

The notion of Privacy and Self with the Change of Social Media

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Abstract. Over the recent past, the world has witnessed increased uptake of social media and the use of internet. In particular, The world has witnessed tremendous growth in the number of people accessing social media through accessible mobile devices. In this foregoing, the use of social media has exposed millions of people to privacy infringement as voluminous personal information is shared via the social media and able to influence individuals' self-awareness along with self-image. The aim of this essay is to address the concepts of privacy and self consciousness, as well as the influence of self-orientated social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr on the processing of personal and private information and the relevance of this impact on self-presentation. The findings conclude the direct relationship between audience and media platforms, and thus can be used to suggest future research directions.

Keywords: privacy; social media; self-awareness; self-image; surveillance capitalism; deboundarying.

1. Introduction

The 21st century can be termed as a “boom” era of social networking. Social media consumption is growing at an expeditious rate. The number of social media users is growing yearly and it is still continuously growing. Based on a report[1], as of February 2018, there were approximately 970 million social media users, and as of July 2021, the growth increased to approximately 4.5 billion users. Meaning, the user growth on social media per year is about 9%. Generally, as social media has grown so widespread that it has become an essential element of modern life, transforming how we engage with society, resulted in a massive effect on the society as a whole. As the majority of people join social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other different social media websites, there is a robust sharing of information, ideas, contents, and perspectives than ever before in the history of the world. As a matter of fact, social media is essential since it helps establish online brotherhood, link audiences, and create revenue. However, people's perception of privacy has undoubtedly shifted as a result of the convenience and accessibility that online media now provides, as the boundary of our personal privacy has become easier to overlook and neglect. The unethical use of social media has led to the breach of people’s privacy and has affected the view of individuals. As such, this essay intends to analyze the manner in which social media has changed the conception of the self and privacy, and how internet media can lead to privacy leakage and examine how the media impacts people's self-deception with the easily alterable online persona, and will then discuss how these blurred distinctions between reality and online appearance can be damaging to our everyday lives.

2. Social Media and Privacy

Privacy and the freedom from unauthorized intrusion to people’s personal lives is a fundamental right of everyone. According to Busuttil et al. [2], privacy is the right to be free and be left alone from the secret and unwanted disclosure and surveillance concerning one’s personal information and data. Nonetheless, privacy wasn’t always like this, before social media was ever a norm, data privacy, secretive to one’s personal information such as birth date and location, are almost never a concern to public individuals. As social media advances, traditional privacy is getting reformed by the online culture, data privacy issues have shown to be a dangerous concern for one’s safety. Nevertheless, in this electronic era, with the emergence of advanced technology and the widespread consumption of the internet and social media, the notion of privacy has shifted. In today's hyper-connected society,

privacy seems to be almost irrelevant and unachievable, according to Francis and Francis [3]. True, due to the vast amount of information that individuals disclose on social media platforms, achieving privacy may be difficult. As our privacy is constantly exploited for business or even personal advantage, data privacy wise, it is nearly impossible to guarantee that it will not be leaked or sold to third parties through internet means. And these stated above are only just the damages that are mostly used by big profit-seeking corporations, individuals also play a role as their own threat to the notion of privacy. Oversharing often can impose potentially detrimental consequences to one's self, whether consciously or unintentionally.

2.1 Threats imposed by Social Media Platforms

Through its own platform, social media plays a vital role to the invasion of privacy, frequently employing mechanisms to gain access to or even control of users' sensitive data. Individuals today leave a large volume of data trail on the internet. For illustration, whenever a person establishes a new social media account, they are requested to provide personal information such as their names, geographic location, dates of birth, photographs, and contact list, which the media platforms frequently claim is mandatory. Although most platforms include features such as privacy settings that seemingly grant users control over their private information, the security of one's personal data remains a concern; some media platforms may be vulnerable to fraudulent third-party activities, and others may overtly put users' data at risk. Data mining, malware spreading, and phishing attempts are just a several of the social media privacy hazards.

Companies often use data mining to automatically extract usable data to analyze and understand patterns in users activities solely for the benefit of corporate profit. As Shoshana Zuboff[4] put it, in surveillance capitalism, private data is considered as free material to convert into a commodity, for corporate extraction, prediction, and marketing tactics, all of which are done without people's knowledge. That is, corporations are manipulating and exploiting the data privacy of their customers. Websites, for instance, fairly regularly collect personal information from users such as their geographic location, birthdate, interests, as well as search history in order to promote their own product or advertisement by analyzing and modeling marketing campaigns using large amounts of data gathered from their users. And though social media platforms do seek consent through its lengthy and complicated terms of service and agreement, most users were never aware of how their data is getting harvested.

