



# Rationality-based beliefs affecting individual's attitude and intention to use privacy controls on Facebook: An empirical investigation



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## ABSTRACT

Online social networking sites like Facebook provides a fast and easy way to connect with friends and family. Users need to post and share their personal information in order to get the best possible experiences on Facebook. However, the spreading of private information can also lead to serious and harmful issues. Therefore, privacy becomes an important component in the use of Facebook and it is the user's responsibility to protect his or her profile. This study draws upon the theory of planned behavior and the rational choice theory to investigate the rationality-based beliefs affecting individual's attitude and intention to use privacy controls on Facebook. The results show that individual's attitude toward using privacy controls is influenced by benefit of using privacy controls, cost of using privacy controls, and cost of not using privacy controls. Further, benefits of using privacy controls is shaped by beliefs regarding intrinsic benefit and resource safety; cost of not using privacy controls is shaped by beliefs regarding resource vulnerability, threat severity, privacy risk and privacy intrusion; and cost of using privacy controls is shaped by beliefs about intrinsic cost and work impediment. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed in the paper.

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## 1. Introduction

Online social networking is a fast and easy way to stay connected with friends and family through the Internet. Online social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook, Myspace, Instagram and LinkedIn allow users to create and manage profiles that can be used to connect with others and create a personal network with the objective of social interaction, connection and communication (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011). In order to connect with others, users build their profiles by generating content that reflects their personalities and interests, and by posting information about themselves, such as describing their interests, and sharing photos, posts, links, events, and much more. With the advent of technology and the large amounts of information traveling across the Internet, personal information is harder to keep private; thus, sharing information this way could lead to risks. Social networking sites have the responsibility of maintaining the assurance and security of their users' private information. However, information can be shared without users' knowledge in ways that they may not appreciate, so it is important for users to act responsibly for safeguarding their information.

Facebook is one of the most popular online social networking sites with users ranging from teenagers to older adults. However, the vast majority of users are young adults. Facebook allows users to create profiles, post information about them, and add friends to build their social circles. Users are able to connect with others in ways that are similar to relationships in the real world, except Facebook brings it to a higher level. Virtual communities are created among users that share similar interests and explore new interests. With continuous updates flooding users' news feeds, Facebook keeps users interested in coming back to the site (Stutzman, Capra, & Thompson, 2011). Facebook also provides a unique research environment because of its heavy usage patterns and its ability to bridge online and offline connections (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). In order for users of Facebook to get the best possible experiences, users must post and share their personal information. Therefore, privacy becomes an important component in the use of Facebook.

Different users want their personal information to be seen in different ways. While some users want to keep their lifestyles discreet, and only use the site as a means to keep in touch, others post as much information and as many status updates as possible. Public and private information alike can be found and shared on social networking sites like Facebook. However, the spreading of private information can also lead to serious and harmful issues.

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Privacy issues have hung over sites like Facebook as users many times do not think about the repercussions of sharing their information on Facebook. Although privacy controls exist on Facebook, it is at the user's expense to activate and protect his or her profile. The objective of this study is to investigate the rationality-based beliefs affecting individual's attitudes and intention to use privacy controls available on Facebook.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief review of the relevant literature followed by this study's theoretical framework and research model. Next, we present the research methodology. We then provide data analysis and results. Finally, we conclude by discussing our findings, their implications, and future research directions.

## 2. Literature review

The use of social networking websites, especially Facebook, has continued to be an important topic for researchers. Many researchers have conducted studies on various aspects of the use of Facebook, including people's motives in using Facebook, information disclosure, privacy concerns, trust related issues, and the importance of privacy controls available on Facebook.

Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) studied college students' use of Facebook and found that students facilitate social relationships by connecting with offline friends and searching for new friends in order to develop their individual identities as they experience emerging adulthood, and to gather feedback on their disclosed information to feel good about themselves. Kim, Kim, and Nam (2010) used self-construal to explore how individuals define and relate themselves to their surroundings and others for assessing the relationship between people's understanding of self as a predictor of social computing (Facebook use) and satisfaction. The other factors involved in the study were social and nonsocial motivations, use behaviors (use time, average stay time per login, number of "friends" in SNS, and profile length), and satisfaction. They found that users with higher self-construal have stronger motivations to use Facebook to build social relationships. From an organizational use perspective, Fernandez (2009) described libraries' potential for using Facebook as a means to connect with their library patrons. The author realized that this outreach not only has advantages, but also collides with the privacy concerns associated with disclosing sensitive library information through Facebook. Peluchette and Karl (2009) notes that businesses use Facebook to investigate potential employees, and explore the factors that influence college students' posting of inappropriate information.

