See you, see me: Teenagers' self-disclosure and regret of posting on social network site

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ABSTRACT

Self-disclosure is popular on social network site (SNS). However, teenagers' self-disclosure behavior and their regret of posting, a negative emotional experience, have been seldom studied. Using data from a nationally representative survey, this study tries to investigate teenagers' self-disclosure and regret of posting on SNS. We further examine how demographic variables, SNS use, different types of "friends", trust, and privacy control behavior relate to self-disclosure and regret of posting. We find that though teenagers reveal moderately high level of personal information on SNS, they do not disclose all types of personal information equally. Results also show that male and older teens disclose more personal information. Frequent SNS use, large SNS network size, and having strangers in SNS friend list increase both self-disclosure and posting regret. Setting SNS profile private is related to lower level of self-disclosure. Implications for privacy design of SNS are discussed.

1. Introduction

Social network site (SNS) grows rapidly in the last few years (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014; Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, & Arsoy, 2010). Not solely does SNS allow a vast number of users to get connected and share information with others, but it also consists of heterogeneous types of individuals, groups, communities, and organizations exchanging various sources, in pursuit of their distinctive sociological and psychological wants and needs (Trepte & Reinecke, 2013).

The increasing popularity of SNS raises questions about user self-disclosure on SNS. As a place where a user can create a profile, post pictures and videos, share contact information, personal interest, and build up a network with other people, Facebook encourages or even requires users to disclose personal information and thus is of great relevance for research concerning self-disclosure (Trepte & Reinecke, 2013). Though previous studies have investigated the extent to which users reveal personal information on SNS, there is a lack of systematic examination of the factors contributing to self-disclosure on SNS (Chang & Heo, 2014; Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2012; Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014). This study will try to examine factors that have been identified in online communication or social media literature that could

contribute to self-disclosure, including demographics, SNS use frequency, SNS network size, different types of "friends" on SNS, trust, and privacy control (Chang & Heo, 2014; Fogel & Nehmd, 2009; Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014) to help obtain discerning insights into self-disclosure behavior on SNS.

One possible result of excessive self-disclosure on SNS is regret of posting. As other parties such as advertisers, employers, and parents can get access to information disclosed on SNS, the appropriateness of content on SNS has become an issue (Peluchette & Karl, 2008), and disclosing too much personal information on SNS crossing the privacy boundary can easily lead to regret (Moore & McElroy, 2012; Wang et al., 2011). Recent statistics shows that 32% of people who post on a SNS regret about the information they share openly (Barkoviak, 2010). Age plays an important role in overall posting regret. Though only 27% of people over the age of 25 wish they have not post their updates, photos or other information, 54% of people under 25 have regretted their posts on a SNS, and more than 20% of young SNS users have removed or taken down their photos or postings to avoid long standing damage (Croteau, 2013). The extreme form of regret of posting on SNS can be self-censorship (Das & Kramer, 2013), quitting Facebook (Smith, 2010), or even closure of a user's account (Baumer et al., 2013). Therefore, to create a healthy and sustainable online communication environment, it is essential to understand the regrettable actions on SNS and reasons for such actions to help users avoid them. However, to date, very little research has investigated

posting regret on SNS (Moore & McElroy, 2012; Wang et al., 2011). This study will try to fill this void by examining self-disclosure and other factors that may contribute to teenagers' posting regret.

Previous studies about self-disclosure on SNS focus primarily on college students or adult samples. However, college students are no longer the only rampant users for SNS. Teenagers, often neglected in SNS studies, are also migrating to SNS rapidly and their self-disclosure behavior should be considered (Ellison, Vitak, Steinfield, Gray, & Lampe, 2011). As the minimum age requirement on Facebook has been lowered to 13 years old, more than 70% of teens under the age of 17 in the US utilize Facebook (Lenhart, 2015). Additionally, 59% of teens aged between 8 and 17 check their Facebook account twice daily, while only 20% of adults do that (Beasley & Conway, 2011). It is vital to understand teens' disclosure on SNS, due to risky effects on their identity construction without adult surveillance (Ong et al., 2011), vulnerability (Antheunis & Schouten, 2011), naïve behaviors (Liu, Ang, & Lwin, 2013), psychosocial development (Christofides et al., 2012), sexuality, and cyber-bullying (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). It was further found that teenagers are better able to disclose themselves online than offline (Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007), and they tend to disclose information more greatly and frequently than adults do due to a lack of understanding of how to control privacy settings (Christofides et al., 2012). It is thus essential to obtain a critical insight into teens' disclosure on SNS.

