Chapter 32
Information Disclosure on Social Networking Sites:
An Exploratory Survey of Factors Impacting User Behaviour on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how six constructs—control, trust, perceived risk, risk propensity, perceived legal protection, and privacy disposition—affect information disclosure on the Social Networking Site (SNS) Facebook. Building upon previous related work, an extended causal model of disclosure behaviour is proposed. The hypothesised relationships in this model were tested using survey data collected from 278 social networking site users in Ireland. The results of the analysis provide strong support for the proposed model.

INTRODUCTION

Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn offer a convenient way to maintain existing personal and professional relationships while also developing new ones. With millions of people interacting and communicating online, coupled with the amount of personal information disclosed, this can lead to personal information ending up in the wrong hands and users may unsuspectingly leave themselves susceptible to privacy and security risks in cyberspace (Harden et al. 2012). SNS are web-based services which allow people to build a public or private profile in a particular system, join users with whom they may or may not share a connection, and view other people's connections within this system (Boyd and Elison 2007). These websites have become particularly popular tools for social experimentation; many users use Facebook for either "social searching" or "social browsing" to interact with people they already know and to meet new people.

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Disclosing personal information is an important aspect of building relationships with others (Christofides, 2009; Nguyen et al, 2012). Privacy and trust are central concerns as regards on-line behavioural intentions (Liu et al 2005). A person's trusting belief can impact their loyalty of using Facebook, ultimately affecting how active they are and how much information they disclose (Wang, 2013). A trade-off is undertaken when using SNSs between the perceived benefits of using SNS on one hand and the potential risks of personal information disclosure on the other. The perceived benefits of using SNS are not discounts or free services, but social capital or the development of attachment through relationships (Xu et al 2013). A previous study has shown that there is a complimentary relationship between trust and information disclosure online (Henderson and Gilding 2004). When looking at privacy in relation to Facebook it has been said that Facebook should go beyond and try and increase the protection of users from corporate surveillance by protecting users' privacy (Fuchs 2011).

This chapter reports the findings of an exploratory opinion survey conducted in Ireland of 278 SNS users. Because the various SNS providers (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, MySpace, FourSquare, Bebo, etc.) have different features, we chose in our questionnaire to specifically concentrate on the most popular SNS, Facebook, as we felt it might have led to confusion and measurement error if participants were instructed to answer questions but not given a clear context. Facebook has enjoyed a rapid increase of its users since it opened up its registration to not only college-based students in 2006 (Joinson, 2008). At the start of 2013, Facebook had 1.11 billion users using the site each month (Associated Press, 2013). Facebook has undergone radical change over the past 24 months by introducing a new "timeline" profile and updating its news feed aspect. However, it has not only changed its profile layout and its profile of users, but more importantly the potential motivations of users.

In this chapter we look at how six constructs affect information disclosure on Facebook: (1) perceived control; (2) trust; (3) perceived risk; (4) perceived legal protection; (5) risk propensity; and (6) privacy disposition. Our research model builds upon aspects of the Privacy Calculus model (Dinev and Hart 2006) and also the previous work of Krasnova et al. (2010), but is different in a number of regards. Whereas those earlier models include perceived control and perceived trust as single constructs, our factor analysis revealed that these two factors each have two distinct components, relating to (a) trust in / perceived control over individuals, and (b) trust in / perceived control over Facebook/on-line companies. Additionally, our model explores a number of factors which have received very little attention in previous studies, being the latter three of those aforementioned.

The chapter is organised as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of previous literature and sets forth the hypotheses to be explored. Section 3 outlines the research approach. A discussion of the findings of our study in presented in Section 4. A number of possible areas for future research are proposed in Section 5. We then present our conclusions in Section 6.

BACKGROUND

Perceived Control

Table 1 shows the results of our factor analysis, revealing two separate underlying components: perceived control over individuals, and perceived control over companies.

Perceived Control over Companies

Previous research reveals that internet users possess a lack of trust in using online companies such as Facebook as they feel that have little control over what these companies do with their personal information. Users do not want their personal in-