

Journal of Social Sciences (COES&RJ-JSS)
ISSN (E): 2305-9249 ISSN (P): 2305-9494
Publisher: Centre of Excellence for Scientific & Research Journalism
Online Publication Date: 1st April 2014
Online Issue: Volume 3, Number 2, April 2014
[http://www.centreofexcellence.net/J/JSS/JSS Mainpage.htm](http://www.centreofexcellence.net/J/JSS/JSS>Mainpage.htm)

Perspectives for sharing photos of children online

Johanna Virkki, Chi Kin Chan

Abstract

The goal of this study was to gather the thoughts people have about sharing photos of children online. The work was done by gathering a literature review, studying 29 Internet forum discussions (in English and Finnish), and by personal interviews of 50 people (from Asia and Europe). Eight main viewpoints for sharing photos of children online were discovered that also supported the findings of earlier studies. Also, it was found that compared to the male users, the female users are more active in sharing information about other people online and also feel freer to share the information without asking for permission.

Keywords

Information sharing, interviews, online social networks, photos.

Citation

Virkki, Johanna; Chan, Chi Kin; Perspectives for sharing photos of children online; (April, 2014); Journal of Social Sciences (COES&RJ-JSS), Vol. 3, No. 2, pp: 357-366.

1. Introduction

Today's young parents are the first generation to raise kids in the age of social media. The trend of continuously increasing number of users sharing multimedia content was highlighted in a study that measured the consumer usage, attitude, and interest in adopting social media platforms (Smith, 2008). People today have accounts (sometimes several) on versatile social media applications and new applications are constantly booming. Commonly shared personal information includes, e.g., personal identifiers, contact information, social links, and online activities. For example, posting original photos and videos online has increased significantly in the past year; half of wired users post original photos online (Duggan, 2013). Besides the information the user knowingly discloses, the use of the service itself reveals information to the service provider; e.g., IP (Internet Protocol) address, used browser, time of connection, and other visited profiles. The service provider can thus customize its services on the base of the secondary data collected. Available information can be used to create a digital footprint of the user (Malhotra et al., 2012; ENISA, 2007; Campisi et al., 2009).

While sharing (personal) information is the main purpose of online social networks, privacy is the major concern. It has been studied that some people aren't concerned about the security and privacy on social media applications, although their main reason for using such applications is to share information (Miller and Voas, 2012; Baracaldo et al., 2011). Correspondingly, most users click to accept privacy notices and consent declarations without understanding or even reading them (Determann, 2012). Nevertheless, the data collected in online social networking applications tends to stay online, with the added risk of being linked in diverse ways. Thus, one important issue related to these different social media applications is the data aggregation (joining seemingly non-sensitive separate bits of information may well reveal additional information). Similar effect can occur when data collected for one purpose is used for a different purpose without the person's approval or even knowledge (Krishnamurthy, 2013; Solove, 2007). An interesting survey on social networks' privacy leaks and the potential hazards for users are presented in (Michalopoulos et al., 2010).

Virtual life and online individual privacy are active research areas worldwide. For example, a study that investigated American, Chinese, and Indian users of social networking applications and studied their privacy attitudes and practices, found the American respondents to be the most privacy concerned, followed by the Chinese and Indians, respectively (Yang et al., 2011). In another study, where opinions on individual privacy were collected from people working with different aspects of the Internet of Things (IOT) in China and Finland, the answerers from Finland were less worried about the individual privacy in different IOT applications than the answerers from China (Virkki and Chen, 2013). In a yet another study, it was found that French and Chinese online social networking users possessed significantly different privacy belief and trust. Specifically, French users were found to be more concerned about their privacy in the Internet and they felt less comfortable in giving personal info (Chen and Tsoi, 2011). Also, in one study, individuals using Facebook and MySpace expressed similar levels of concern regarding the Internet privacy. However, Facebook users were more trusting of the site and its members, and more willing to include identifying information in their profile. On the other hand, MySpace users were more active in the development of new relationships. It was concluded that the interaction of trust and privacy concern in

Perspectives for sharing photos of children online

social networking applications was not yet understood to a sufficient degree to allow accurate modeling of behavior and activity (Dwyer et al., 2007). In a more recent study, an interesting literature review (Kuss and Griffiths, 2011), with thought-provoking references like (Wilson et al., 2010; Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Barker, 2009), it was indicated that extraverts seem to use social networking sites for social enhancement, whereas introverts use them for social compensation, which in both cases appears to be related to greater usage, as does low conscientiousness and high narcissism. Negative correlates of usage include the shrinkage in real life social community participation and academic achievement, each of which may be indicative of potential addiction. Thus, virtual life and online individual privacy are important and challenging research topics.

