

# Research on the Impact of Social Media on People's Privacy and its Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the current situation of social media privacy violation and protection from the perspectives of laws, technology and user behavior, and the comparison of the similarities and differences between China and Western countries.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Privacy Protection, Personal Privacy, Privacy Regulations.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, privacy breaches surrounding social media platforms have been frequent, such as Facebook-Cambridge Analytica. Facebook allowed a third-party firm, Cambridge Analytica, to collect the personal information of up to 87 million users through an app that was later used for political advertising. In the same year(2018), Alipay was exposed when it released its annual statement, by default checking the terms of agreeing to share user data with Ant Financial without the explicit consent of users. This lead to the commercial utilization of users' historical data without their permission, which will violate users' privacy or their legal right, or even will lead to criminal crimes or loss of wealth.

By studying the different legal terms and practice, this article is to find the complex relationship between social media and privacy protection, offering readers a more comprehensive perspective on how to uphold privacy rights in a globalized digital time. Through this research, I hope to help readers understand how social media platforms treat personal data and how individuals can protect their privacy better when they use these platforms.

## 2. The Media People are Using Today

### 2.1. The Definition of Social Media

In western countries, social media is an Internet application based on Web 2.0 technology, and the core is user-generated content and interactivity. The difference between this and traditional media is that it is not only a channel for information dissemination, but also a space for users to interact with each other and create content(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition, Kietzmann further refined the definition of social media from the perspective of functional modules, arguing that it is a multi-dimensional interactive tool where users interact through functional modules such as identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationship, reputation, and group(Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media platforms under this definition, such as Facebook and Twitter, are regarded as tools for individuals to exchange information with the public, which not only promote the rapid dissemination of information, but also have a profound impact on privacy protection, online social behavior and the construction of social capital.

In China, Social media is often defined as an Internet-based social platform with user-generated content and interactive

features. Different from the Western definition, China's social media puts more emphasis on its role in the social structure, especially its function in information dissemination, public opinion guidance and social governance(Zhao & John, 2022). This expansion of functions has enabled social media in China to play an important role in social mobilization, collective identity, and the dissemination of national policies.

### 2.2. Types of Social Media

As the core product of modern digital technology, social media has become an important platform for social interaction, information sharing and content generation, and its classification have been widely discussed in academic research. Social media can be divided into six categories, including collaborative projects, blogs and microblogs, content communities, social networking services, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds. This classification provides a comprehensive classification framework based on the different functions and user interaction patterns of social media(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

This classification may be too esoteric for non-scholars. From the perspective of the average social media user, the classification by purpose may be easier to understand. Based on the criteria of interactivity and communication, Social media can be divided into platforms based on content (such as YouTube), interactive (such as Facebook), and a combination of both, which further expands the understanding of the complexity of social media(Carr & Hayes, 2015).

## 3. The Impact of Social Media on People's Privacy in China and Western Countries

### 3.1. Background

Paliszkievicz explores the issue of privacy and trust in the social media environment. First, he points out that privacy issues in social media are increasingly complex and users need more control over their personal data. Improved privacy policies and simplified procedures for reporting breaches are the way forward. In addition, the application of data encryption and artificial intelligence technology provides new possibilities for privacy protection. Second, in terms of the trust, he puts forward the concept of "fast trust", in which the trust relationship established by users on the platform in a short period of time is easily damaged by factors such as

privacy disclosure. Transparent data processing processes and strict privacy protection mechanisms help enhance users' trust in the platform. Finally, he discusses how to build trust through social media, especially through influencer marketing and transparent brand communication, companies can effectively enhance user trust. These studies provide important theoretical basis and practical guidelines for privacy and trust issues in the field of social media.

Trepte mainly discusses the control issue of social media users in privacy management. His point is: On social media, the protection of privacy depends on the interaction between people and the environment, and users cannot fully guarantee the security of privacy through simple control. The flow and sharing of information is managed primarily through interactions with others and platforms, while trust and social norms play a central role in privacy protection, especially where privacy cannot be controlled through direct communication.

