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Comfortable with friends sharing your picture on Facebook? - Effects of closeness and ownership on picture sharing preference

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ABSTRACT

Picture sharing activity on social networking sites helps create and maintain social relationships. However, some of these pictures can be undesirable digital traces especially when the person sharing the information (owner) and the person receiving the information (viewer) do not ask the sharing preference of the person who is in the picture (subject). In our exploratory lab study, we asked twenty-nine participants about their picture sharing preference (PSP) towards an owner's act of sharing a photograph containing both the participant (subject) and the owner with a viewer. Our multi-level regression on 5520 data points show that in terms of closeness, a subject feels more comfortable sharing a picture i) as the "closeness between the subject and the owner (SO closeness)" increases and ii) as the "closeness between the subject and the viewer (SV closeness)" increases. In terms of ownership, a subject feels more comfortable with sharing a picture i) when the picture shows a greater number of people as opposed to a smaller number of people, and ii) when the picture is captured at an event held for the viewer or the owner rather than for the subject. In addition, we observed three types of interaction effects on PSP between the following variables: i) SO closeness and SV closeness, ii) SO closeness and num_people, and iii) both types of closeness and event_possessor.

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1. Introduction

People share group photographs to create and maintain social relationships, by constructing and sharing group memory. One medium currently used for sharing pictures is social networking. Social networking services (SNSs) help users broadcast group pictures to their friends instantly (Ahern et al., 2007; Besmer & Lipford, 2010). For example, on Facebook, 25 million pictures are uploaded and shared between Facebook users every day (Ebersman, 2012). However, some of these group pictures may end up creating undesirable digital traces, if the picture sharing preference (PSP) of the owner who shares the picture does not match the PSPs of the other people in the picture. As the result of such a mismatch of PSPs, while many people spend time uploading and tagging group pictures, others spend time untagging themselves from the pictures (Besmer & Lipford, 2010; Lampinen, Lehtinen,

Lehmuskallio, & Tamminen, 2011; Lang & Barton, 2015; Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010). For example, Lang and Barton (2015) found in their survey-based study that 84 percent of their survey participants stated that they had had the experience of having their Facebook friends share pictures they did not want to have distribute.

Our work builds on existing research that focused on understanding the preferences of people who share their own personal information. Unlike existing research, however, we examine how a persons sharing preference differs when another user shares a commonly owned object, namely a group picture that includes both of them. In our study, the one who shares the group picture is the owner, another individual in the group picture is the subject, and the person who sees the group picture that has been shared by the owner is the viewer. Fig. 1 shows the three parties involved in picture sharing activities, and the seven hypotheses that examine various factors that affect a subjects PSP. More specifically, we examine two factors on closeness in hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, two factors on ownership in hypotheses 4 and 5, and the relationship between closeness and ownership in hypotheses 6 and 7.

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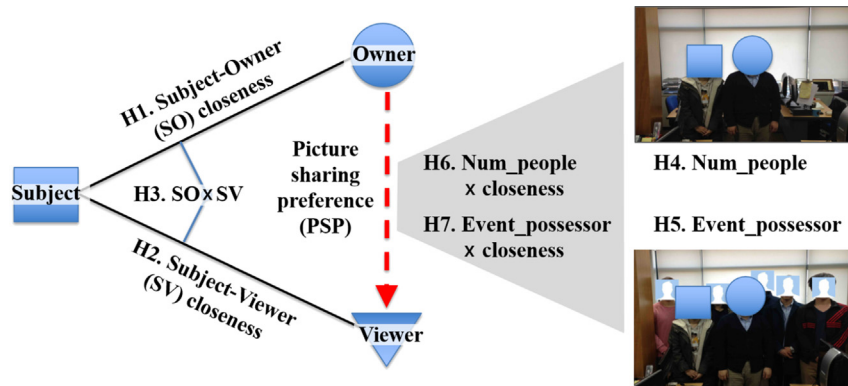


Fig. 1. Summary of the seven hypotheses. The variables include three parties (subject, owner, and viewer), and four factors (SO closeness, SV closeness, number of people, and event_possessor) that affect a subjects picture sharing preference (PSP).