Also, an interesting research area, the virtual lives of active users of social media applications, the teenagers, has been under study. Teens share a wide range of information about themselves on social media sites but few teens have a fully public approach to social media. Instead, they take a selection of steps to restrict their profiles, and their patterns of reputation management on social media vary greatly according to their gender and network size; girls are more likely than boys to restrict access to their profiles. These are among the key findings of a recent survey that examined teenagers' privacy management on social media applications (Madden et al., 2013). In addition, according to another survey, most parents of teenagers are concerned about what their teenage children do online and how their behavior could be monitored by others. Some parents are taking steps to observe, discuss, and check up on their children's digital footprints (Madden et al., 2012). In a yet another study, it was found out that students are more likely to have a private profile in social media if their friends and roommates also have. In addition, women are more likely to have private profiles than men. Also, having a private profile is associated with a higher level of online activity (Lewis et al., 2008). A gender gap when it comes to the way male and female social media users choose to manage their profiles was also found in another study (Madden, 2012). According to findings of this study, women are much more conservative in the basic settings they choose in social media; 67 percent of female profile owners restrict access to friends only compared with 48 percent of male profile owners.

What haunts people and their privacy is typically user-generated content, i.e., information that people themselves, their friends, and other social media users upload online (Determann, 2012). It has also been stated that privacy problems are not caused by the technology alone, but primary through activities of people, businesses, and governments (Solove, 2006). According to one study, 11 percent of online social networking users have posted online content they regret (Madden, 2012). In another study, it was discovered that 8 percent have requested someone to remove information about them that was posted online, including photos or videos (Madden and Smith, 2010).

Thus, social media applications have collected a great amount of data and are today also functioning as tools for computational social science. Online social networking has made available a rich and versatile dataset covering large sections of the population (Oboler et al., 2012). This work shares some similar objects to the studies above. The goal is to gather the thoughts people have about sharing photos of children online. The work was done by gathering a literature review, by studying 29 Internet forum discussions, and by 50 personal interviews. The work presented here is organized as follows: After this literature survey, the Internet forum survey and the conducted interviews will be

introduced. The third section presents and discusses the gathered results, while the last section provides the conclusions of this study.

2. Internet forum survey and interviews

2.1 Internet forum survey

For this survey, 29 Internet discussions handling the topic of sharing photos of children online were studied; 11 discussions were in English and 18 were in Finnish. Many of the discussions took place in discussion forums that were related to parenting, but the topic was also discussed, e.g., in comments of online magazine articles and blogs. The oldest discussion was started in March 2007 and the newest in October 2013. There were all together 1857 studied messages. The survey was divided into two main topics:

1. How do the answerers feel about sharing photos of children online?
2. What are the main viewpoints presented in these discussions?

2.2. Interviews

For this research, 50 people from Asia (38 people) and Europe (12 people) were interviewed. Most of the answerers were from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Finland, but there were also individual answerers from Singapore, Ireland, and Russia. People of different age and of both gender (See Table 1), were interviewed.

Some of the interviews were done as personal interviews that were conducted by an associate of the researcher, some were done by private e-mails between the researcher and the answerer, and some of the answers were collected with an Internet questionnaire. Some of the results of this interview study were published in our previous paper (Chan and Virkki, 2013) but it also includes interesting unpublished information, e.g., answers to the following two questions:

1. Do you share information about other people through the Internet?
Yes/No
2. Whose information do you think you can share without asking for permission?
Your children
Your other family members
Your boyfriend / girlfriend / spouse
Your friends
our colleagues
yone
Others, who?