This study will use data from a nationally cross-sectional survey with teenagers aged between 12 and 17 to examine teens' self-disclosure and posting regret on SNS. Moreover, we will go further to examine how demographics, SNS use, different types of "friends", trust, and privacy control on SNS relate to teens' self-disclosure and regret of posting on SNS.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-disclosure on SNS

The concept of self-disclosure originates from research in social psychology and refers to information which a person voluntarily reveals to other people (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Ignatius & Kokkonen, 2007). Self-disclosure has been defined as verbal and non-verbal communication exposing information about individuals (Cozby, 1973; Wheeless, 1976). SNS can be a natural vehicle for self-disclosure as it allows users to share information with others instantaneously and conveniently (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014; Walther, 2007). For instance, as Facebook's mission statement says, the mission of Facebook is to "make the world more open and connected" (Facebook.com, 2014). People are required to reveal their names and valid email addresses when registering for a new account. The status box on the top of the interface always asks "What's on your mind", encouraging users to share their experiences or thoughts. When people update status, or upload photos, videos or other self-created content, Facebook will notify their "friends" simultaneously through Newsfeeds.

A majority of the studies pertaining to disclosure on SNS primarily focuses on college students and adult population (Forest & Wood, 2012; Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov, 2012; Waters & Ackerman, 2011). Those studies found most of SNS users revealed their real names, pictures, relationship status, birthday, and personal interest on SNS (Taraszow et al., 2010; Tufekci, 2008). Compared with adults, teenagers are considered as having lower level of online privacy concern (Feng & Xie, 2014; Lenhart & Madden, 2007) and higher level of willingness to disclose private information on SNS. Research comparing teenagers' self-disclosure and applications of privacy settings on SNS with adults' demonstrates that teens reveal more information and use fewer applications of

privacy settings than adults do, allowing a broader user access to their SNS data (Christofides et al., 2012; Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck, & Heirman, 2012). Hence, research on teenagers' self-disclosure on SNS is imperative and of particular interest.

2.2. Regret of posting on SNS

Regret is defined as a negative, cognitively based emotion that people experience when they realize or imagine that the present situation would have been better had they acted differently (Zeelenberg, 1999). Consequently, the experience of regret is considered as costs in the decision-making process (Janis & Mann, 1977). To date, very little attention has been paid to regret of posting on social media (Sleeper et al., 2013). Nonetheless, regret of posting on SNS may lead to unhealthy online communication behavior such as deleting photos and comments, posting fake information or even quitting SNS (Das & Kramer, 2013; Smith, 2010).

Wang and his colleagues (Wang et al., 2011) revealed that Facebook users' regrets revolved around sensitive topics, content with strong sentiment, lies, and personal secrets. The possible causes of why people post regrettable content on SNS included that they do not think about the consequences of posts, they are in a high emotion when posting, their postings are seen by unintended audiences, or they do not foresee how their posts will be perceived by intended audiences. Moore and McElroy (2012) examined the influence of personalities on SNS posting regret, and found that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability positively predict regret, while extraversion is negative related with regret. However, to our knowledge, no studies document to what extent teenagers vary in their regret over SNS activities and what factors contribute to such regret. This study will try to fill this gap in the literature.

2.3. Predicting self-disclosure and regret of posting on SNS

2.3.1. Demographics

Gender and age turned to be two most important demographic factors in predicting self-disclosure on SNS. Male adult Facebook users are more likely to disclose personal information, especially contact information publicly than females do (Brandtzæg, Lüders, & Skjetne, 2010; Taraszow et al., 2010) because while females are more concerned with safety threat associated with online disclosure, males are more inclined to meet with new people and get involved in romantic relationships through SNS (Tufekci, 2008). Earlier report also shows similar gender difference in self-disclosure among teenagers (Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

In terms of age, research has different findings within adult group and teen group. Though adults tend to have higher level of privacy concerns and disclose less information as they age (Nosko, Wood, & Molema, 2010), older teens reveal more information including photos, telephone numbers, school names, and home address on SNS than younger teens do (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2010). Walrave et al. (2012) explained that teenager was a special life development stage and self-disclosure on SNS could help older teens explore and develop their identities by clarifying their images. It may also be because younger teen SNS users have technical difficulty with sharing information on SNS (Brandtzæg et al., 2010).

H1a. Male teens will disclose more information on SNS than females do.

H1b. Older teens will disclose more information on SNS than younger teens do.