Overall, Trepte highlights the relationship between privacy and control on social media, and presents trust and communication as key factors in guaranteeing privacy in an environment where information is increasingly networked(Trepte, 2020).

With the in-depth analysis of user behavior data by social media platforms, advertisers can conduct more research based on users' browsing habits, interests and consumption motivations. The study found that when users' primary purpose on social media is to find product or promotional information, they are more likely to respond positively to ads, view them as useful, and are more likely to click on them. Such data can also provide users with more personalized content tailored to their interests and needs, reduce the distraction of irrelevant ads, and enhance the overall user experience. In addition, the study highlights the impact of the correlation between ads and what users are viewing on the effectiveness of ads. If the AD content is related to a social or browsing activity initiated by the user, the user is more likely to be interested in and click on the AD. Targeted targeting based on behavioral data can not only improve click-through rates for such ads, it can also help businesses spread their messages more effectively, which in turn increases purchase intentions and brands(Zhang & Mao, 2016).

On July 20, 2021, the city of Zhengzhou and its surrounding areas were hit by extremely heavy rain, and the extreme rainfall in a short period of time caused serious flooding disasters, resulting in traffic paralysis in many places, especially the Zhengzhou Metro Line 5 accident, hundreds of passengers were trapped in the flooded carriages, and eventually led to many deaths. After the disaster, the urban infrastructure was seriously damaged, a large number of houses were destroyed, and the casualties and property losses were huge.

In the face of disasters, social media have become important channels for people to help each other. Many trapped people posted their real-time location through social platforms to seek outside rescue, and netizens quickly relayed the information to help rescue workers quickly locate and implement rescue operations. It has helped save many lives and provided opportunities for support and assistance in recovery after the disaster(Zhang, 2021).

Bashar explores the development trends and future research directions of social media platforms in marketing. With the widespread application of innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, these

technologies enable enterprises to collect real-time data on user behavior and feedback to optimize marketing strategies, enhance brand value, and enhance customer loyalty. At the same time, the platform can continuously optimize the user experience by collecting user feedback and analyzing data. This includes adapting the interface design to the user's usage habits, adding new features, and even providing personalized services(Bashar et al., 2024).

Chen found that users tend to ignore the potential privacy risks when enjoying the convenience, social relationships and personalized services brought by social media, which also explains the so-called "privacy paradox" phenomenon: users are still willing to disclose personal information even though they are aware of the privacy risks. Chen provides a theoretical basis for understanding the privacy behavior of social media users, and emphasizes the dual paths of privacy protection and privacy disclosure behavior and their coexistence(Chen et al., 2024).

### **3.2. The Positive Impact of Social Media On Privacy**

With the development of social media, privacy disclosure may sometimes start a hot topic for the whole society lead to some great changes of the society. First, the role of privacy disclosure in social movements might be particularly significant. In the case of the MeToo movement, victims made their sufferings open, stirring up a global argument about gender inequality and pushing for legal reform(Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). This public act breaks the silence, brings the issue to the surface and arouses strong social resonance(Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Habermas's "public sphere" theory points out that the disclosure of privacy tends to become an important way for the public to express their demands in modern social media, which promotes the formation of public opinion(Habermas, 1991). In some cases, by providing true information, such as through real-name reporting, individuals can get a quicker responses to some issues from authorities, though their privacy may be exposed.

Second, Castells' research shows that social movements, in the age of social networks, rely on private sharing of individuals, which helps to expose social injustice and promote changes(Castells, 2015). At the same time, privacy is also an important way of self-expression and identity. For example, the LGBTQ community promotes social understanding and acceptance of diversity by disclosing their gender identity(Papacharissi, 2010).

Third, the disclosure of privacy provides an effective way for individuals to express their demands and promote social changes, and becomes an important part of modern public opinion and social progress.