Table 1. Gender, age group, and nationality of the answerers in this study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Internet forum survey results

The first studied topic, how do people feel about sharing photos of children online, showed clearly three main opinion groups: those who say they share photos of their children online; those who say they share photos of their children online, but mention this to be only to limited people; and those who say they do not share photos of their children online. All messages (out of the 1857 studied messages) that clearly stated an opinion were selected and these opinions can be seen in Table 2. As can be seen, 61 percent of the answerers share photos of their children online. However, 34 percent of the answerers share only to limited people. Thus, they seem to trust the privacy settings of the online applications. It should be noted that also some of the answerers who stated that they share photos online (27 percent of the answerers) may have limited the access to friends only; they just did not mention it.

Table 2. How people feel about sharing photos of children online.

The polarized public debate about whether or not privacy can be dismissed as a leftover in the information age was previously introduced in an interesting study (Madden, 2012). Basically, some people think that if people are willing to share versatile personal information about their lives on social networking applications, they must have abandoned any realistic expectation of privacy. Some researchers have suggested that online social network users are uniquely unconcerned about privacy; continuous use of social media without any major negative experiences may lessen their concerns about sharing information. However, some people say that the users still care about their privacy online but those sensitivities have been influenced by technology companies that can profit from availability of personal information. Also, users may be more open with what they share because they don't completely understand how their data is stored and used. Just because people want to post some information publicly online does not mean they quietly gave up all control over the information they want to share (Madden, 2012). This ongoing debate is supported by the findings of our Internet forum survey; in these 29 studied Internet discussions, eight main viewpoints for sharing photos of children online were discovered, and they are listed next.

1. It is OK if only photos where the child cannot be identified are shared.
Shared photos are taken so that the face cannot be identified or the child is so young that identification is not possible.
No full name of the child is given online with the photo.
2. It is OK if no photos that can be harmful to the child are shared.
No bath photos or beach photos are shared.
3. It is OK if the photos are only available to a limited amount of people.
Photos can be shared if they are only shared to a certain group of people.
"As long as you click that only friends can see your photos, you're safe."
4. It is not safe even if the photos are only available to a limited amount of people.

This kind of privacy is not real and although shared only with limited access to them, these photos will not necessary stay private because other people can share them forward.

Some social media applications, for example Facebook, own the uploaded photos.

The privacy settings and rules in social media applications can change.

5. It is not an issue.

If someone sees photos of a child, it will cause no damage to the child.

Children are outside all the time (parks, shops, beaches) and anyone can see them, sharing a photo online is nothing different.

“I still don't see the problem with someone knowing what you or your kids look like.”

6. It is an issue.

It is parents' responsibility to protect the privacy of their children.

Everybody, also minors, should be able to decide themselves if they want their photos to be shared online.

7. Other people sharing photos online can be an issue

Other relatives of the children can share photos; parents should be able to decide the rules to this, but some people do not listen to the parents.

8. It is part of the modern world

Today's young parents are first generation to raise kids in age of social media. In the internet age, privacy is just less important to people.

“The world is changing, get used to it!”

3.2 Interview results

According to results from the interviews, half of the answerers (26 answerers out of the total 50) share information about other people online. What is notable is that 14 out of the 19 female answerers (74 percent) say that they share information about other people, compared to 12 out of the 31 male answerers (39 percent). These results can be seen in Table 3.

As can be seen from Table 4, there is also a difference among female and male answerers in question “Whose information do you think you can share without asking for permission?” Out of the all answerers, 42 percent feel that they cannot share information about other people without permission and the percentages for male and female answerers are 48 percentages and 32, respectively. Actually, the percentage of female answerers to share information of certain people group without permission is bigger than that of male answerers for every people group. These are interesting findings, as in earlier studies, e.g., (Lewis et al., 2008) and (Madden, 2012) it has been found that compared to male users, female social media users are more concerned about the privacy of, at least, their own profile. According to our results, 36 percent of the answerers feel that they can share information about their friends online, without asking for permission. However, only 14 percent of the answerers feel that they can share information about their children online, without asking for permission. There is again a notable difference among male and female answerer percentages (10 percent and 21 percent, respectively, think they can share

Perspectives for sharing photos of children online

information about children without permission). This clear difference between genders definitely is a topic for our further research.