Researchers have conducted interesting studies related to information disclosure on social networking sites. Nagle and Singh (2009) observes that Facebook users' are willing to disclose their personal information based on the friendship circle. Users are willing to allow strangers into their friendship circle so long as there are mutual connections, i.e. mutual friends. Boyle and Johnson (2010) found that Myspace users were more willing to disclose broad pieces of information, including age, race and gender, than they were for more personal information. Moreover, users will disclose information based on their reasons for creating profiles. Joinson (2008) notes the fact that Facebook's social search capabilities benefit users to the extent that they are willing to disclose their information in order to get the most out of using Facebook.

As individuals need to provide adequate levels of personal information in order to gain the desired benefits of using Facebook, privacy-related concerns arise. Acquisti and Gross (2006) studied college users' privacy concerns and its impact on their usage of and attitudes toward Facebook and found that despite the knowledge of the various risks to disclosing private information online,

students' privacy concerns have little effect on their membership of and information revealed on Facebook. However, they also found that these students do not realize the visibility of their profiles and information to other parties on the vast Facebook network. Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007) noted that trust and privacy influenced users' willingness to make friends and disclose information on the social networking sites. Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, and Hughes (2009) argue that Facebook users who have experienced privacy invasions are more likely to change how they disclose their personal information than users who merely heard about others' privacy invasions.

While Fogel and Nehmad (2009) studied how risk-taking is involved in the usage of social networking sites and found that trust and privacy are major issues, Lo (2010) notes that perceived risk and trust determine whether users are willing to disclose personal information on social networking sites. Brandtzæg, Luders, and Skjetne (2010) claims that sociability and content sharing, important aspects involved in the success of social networking sites, are affected by users' privacy concerns. Lo and Riemenschneider (2010) also found that internet privacy concern, trust in the site, trust in friends, and trust in everyone affect users' willingness to provide information. Nosko, Wood, and Molema (2010) studied the types of information that can be disclosed on Facebook, as well as the types of user characteristics that are likely to disclose certain information. They found that as age increased, less information was disclosed. Also, users in a relationship revealed more sensitive personal information and potentially stigmatizing information. Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck, and Heirman (2012) found that both young and adult users place little trust in SNS but disclose their personal information for communicating with their friends. They found that privacy concerns affect how adults disclose information and open their profiles, and peer-pressure influences adolescents to disclose more information.

The extant literature has investigated the importance of privacy controls on Facebook. Lewis, Kaufman, and Christakis (2008) observed the factors that determine whether college students will have private Facebook profiles. The factors that influence college students' use of privacy settings stem from social influence and personal incentive mechanisms. Joinson (2008) notes the fact that Facebook's social search capabilities benefit users to the extent that they are willing to leave their privacy settings more open in order to get the most out of the function. Hoadley, Xu, Lee, and Rosson (2010) showed that the news feed's easy-to-use features were only made possible by allowing more specific access to sensitive and personal information.

While Guo (2010) discussed the features of Facebook contributing to privacy issues, including news feeds, beacons, third parties and privacy policies, Gross and Acquisti (2005) found that privacy preferences are rarely used, resulting in privacy risks for the users. These studies shed light on the fact that SNS users are freely open to revealing their personal information online and connecting to friends and strangers. Brandtzæg et al. (2010) suggests that these sites employ privacy settings for users to customize the disclosure of their information in order to improve sociability and content sharing. In their study of medical students' use of Facebook, MacDonald, Sohn, and Ellis (2010) determined that the site's privacy controls must be properly adjusted to limit disclosure of sensitive content and other confidential information pertaining to the medical profession. Hull, Lipford, and Latulipe (2011) describes how Facebook's applications and news feeds present risks to privacy, and explains why the problem is caused by the design of each feature. It signifies the need for users to actively take controls of safeguarding their privacy. Chaulk and Jones (2011) conducted research concerning the use of Facebook as a medium for stalking, and provided implications for not using privacy controls. Bornoie and Barkhuus (2011) found that users had little or no knowledge

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