Last but not least, personalized push creates a win-win situation. By analyzing customers' historical data, personalized push of highly focused services can be made. This targeted push not only improves users' experience significantly, but also strengthens the relationship between the users and the platforms. The platforms can help users find their desired goods or services, reducing the time cost and improving their efficiency(Ricci et al., 2010). On e-commerce platforms, personalized recommendations make it easier for users to find products that are suitable for them, increasing the experience of dealing or purchasing. This improvement of user experience increases the mutual confidence of users and the platforms, further promoting the development of the

platform and user loyalty. At the same time, personalized pushing brings more opportunities companies or merchants. Through precise push, businesses can display ads in a targeted manner according to users' interests and consumption habits, greatly improving the click-through rate of ads (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011). For merchants, this not only improves the effectiveness of marketing, but also promotes sales and revenue growth.

This win-win situation makes personalized push systems an important tool for platforms and merchants. Users enjoy content and services that are more tailored to their personal needs on the platform, saving time in filtering information. Merchants use accurate data analysis to find potential consumers who are more likely to be interested in the product, optimize advertising spending, and maximize profits.

### **3.3. The Negative Impact of Social Media on Privacy**

Social media may lead to the risk of privacy breaches and data misuse, as well as to affect an individual's reputation and mental health. In the digital society, the abuse and disclosure of personal privacy not only brings extensive social and economic impact, but also reflects the vulnerability of personal data in modern society (Solove, 2004). This misuse of data is not only a threat to personal security, but also a violation of personal autonomy. As private data gradually becomes a commercial commodity, the identity of users in cyberspace is reduced to a series of data, and they will lose the initiative of their own information. In addition, Zuboff's argument about "surveillance capitalism" proves that the abuse of personal privacy involves not only the transfer of economic interests, but also the reconstruction of power relations (Zuboff, 2019). The commercialization of data is no longer just a technical issue, it has profoundly changed the way people interact with social institutions and businesses. People become passive in such relationships, unable to pursue legitimate interests for themselves. At the same time, users will also become a tool for capital to pursue interests. In my opinion, the issue of privacy is no longer just a matter of individual choice, but a manifestation of power imbalances in the entire social structure.

In today's highly connected digital society, the disclosure of personal privacy not only has a profound impact on professional reputation and social image, it can also pose a serious threat to mental health. From a professional and social reputation standpoint, the "Context Collapse" theory reveals the negative consequences of out-of-control information dissemination when individuals move between different social groups. Public private content may be misunderstood in front of different audiences, which not only affects an individual's career development, but also may lead to the breakdown of social relationships. In fact, when individuals disclose their privacy, they cannot fully control the dissemination and interpretation of information, which is an inevitable dilemma in digital social networking. Social media blurs the boundaries between the private and public spheres, making users' actions and words to be shared indiscriminately with people of different identities. Especially in the workplace environment, an individual's remarks, photos or details of life may be misunderstood by employers and colleagues, affecting his professional image and promotion opportunities. At the same time, the disclosure of privacy not only affects users' reputations externally, but also profoundly affects their mental health internally. There is a strong

association between privacy exposure and anxiety, low self-esteem and decreased life satisfaction (Vannucci et al., 2017). The frequent and extensive nature of privacy disclosure can cause users to feel psychological pressure and emotional exhaustion in continuous self-exposure. This sentiment is especially evident among young users and teenagers, who tend to care more about the evaluation of others, and privacy exposure further aggravates their psychological burden.

## **4. Countermeasures for Privacy Protection in China and the Western Countries When Using Social Media**

To address this issue, this article will explore in three perspectives: governments, social media platforms, and individuals.