The result of only 14 percent of the answerers feeling they can share information about their children online without permission is not in line with the results achieved in the Internet forum survey, where 27 percent of the answerers share photos of their children online and 34 percent of the answerers share photos of their children online, but only to limited people. One reason may be that many people share photos of children who are too young to be able to give permission and thus no permission is asked. Also, many people probably think they actually are the ones to give the permission for sharing photos their children, as one writer in an Internet discussion stated: "Parents can decide as they are responsible for other decisions too".

Table 3. Answers to "Do you share information about other people through the Internet?"

Table 4. Answers to "Whose information do you think you can share without asking for permission?"

4. Conclusions

Online information sharing has become a mainstream activity. Consequently, the public debate about privacy has been spreading. This study started with a literature survey in order to give an understanding on the magnitude of the topic. The thoughts people have about sharing photos of children online were gathered from different countries by Internet forum survey and personal interviews. It was discovered that while some parents think it is OK to share photos of children, some think it is OK if they can only be accessed by selected people (34 percent of the messages in this study), while others (39 percent of the messages in this study) feel it is not OK, no matter what the circumstances are. In the Internet forums, eight main viewpoints for sharing photos of children online were discovered that also supported the findings of earlier studies. Furthermore, in the personal interviews, it was found that compared to the male answerers, the female answerers are more active in sharing information about other people online, and also feel freer to share the information without asking for permission.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation.

References

- Baracaldo, N. Lopez, C., Anwar, M. and Lewis, M. (2011) "Simulating the Effect of Privacy Concerns in Online Social Networks" Proceedings of IEEE International Conference on Information Reuse and Integration, pp. 519-524.
- Barker, V. (2009) "Older Adolescents' Motivations for Social Network Site Use: The Influence of Gender, Group Identity, and Collective Self-esteem" *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*, volume 12, number 2, pp. 209-213.

Campisi, P., Maiorana, E., and Neri, A. (2009) "Privacy Protection in Social Media Networks a Dream That Can Come True?" Proceedings of International Conference on Digital Signal Processing, 5p

Chan C.K. and Virkki, J. (2014) "Perspectives for Sharing Personal Information on Online Social Networks" Social Networking, volume 3, number 1, pp. 41-49.

Chen, L. and Tsoi, H.K. (2011) "Privacy Concern and Trust in Using Social Network Sites: A Comparison between French and Chinese Users" Proceedings of International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction, pp. 234-241.

Determann, L. (2012) "Social Media Privacy: A Dozen Myths and Facts" Stanford Technology Law Review, at <http://stlr.stanford.edu/pdf/determann-socialmediaprivacy.pdf> , accessed 1 January 2014.

Duggan, M. (2013) "Photo and Video Sharing Grow Online" Pew Internet & American Life Project, at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Photos-and-videos.aspx> , accessed 8 December 2013

Dwyer, C., Hiltz, S.R. and Passerini, K. (2007) "Trust and Privacy Concern within Social Networking Sites: A Comparison of Facebook and MySpace" Proceedings of Americas' Conference on Information Systems, 10p.

ENISA, European Network and Information Security Agency, 2007. "Security Issues and Recommendations for Online Social Networks" at <http://www.enisa.europa.eu/publications/archive/security-issues-and-recommendations-for-online-social-networks> , accessed 8 February 2014.

Kirschner P.A. and Karpinski, A.C. (2010) "Facebook and Academic Performance" Computers in Human Behavior, volume 26, pp. 1237-1245.

Krishnamurthy, B. (2013) "Privacy and Online Social Networks: Can Colorless Green Ideas Sleep Furiously?" IEEE Security & Privacy, volume 11, number 3, pp.14-20.

Kuss D.J. and Griffiths, M.D. (2011) "Online Social Networking and Addiction—A Review of the Psychological Literature" International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, volume 8, number 9, pp. 3528-3552.

