users' wish to communicate and their understanding of personal privacy on the interactive web. In digital contexts, information gathering is sometimes combined with some kind of gratification for the user (and information provider). Such gratification could consist of gifts or access to exclusive content. To many

people, these kinds of benefits can be of great value and thus lead to their reluctantly disregarding security settings or attention to digital footprints, willingly giving up their privacy for consumer convenience and other benefits. This privacy paradox is often a personal decision based on a cost-benefit analysis (Park, Campbell, & Kwak, 2012; Preibusch, 2013; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011; Woo, 2006; Youn, 2009).

The physical reality of danger around certain areas of use in online settings might be widely separated from how people understand a potential danger. Both perspectives contribute to determining the centrality of risk in society (Turow & Hennessy, 2007). Furthermore, a country's regulatory approach to information privacy is the result of its cultural values and of its citizens' privacy concerns (Milberg, Smith, & Burke, 2000). Rules are often social and normative rather than legal, and they are negotiated among users in networks or on a broader societal level (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008). Society seems to be facing increased demands regarding protection and recommendations for user's privacy (Starke-Meyerring, Burk, & Gurak, 2004), and online privacy has tended to become more of a societal concern than an issue for each private user (Baek, Kim, & Bae, 2014; Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

Intrusive use and manipulation of personal information not only affect people's willingness to disclose truthful information (Yang, 2013), but also they could have important implications for

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political regulation and civic society (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, & Sandoval, 2011). Questions about privacy and security in digital media use are also an important part of the media and information literacy as emphasized by UNESCO as basic conditions for active citizenship and democracy (Wilson, Grizzle, Tuazon, Akyempong, & Cheung, 2011).

Previous researchers have identified some central dimensions of privacy: collection of personal information, unauthorized secondary usage, external unauthorized secondary usage, errors in personal information, and improper access (Milberg et al., 2000; Okazaki, Li, & Hirose, 2009; Smith, Milberg, & Burke, 1996; Wirtz et al., 2007; Woo, 2006). This study deals with concerns on a more general level and with Smith et al.'s (1996) terminology: unauthorized use of personal information. The paper aims at describing the digital contexts in which people perceive concern and at explaining their anxiety.

2. Contexts of user privacy

Misuse of personal information and privacy concerns are found within several areas of online use, and perceptions of intrusive use are likely to differ depending of the character of the use. This study includes four different areas of character: e-mailing, searching for information, using social network sites, and making purchases with debit cards.

Previous research provides different understanding of concern for these areas. An American study from 2013 reveals, for instance, that handling e-mail content and contacts is perceived as being relatively private. More than 80% of the internet users in the study claimed that it is important to keep personal control over e-mail access. Regarding searches on the web, about 70% in the same survey said it is important that nobody but oneself and those one authorizes have access to information about internet searches (Rainie, Kiesler, Kang, & Madden, 2013).

In relation to privacy issues, the experience of conducting online transactions is psychologically and procedurally different from activities such as exchanging e-mails (Akhter, 2014). Privacy also becomes salient in online business because of the personal and financial information required. Online shopping has proven to be the most commonly used activity linked with privacy concerns (TRUSTe, 2013).

Social network sites create privacy problems that make users more self-consciously concerned about privacy than do many other online situations (Blank, Bolsover, & Dubois, 2014). The basic concept of social network media often means contributing and sharing content both with the site operator and with other users. In both cases, users can appropriate returns from disclosing personal data (Preibusch, 2013). Some network sites let users create groups and also restrict access to certain content (Marwick & boyd, 2014).

3. Perspectives on users' concern for privacy online

Several dimensions of factors have implications on how people perceive misuse of personal information in digital environments. The following have proven to affect overall privacy concerns: personal experiences of internet use and areas of the internet (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Jensen, Potts, & Jensen, 2005; Lee, 2009; Lewis et al., 2008; Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2001; Paine, Reips, Stieger, Joinson, & Buchanan, 2007; Park et al., 2012; Trepte, Dienlin, & Reinecke, 2013; Yao, Rice, & Wallis, 2007; Youn, 2009); socio-demographic factors (Blank et al., 2014; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Jensen et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2014; O'Neil, 2001; Rainie et al., 2013; Taddicken, 2013; Yao et al., 2007; Youn, 2009); trust in institutions and in other people (Chellappa & Sin, 2005; Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, & Saarinen, 1999;

Macneil, 1974; Metzger, 2004; Okazaki et al., 2009; Park et al., 2012); and political orientation and ideology (Acquisti & Grossklags, 2004; Bjereld & Oscarsson, 2009; Fuchs, 2013; Yao et al., 2007; Rykkja, Laegreid, & Fimreite, 2011). These factors are included in the conducted study and will be elaborated upon hereafter, whereas external conditions such as business policies (Malhotra, Kim, & Agarwal, 2004; Schoenbachler & Gorden, 2002; Wirtz, Lwin, & Williams, 2007; Yang, 2013) and knowledge about privacy settings (Baek et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 2005; Lewis et al., 2008; Youn, 2009) are out of the scope of this study.

Research has proven that internet consumption practices and objective for internet use affect the level of concern people perceive when using digital media (Lewis et al., 2008; Yao et al., 2007). Considerable experience has shown to lead, for instance, to less anxiety in e-commerce situations (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2001), but the data is not conclusive about whether victims of fraud are more concerned about privacy (Jensen et al., 2005). Internet banking experiences have proven to affect people's level of concern, and people who are anxious about fraud and identity theft are quite reluctant to use internet bank services (Lee, 2009). People who frequently use social network sites and who update detailed profiles in digital networks have tended to be more risk averse when revealing personal information than have people who have more limited profiles (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Lewis et al., 2008; Paine et al., 2007; Park et al., 2012; Trepte et al., 2013; Youn, 2009).

Furthermore, demographic factors, such as gender and age, also appear to be of importance towards understanding risk perception and concerns in digital media use. Gender has, in some studies, proven to significantly influence whether privacy settings are used (Lewis et al., 2008; Youn, 2009), and men seem to be more willing to take risks when posting personal and private information or content on the internet (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009). Women have also proven to generally have more concerns about privacy than have men (O'Neil, 2001), but the effect of gender has been somewhat inconclusive (Yao et al., 2007). Studies of different areas, however, definitely point to different results. Jensen et al. (2005) concluded that women tend to report higher levels of concern than do men, but these findings seem to be trends rather than statistically significant.

Age might also affect the perception of digital privacy issues. Just as for gender, the findings regarding the impact of age are not consistent across research literature. Several studies pointed to little or no significant differences by age (Hoofnagle, King, Li, & Turow, 2010; Taddicken, 2013). Others, however, showed more protective usage among older users, whereas younger people were more likely to better manage privacy settings (Blank et al., 2014). American teens are not particularly concerned that information shared on social network sites might be accessed by third parties. However, their parents are concerned about personal information posted by their teens (Madden et al., 2013). Other previous research has shown that youth handle privacy in public networks not by avoiding sharing, but by using the technical facilities and their social networks to achieve privacy (Marwick & boyd, 2014).

Education and its effect on privacy concern have been less investigated. Users with lower education have tended to be less concerned with privacy issues, and the more highly educated have been more likely to utilize privacy protection (Blank et al., 2014; O'Neil, 2001; Rainie et al., 2013).

In another dimension, people who are generally anxious also have been more motivated to protect personal information (Park et al., 2012). Trust has proven to be one of the most important factors influencing privacy concerns (Metzger, 2004). According to the social exchange theory (Macneil, 1974), individuals tend to weigh costs and rewards when deciding whether or not to engage in social transactions. Trust has been believed to reduce costs of such

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