Data on social media is also accessible by third parties. Malware, broadly known to as malicious software, refers to any software that is designed in a manner to get access to computers and the data they store. Trojan infections, adware, spyware, phishing, and botnets are examples of common malware. When a malicious program or code infiltrates a user's computer, it can usually be used to steal or even exfiltrate crucial personal information. As a matter of fact, most social media sites, such as Twitter, are ideal delivery systems for malware distributors since a disguised link, text message, or even a fake account could easily be posted on media. Some phishing attacks, which are often employed by criminals, would even present itself as an official company or organization, tricking people into giving sensitive and personal information including passwords, credit card data, and banking information [5]. As a result, it poses a significant danger to data privacy.

And this brings out more concern for the people, what if their data privacy is getting violated by media platforms and third parties, and they have no way to defend their own right. An great example of this is the scandal of Cambridge Analytica's user data collection. Not only did Cambridge Analytica access facebook users data through a third-party application, it also gained access to the users' friends' information, without their explicit permission. This directly violates Facebook's Terms of Service on users' privacy policy but Facebook still ended up giving the data of up to further 87 millions profiles and did not properly act upon the issue. [6]

2.2 Deboundarying

Deboundarying, as Agger[7] presented in his study, *Oversharing: Presentations of Self in the Internet Age*, is used to suggest that boundaries between public and private are constantly getting blurred by social media and thereby creating a space where people easily overshare. According to Erving Goffman [8], human's behaviors on both the "front stage" and the "backstage" much as an actor on the stage and behind the curtain, and their attitude might be drastically different. In other words, People frequently try to display a public-acceptable image on the front stage while reserving the backstage for behaviors or feelings that are difficult to express in public. And social media itself is mostly front stage since most content posted are visible to the public or at least semi-public, building an image for the outsiders to fulfill their own need for attention; but at the same time, most people used social media to document their own life, own emotion, and sometimes even thoughts, making it also contain the element of a backstage. Thus, people are losing the sense of the dividing line between what should be shared to the public and what should stay as personal knowledge. Social media has overshadowed this boundary line extremely unclearly, which can lead to severe harm to an individual's privacy, and often in an unconscious way. Internet users as a whole are now fairly comfortable in sharing information or emotions that would otherwise be kept to themselves before the age of online media.

Media platforms like TikToks and Twitter can further push this harmful deboundarying, as these media are filled with contents that's quick and convenient to consume and at the same time encourage users to actively create content. These short and minor content might not seem much, and most of the time can be created as anonymous or semi-publicly, but exactly because they are created through a masked screen, people are more than likely to share deep secrets and emotions that are not public-acceptable information. For instance, minors on the internet might consciously share extremely personal information to strangers online because they believe the internet is virtual and anonymous. They might post an image/video that can expose their location, a post with their friends real names in it, or a comment about the real school they attend. According to the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner's survey [9] 19% of teens and 9% of children as young as eight have shared personal information, such as home address, full name, and phone number out to the public for strangers to see.

The fact of the matter is that social media has drastically altered the meaning of privacy. It is not that people no longer care about their own privacy, but rather that people have accepted that the notion of privacy is no longer the same with the emergence of social media. They are more willing to share personal thoughts and information online, whether is to seek sympathy or attention. Hence, the best thing to do is for people is to learn and understand how they can limit the amount of information they put on social media. It is true that people share excessive information on social media platforms, and all of this personal data people expose on social media is no longer in users' full control as corporations and malicious third parties are constantly violating people's right to their privacy.

3. Social Media and the notion of Self

There is a great connection between social media and the growing mental health concern regarding a person's self-perception. Social media has expanded avenues for networking, building a global village and connecting people through various methods; however, it has also come with a desperate requirement by individuals for the validation of this said online community. Customarily, youths, who are the majority of social media consumers, desire and enjoy the quick fame and recognition the media platform brings. And because of the distance between individuals through the internet, every message, every post, every image one shares could be easily altered and calculated. This easily interchangeable online characterization of oneself is one of the main reasons why youth can often not differentiate the distinction between one's real image and their ideal image, they are often comparing themselves to unrealistic, altered, and staged online content. Consequently, the desire to fit in these

unrealistic social media platforms has affected how people see themselves, leading to low self-esteem and a negative notion about the self and body image.

3.1 Social Media Has Changed the Perception of self

The most prominent example of this is how most social media feature a system for individuals to build a profile; whether public or semi-public, created purposefully by the user to display how they want outsiders to perceive them. On the internet, people are most likely to lie and make up facts about themselves, creating an identity that isn't entirely true as a representation of themselves. And catfish often use this convenience of profile feature to their own benefit. Catfish is a term used to refer to people who take on a whole different fictional persona or identity online by altering information or photos they shared on their profile to create a better version of themselves, in order to trick their victims for financial gain or just purely personal satisfaction. [10] One might take on this catfish identity because it allows them to disguise what they truly are, and use this fake identity to disassociate from their true self, something they might be too ashamed to share online. And just like actors playing a character, they can get too attached to this catfish role they play, which then feels as if this role has become one part of their identity. The catfish identity, which is supposed to be an individual's ideal self, now merges with their real self-image, swaying their perception of self.