Lewis, K., Kaufman, J., and Christakis, N. (2008) "The Taste for Privacy: An Analysis of College Student Privacy Settings in an Online Social Network" Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, volume 14, number 1, pp. 79-100.

M. Madden, et al. (2013) "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy," Pew Internet & American Life Project, at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Teens-Social-Media-And-Privacy.aspx> , accessed 10 November 2013.

M. Madden, et al. (2012) "Parents, Teens, and Online Privacy," Pew Internet & American Life Project, at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Teens-and-Privacy.aspx> , accessed 13 October 2013.

Perspectives for sharing photos of children online

Madden M. and Smith, A. (2010) "Reputation Management and Social Media", Pew Internet & American Life Project, at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Reputation-Management.aspx> , accessed 7 January 2014.

Madden, M. (2012) "Privacy Management on Social Media Sites," Pew Internet & American Life Project, at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Privacy-management-on-social-media.aspx> , accessed 5 October 2013.

A. Malhotra, et al. (2012) "Studying User Footprints in Different Online Social Networks" Proceedings of International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining, pp. 1065-1070.

Michalopoulos D. and Mavridis, I. (2010) "Surveying Privacy Leaks through Online Social Network" Proceedings of Panhellenic Conference on Informatics, pp.184-187.

Miller K.W. and Voas, J. (2012) "Who Owns What? The Social Media Quagmire" IT Professional, volume 14, number 6, pp. 4-5.

Oboler, A., Welsh, K., and Cruz, L. (2012) "The Danger of Big Data: Social Media as Computational Social Science" First Monday, volume 17, number 7- 2.

Smith, T. (2008) "Power to the People, Wave.3," at <http://www.universalmccann.com/Assets/wave-3-20080403093750.pdf> , accessed 5 November 2013.

Solove, D.J. (2006) "A Taxonomy of Privacy" University of Pennsylvania Law Review, volume 154, number 3, GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 129.

Solove, D.J. (2007) "'I've Got Nothing to Hide' and Other Misunderstandings of Privacy" San Diego Law Review, volume 44, GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 289.

Virkki J. and Chen, L. (2013) "Personal Perspectives: Individual Privacy in the IOT," Advances in Internet of Things, volume 3, number 2, pp. 21-26.

Wang, Y., Norcie, G., and Cranor, L.F. (2011) "Who Is Concerned about What? A Study of American, Chinese and Indian Users Privacy Concerns on Social Network Sites" Proceedings of International Conference on Trust & Trustworthy Computing, 8p.

Wilson, K., Fornasier, S., and White, K.M. (2010) "Psychological Predictors of Young Adults' Use of Social Networking Sites" Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking, volume 13, number 2, pp. 173-177.

Tables

Table 1. Gender, age group, and nationality of the answerers in this study.

All	Gender		Age group				Nationality	
	M	F	< 20	20-30	30-40	50-60	Asian	European
50	31	19	3	40	6	1	38	12

Table 2. How people feel about sharing photos of children online.

Percent	Opinion
27 %	Share photos of children online
34 %	Share photos of children online, but only to limited people
39 %	Do not share photos of children online

Table 3. Answers to “Do you share information about other people through the Internet?”

	All N=50	Male N=31	Female N=19
Yes	26	12	14
No	24	19	5

Table 4. Answers to “Whose information do you think you can share without asking for permission?”

	All N=50	Male N=31	Female N=19
Your children	14 %	10 %	21 %
Your other family members	20 %	16 %	26 %
Your boyfriend / girlfriend / spouse	20 %	19 %	21 %
Your friends	36 %	32 %	42 %
Your colleagues	14 %	10 %	21 %
Anyone	0 %	0 %	0 %
Other	0 %	0 %	0 %
None of these	42 %	48 %	32 %

About the Author(s)

Johanna Virkki

Department of Electronics and Communications Engineering
Tampere University of Technology
Finland
Direct comments to: johanna.virkki@tut.fi

Chi Kin Chan

Department of Electronic Engineering
City University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
ckchan334@student.cityu.edu.hk