Insights from research on how closeness and ownership affect PSP can be used to inform policies for managing pictures/information on diverse SNS systems. Existing research on information-sharing preferences has mainly examined how the level of closeness between the information sharer (owner) and a receiver (viewer) affects their information-sharing preferences (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Wiese et al., 2011). However, the preference of a party who has an interest in the shared information, but is not directly involved in the sharing process, has not been studied extensively. Therefore, in this paper, we examine the subjects information-sharing preference, a topic that has received little attention thus far.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing relevant research and seven research hypotheses. Then we present the details of our study. Finally, the study's results are presented, followed by the conclusion.

2. Research questions

Of the seven research hypotheses that we examine in this paper, three relate to how aspects of closeness affect subjects PSPs (H1, H2, H3); the next two explore how ownership affects PSPs (H4, H5); the last two consider how closeness and ownership interact (H6, H7). In the two subsections that follow, we present existing research on closeness and ownership, along with the corresponding hypotheses.

2.1. Research questions on closeness and picture sharing preference (PSP)

Research shows that higher levels of closeness between the parties directly involved in sharing information affects the level of PSP positively (Greene et al., 2006; Joinson, Reips, Buchanan, & Schofield, 2010; Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011; Utz, 2015; Wiese et al., 2011). For example, Wiese et al. (2011) showed that a higher level of closeness between people is associated with a higher degree of willingness to share information. In our context, the parties directly involved in sharing information are the owner and the viewer. We extend such existing research on closeness by examining an additional party who has an interest in the information exchanged, namely the subject who appears in the shared photograph.

The first type of closeness that we are interested in is the relationship between a picture subject and an owner (SO closeness), who shares their personal picture with a viewer. The effect of this relationship on a subject's PSP can be inferred from previous work on social exchange theory and shared acquaintance. Social

exchange theory states that the greater the strength of relationship between the parties involved, the greater the degree of willingness there is to help other parties in the relationship (Burt & Knez, 1995; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). According to this theory, when people provide help, they anticipate a norm of reciprocity, and expect others help in return, in the future. As people successfully help each other over time, and build stronger relationships, they build confidence about each others behaviors, and the levels of reciprocity increase. In contrast, the relationships could be lost if help is not successfully exchanged (Burt & Knez, 1995; Emerson, 1976). Therefore, applied to our study, social exchange theory implies that when a subject and an owner have a high degree of closeness, the subject would have a high degree of confidence that the owner would be posting their picture, which in turn would result in a high level of the subject's PSP.

Literature on shared acquaintance suggests a similar prediction regarding a subject's PSP. When a person has a shared acquaintance, he is more trusting of that acquaintance (Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005). In our study, that shared acquaintance is the owner. In addition, literature shows that even without any communication, seeing a person in an online group repeatedly can be a precursor to forming a personal attachment (Milgram, 2010). Since having a common friend (owner) with a high degree of closeness increases the likelihood of seeing that friend's friend (viewer) online, for example, on the owner's Facebook timeline, a subject is more likely to feel comfortable with the viewer when the owner is close to the subject. Taken together, literature on social exchange theory and shared acquaintance suggests the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. *If subject-owner (SO) closeness increases, a subject's PSP for an owner's picture sharing activity will also increase.*

The second type of closeness that will be examined is the relationship between a subject and a viewer (SV closeness). Literature on social penetration theory and trust suggests that SV closeness can affect a subject's PSP. Social penetration theory suggests that the strength of the relationship affects the degree of self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 1994; Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Self-disclosure is an act of revealing private information about oneself to others (Collins & Miller, 1994; Greene et al., 2006). Sharing one's own picture is, in a broader sense, an act of self-disclosure, because the picture contains information about the people in it. As relationships develop over time, and the strength of these relationships grows, people reveal more of their inner thoughts and feelings, more frequently and deeply, on a wider range of topics (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 1994). In

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