Catfishing is only an extreme example of the changing perception of self caused by social media, in reality, most people are harmed by this gradually decreasing distinction of self and ideal self. Anyone could easily hide away their flaws and imperfection online, such as: only posting edited photos of oneself, only sharing pictures of expensive restaurants(though might not be something they can regularly afford), or uploading images that have been presented to appear more "aesthetic," deceiving their friends and followers into believing that this is their ordinary lifestyle. People are constantly picking and choosing what they should share online, but by doing so, they are gradually losing their sense of real self, only left behind pieces of their ideal self. And as time went on, they are forcing themselves into a life that they can't afford. Thus, they often feel as if they are falling short from this fake image they created.

3.2 Social Media Leads to Low-Self-Esteem and Mental Health Issues

Since much social media content is largely self-catered, individuals can utilize any form of online engagement as a reflection of their very own self-image. As George Herbert Mead[11] stated, self-identity is constructed on one's interaction with others; in other terms, with the interaction features social media provides, people's self-image can heavily rely on these likes and comments. These figures of fame become a measurement of a person's self-worth, and that they are unceasingly compared to others. The Association for Psychological Science[12] also discovered that these likes and attention can release dopamine and activate a part of brain's reward circuitry, called the nucleus accumbens. Making people more addicted to these online attention, further causes desire and craving for these social media spotlight and fame, so they become self-conscious when they do not receive it. And, in response to these self-consciousness of humans, there are even third party apps that allow people to buy likes and followers by generating bot accounts. I believe that this further increased people's self-consciousness, since these fake popularity not only made others self-conscious by gradually building an unrealistic standard among the platform, but it also managed to make the person who purchased the attention feel guilty about themselves, seeing as even though they managed to stand out from others by winning this comparison of numbers, they are still fully aware that it isn't legitimate and feel ashamed or unworthy of achieving it.

Social media has also intensified the pressure to look attractive; this pressure to always have to appear beautiful on social networking sites has become such a severe problem that it has become a disorder. Body image, as according to Selyutin [13], refers to how people concerned about their appearances and the manner in which they view themselves. Because positive comments and likes are typically associated with being pretty and attractive, commonly known as lookism[14] and socially known by the youth as pretty privilege, one may experience body concerns as a result of

seeking people to perceive them favorably. Selyutin [13] stated that most people who have body issues are the ones who compare their photos with the pictures posted by other people. And if regardless of their best effort to appear good looking people still comment negatively on their photos, this could lead to a negative body perception by some individuals, and could furthermore develop into depression and anxiety. For instance, recent research[15] on this topic found that adolescents who were often dissatisfied with their bodies at a younger age later showed depressive symptoms ranging from mild to severe depression at the age of 18. This study confirms that body comparison on social media often makes people feel dejected and has thus evolved into a severe mental health issue.

Low self-esteem has also become common among social media users. Generally, self-esteem is someone's general opinions about themselves, including the way they feel about their limitations and abilities. Negative comments on social media can drive someone to develop low self-esteem, which can be detrimental to their well-being and mental health. For instance, when someone posts their pictures on an online social networking platform, they may get negative feedback or may end up with no likes at all. As an inevitable result, people have begun to wonder what is wrong with them, prompting them to develop more deep insecurities about regarding their body weight, build, or shape, which could also lead to depression and involvement in substance abuse. According to Francis and Francis [3,] approximately 57 percent of individuals are admitted to hospitals due to severe body image issues.

The fact of the matter is that a low self-esteem and a negative body image can result in depression, anxiety, jealousy, drug abuse, and living unsatisfied life in a society in which social media has a disproportionate impact on people. However, despite the pressure of social media, with maximum effort, society can still overcome body issues. Typically, society should adapt into a culture in which there is inclusivity and encourages a positive body image. Additionally, parents should be keen to observe the symptoms of negative body image of their children and look for assistance. Ideally, parents can assist their children by promoting the concept of positive body image. They can promote a positive body image by making the children understand that social media is filled with unrealistic standards that's almost impossible in reality, and help them differentiate the difference between their real self-image and ideal self.

4. Conclusion

The unethical use of the internet and an over-reliance on online social media can result in the loss of awareness of the risks and consequences of oversharing, as well as the threat of privacy, concluding in a privacy breach. While the media's versatility in terms of communication and information dissemination directly influences people's ways of interacting with social media, as well as the rewarding attention it provides, which also directly influences the justifications for the transition to negative self-deceptions. Social media has blurred the distinction between reality and online presence, between public and private, and according to the findings, the damage caused by social media to individuals is immeasurable if people keep allowing online media to obscure our grasp on reality and security. It is critical that society as a whole commit to finding a solution to the above-mentioned challenges by resolving the problem of social media and fostering stronger relationships with media platform in which people can gain more than they sacrifice.

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