

Chapter 15

Disclosure and Privacy Settings on Social Networking Sites: Evaluating an Instructional Intervention Designed to Promote Informed Information Sharing

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ABSTRACT

The present study evaluated a video-based intervention designed to permit users of social networking to make informed decisions about the information they disclosed online. The videos provided information regarding potential risks of disclosure and well as step-by-step instructions on privacy setting use. Novice (n=40) and experienced (n=40). Facebook™ users were randomly assigned to either the video intervention condition, or given the choice to watch the video intervention then were asked to construct a new Facebook™ account or work on their existing account. Viewing the video encouraged greater use of privacy settings as well as use of more restrictive privacy settings. Gender differences revealed greater use of privacy settings among women. Experienced users continued to disclose more than novice users, however, they increased their use of privacy settings which restricted the availability of the disclosed information. This study shows promising use of direct and explicit instruction in the teaching of privacy online.

INTRODUCTION

Social media and, in particular, social networking sites such as Facebook™ have been synonymous with social communication and connection outside

of the classroom (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty, 2010; Yum, 2007). Indeed, Facebook™ is well integrated into students' personal lives and is viewed as a satisfying, convenient and familiar technology (Rachtham & Kaewkitipong,

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2012). It is not surprising then that students have been using Facebook™ informally to supplement their learning by sharing logistical (e.g., time of classes, assignment details) and intellectual information (e.g., discussions, collaboration and idea sharing) (Bosch, 2009; Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley, 2009; Ractham & Kaewkitipong, 2012; Selwyn, 2009). Recently, this informal use has been complemented by formal use within the classroom (Bosch, 2009; Ractham & Kaewkitipong, 2012; Roblyer et al., 2010). Results of this integration are limited but they suggest many positive outcomes including enhancing social connections among students (e.g., connecting younger and older students, promoting collaboration in the classroom and peer support) (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Bosch, 2009; Selwyn 2009), increasing participation and motivation (e.g., asking questions, offering input into class material in advance; Bosch, 2009; Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007), as well as enhancing language instruction (e.g., Blattner & Fiorio, 2009). Although Facebook™ may offer the potential to augment classroom instruction, risks associated with over-disclosure of personal information and failure to protect disclosed information by using appropriate privacy settings are cause for concern (Acoca, 2008; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Nosko, Wood & Molema, 2010). Potential risks inherent in the integration of social media in educational settings include cyberbullying, deliberate embarrassment and/or harassment, liability issues related to information sharing and threats to academic integrity (i.e., cheating on tests/exams/assignments and plagiarism) (Feinberg & Robey, 2008; King, 2002; Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Nixon, 2004).

Unfortunately, a disconnect exists between reported need for privacy online and disclosure behaviors (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes, 2009; Lui, Gummedi, Krishnamurthy & Mislove, 2011). Specifically, although individuals indicate that they want to exert control and maintain personal privacy, they not only share highly sensitive and personal material online but also fail to employ

available protective features (Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Nosko et al., 2010). This disconnect may be a product of limitations in users knowledge about privacy settings and how to employ them and/or frustration with ever-changing features of social networking platforms (Hoadley, Xu, Lee & Rosson, 2010).

While suggestions have been made to provide users with more knowledge about some of the features of Facebook™ and the consequences of disclosing information (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2012), no known studies have attempted to develop interventions specifically targeted at educating users about how to use and regularly monitor their privacy settings. The goal of the present study was to develop a reliable, research-driven instructional intervention tool that provides information to students and educators about how to better manage their personal profiles on Facebook™.

BACKGROUND: SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: FACEBOOK™

One of the key features of social networking sites is that they allow users to create personal profiles where they can choose what they share and what they restrict with the use of various privacy settings (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Types of information that can be shared include a user's basic information (e.g., birth date, gender, relationship status), contact information, favorite activities, philosophies and beliefs, education, work history, pictures, and photo albums. The user's public or semi-public profile can be updated, altered over time, and used as a mechanism for interacting with others on the network. For example, to create connections on Facebook™ users can search for and add other users as their "friends." Based on common connections through a friend's network, Facebook™ will often suggest people to befriend. Also, while in the process of accepting a friendship on Facebook™, the system may ask users

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