### **4.1. Governments**

At the government level, to address the privacy challenges of social media and technological developments, existing legal frameworks must be updated and refined in light of emerging technologies and changes of user behavior. Helen believes that privacy issues should be analyzed in a specific technical and social context, and that technological developments are changing the traditional definition of privacy (Nissenbaum, 2004). As a result, lawmakers must consider the privacy implications of these emerging technologies in a comprehensive manner and enact specific regulatory measures to ensure transparency and the compliant use of data. Solove further stressed that big data and algorithmic personalized recommendations and behavioral predictions are highly likely to lead to privacy violations, and that governments should adopt new legal tools to limit the excessive collection and exploitation of user data by social media platforms (Solove, 2010). In 2013, China's Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate issued a judicial interpretation that clarified legal responsibility for online rumors. The judicial interpretation stipulates that spreading rumors and information clicked or viewed more than 5,000 times, or forwarded more than 500 times, can be punished with libel and defamation, which can be sentenced to up to three years in prison.

The frequency of data breaches shows that existing laws are not strong enough to punish and deter corporate data abuse. Therefore, we should increase the fines and legal responsibility for data leakage incidents, and strengthen the punitive measures against data leakage legislation. The GDPR came into force in 2018 with the following regulations: fines of up to 4% of annual global turnover or €20 million can be imposed for breaches of core privacy principles, including non-compliance with the GDPR principles on the processing of personal data, the rights of data subjects and cross-border data transfers.

### **4.2. Social Media Platforms**

In the process of protecting the privacy of social media, reasonable use of technology and improvement of platform privacy policy are the key approaches.

First, platforms should provide users with more control over their privacy through technological means. The platform can help users manage their data more effectively by simplifying the privacy settings interface and enhancing user control over the scope of information shared (Jensen et al., 2005). For example, social media can introduce fine-grained

privacy settings that allow users to customize the visibility of information for different audiences (e.g., friends, colleagues, and members of the public). This technology not only improves the user experience, but also reduces the risk of inadvertent privacy disclosure. Privacy settings should be designed with default protection as a core design principle. Most users rely on the platform's default settings (Acquisti & Grossklags, 2005). Therefore, the platform should provide the option of "privacy protection as default" and encourage users to actively participate in privacy management. By enabling high privacy settings by default, platforms can ensure that users can still enjoy basic privacy protection even if the settings are not modified. At the same time, social media platforms can proactively notify users of possible privacy risks through pop-ups or reminders, ensuring that users can choose to share information in an informed manner.

Second, simplification and transparency of privacy policies are also key to protecting user privacy. Most users don't take the time to read lengthy privacy policies, so simplifying privacy policy content is an important step for platforms to improve transparency (McDonald & Cranor, 2008). Privacy policies should try to avoid complex legalese in favor of plain, easy-to-understand language that allows users to understand how their data is being used in a short time. Through such policy design, users can have a clearer idea of how their data will be collected, stored and used, allowing them to make more informed privacy management decisions.

### 4.3. Individuals

In addition to the platform's technical means and privacy policy, the improvement of users' privacy literacy is also crucial. Users need to have sufficient privacy awareness and knowledge when using social media in order to make reasonable privacy management choices (Egelman et al., 2013). People should actively participate in the publicity lectures related to protecting privacy. Through education, users can be more actively involved in privacy management and avoid making unreasonable privacy settings due to lack of information.

To sum up, social media privacy protection requires the joint efforts of laws, policies, platform management and people's awareness of protection. This cannot be achieved overnight and requires long-term persistence and learning.

## 5. Conclusion

As a "double-edged sword", social media not only provides the convenience of information dissemination and social reform, but also brings the risk of privacy infringement. Personalized notifications and information sharing enhance the user experience, but large-scale data collection and abuse weaken individuals' control over their privacy. To address this challenge, governments need to strengthen legislation, platforms need to increase transparency and user control, and users need to increase awareness of privacy protection. Only through multi-party collaboration can we enjoy the convenience of social media while effectively addressing its privacy risks and ensuring that individual rights are protected in the digital age.

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