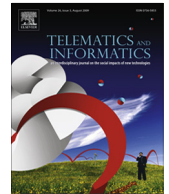




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Who's my audience again? Understanding audience management strategies for designing privacy management technologies



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ABSTRACT

Social network site users are often confronted with invisible audiences. Although various settings for managing audiences are available, we argue that these do not always match the users' interpretations. This study explores the audience-management strategies of 18 young adults when categorizing their (invisible) audiences in Facebook, using card sorting as a research method. Approximately 1254 out of 1800 people (cards) were categorized based on the shared-community strategy, in which the participants referred to multiple community roles. The theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism and the Communication Privacy Management Theory are used to frame the problematic nature of invisible audiences. Implications for designing privacy-management technologies are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Early research in the field of social network sites (SNSs) suggests that users are often unaware of privacy risks (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Stutzman, 2006). Moreover, users' attitudes often seem to contradict their disclosure behavior. This has been labeled as the privacy paradox (Barnes, 2006). Recent studies, however, show a more positive development. More experience with SNSs has a positive effect on disclosure behavior (Lewis et al., 2008) and awareness (Christofides et al., 2009). Taking into account the positive features of SNSs, Tufekci (2008) indicates that American undergraduates try to optimize the boundary between publicity and privacy. Users are also increasingly making use of the available privacy settings when disclosing (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Jones et al., 2008; Tufekci, 2008), even though variations in age (Park, 2013), gender (Lewis et al., 2008) and skills (boyd and Hargittai, 2010) have been found. Various privacy-management strategies are used on SNSs. Lampinen et al. (2011) differentiate between preventive and corrective strategies, both on the individual and collaborative levels, while boyd and Marwick (2011) emphasize teens' usage of social strategies (e.g., social steganography) next to structural ones (e.g., privacy settings).

Although research indicates that more skills tend to stimulate privacy-enhancing behavior (boyd and Hargittai, 2010), many settings remain underused (Strater and Lipford, 2008) or fail to address the expectations of users (Liu et al., 2011). Furthermore, based on longitudinal data, Stutzman et al. (2012) found that network-driven changes in the interface settings of

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Facebook inverted users' privacy management of public disclosures, thereby indicating the importance of design in affecting the decisions of users.

In the current study, we question the design of the privacy settings provided by SNSs for the privacy problem of invisible audiences. [boyd \(2008\)](#) points out that when teens are presenting themselves online, not all audiences are visible. Even though lists of one's audience are available, "a cognitive limit may dampen the number of people that one can attend simultaneously" ([Litt, 2012: p. 332](#)). Hence, the imagined audience and the actual one do not necessarily overlap completely. We argue that it is necessary to capture how users perceive their audience and which audience-management strategies they employ when designing privacy-management technologies. Using card sorting as a research method (e.g., [Stone et al., 2005; Courage and Baxter, 2005](#)) we focus on how our participants categorize and perceive their Facebook audience. We use the theory of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) to frame the problematic nature of invisible audiences and the Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM) to clarify the need of boundary coordination for managing privacy.

2. Theoretical foundations

In the following subsections, we describe our theoretical framework. We argue that the architecture of SNSs creates the dynamic of invisible audiences, which makes it difficult for users to define the situation and put their privacy rules into practice by means of boundary coordination.

2.1. The architecture of SNSs

The technical properties of SNSs are creating new dynamics ([boyd, 2008](#)). Alongside collapsed contexts and the blurring between public and private spheres, [boyd \(2008\)](#) describes the dynamic of invisible audiences. Different audiences that are typically separated in an offline environment are merged into one big audience, through which it becomes difficult to know who has access to one's contributions on SNSs. According to [Goffman \(1959: p. 49\)](#), "audience segregation, or the need to direct one's self-performance to one specific audience, is an essential part of impression management and helps to convey the sense that both performer and actor's relationship to the current audience have something special and unique about them." We do not regard audience segregation as essential per se because users can employ various social strategies when disclosing (e.g., [boyd and Marwick, 2011](#)). Being cognizant of one's audience, on the contrary, does seem essential ([Litt, 2012](#)), which we will explain in Section 2.2. On this topic, [Papacharissi \(2010: p. 308\)](#) states that "the multiplication of social audiences does not imply a lost sense of place, but does necessitate performances that are more aware, so as to make sense to a variety of audiences." [Bernstein et al. \(2013: p. 1\)](#), however, found that "social media users consistently underestimate their audience size for their posts, guessing that their audience is just 27% of its true size."

By default, users have the task to manage multiple identities all at once, e.g., daughter, friend, and colleague. SNSs have invested in technologies for managing one's audiences once accepted into the friend list. For example, on the popular SNS Facebook, the settings of groups and lists can help the user in demarcating his or her audience and manage privacy. The privacy settings of the groups have three different options: open, closed, and secret.¹ Within the first option, anyone can see the group, its members, and their posts. Within the second option, postings are only visible to group members. Within the last option, only members see the group, group members, and their posts. Facebook lists give the user the possibility to better manage the big group of people in the friends list by making sub-lists of people and attaching privacy settings.² These tools have the purpose of keeping contexts separated. In analyzing these tools, [De Wolf and Pierson \(2012\)](#) found that their respondents did not categorize their audience in lists. The perception toward the smartlists, lists created automatically by Facebook, was especially negative. These were perceived as too large, not always correct, and not relevant. Moreover, the respondents did not want to make the effort to create them. The findings of [Vitak \(2012\)](#) suggested that users with a big and diverse network of people were more likely to use advanced settings provided by SNS providers in managing their audiences; however, only a minority of users actually used these settings. [Hull et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Barkhuus \(2012\)](#) also found that dividing people in SNSs into subgroups was not done, due to unawareness of the user or because they required too much effort from the user. Drawing similar conclusions for other SNSs, such as aspects on Diaspora and circles on Google Plus, [Schwartz \(2012: p. 10\)](#) states that the "contextualizing features fail to adequately reflect the dynamic and complex face-to-face privacy regulation and boundary control." Then again, [Kairam et al. \(2012\)](#) found that early adopters did make use of the selective sharing options on Google Plus.

In sum, literature indicates that the audience-management technologies provided are not sufficiently used or do not have the features to solve the problematic nature of invisible audiences.

2.2. The definition of the situation

In this section, we elaborate on the concept of the definition of the situation to clarify the necessity of knowing one's audience when disclosing. We begin by eliciting the Symbolic Interactionism (SI) school of thought, where the concept of the definition of the situation originated.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/about/groups> [accessed on March 21, 2013].

² <https://www.facebook.com/help/204604196335128/> [accessed on March 21, 2013].

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