



Privacy, trust and control: Which relationships with online self-disclosure?



Stefano Taddei*, Bastianina Contena

Department of Psychology, University of Florence, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 16 January 2013

Keywords:

Online self-disclosure
Trust
Privacy concern
Online social network

ABSTRACT

A number of studies have examined the relationship between privacy concerns, perceived control over information, trust and online self-disclosure, highlighting different points of view to understand this connection. This paper intends to compare these different models of explanation for self-disclosure behaviors in online social networks. Three different hypotheses are verified, using mediation and moderation analyses. The results allow underling the effect of the interaction between privacy concerns and trust on online self-disclosure, along with the absence of a direct influence of privacy concerns on disclosure itself. The results suggest practical implications for online social network providers, most of all with regard to privacy policies in online environments.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Online self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is the process of communication about the self to other persons (Wheless & Grotz, 1976). Originally studied in a natural context by Jourard (1964), self-disclosure is characterized by breadth and depth; breadth refers to the amount of information revealed and depth to the degree of intimacy in the act of disclosing information. The first dimension is given by the frequency and duration of the disclosing act and the second by a person's intent, honesty and accuracy. Disclosure of information about oneself is related to well-being, relationship maintenance and intimacy creation, psychotherapeutic processes and therapeutic alliance. In the last few decades, it has become a central phenomenon even for the studies of computer-mediate communication (CMC), particularly for researches about the formation and maintenance of relationships, and the management of privacy and trust in the online environment with a particular attention to interactions in online social networks (for a review of literature, see Joinson & Paine, 2007).

In fact, activities on the Internet require a high amount of disclosure for several reasons; Tidwell and Walther (2002) underlined that online self-disclosure serves to reduce the uncertainty of interactions, and other authors (Galegher, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1998) highlighted its role in legitimating the access to a person in an on-

line group. Moreover, many sites require disclosure of necessary information to purchase objects or services and to record users' accounts (Metzger, 2004, 2006).

Nevertheless, the birth of online social networks (OSNs) has increased the necessity for online disclosure. In OSNs, people exchange information and reveal data about themselves, and these online environments are organized to elicit the disclosure of information that is related to many positive aspects such as the opportunity to maintain relationships with absent friends, establish new friendships, and find support and information (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). But some risks are associated with the use of these environments. In fact, revealing and obtaining personal information on the Web is correlated with legal issues such as defamation, criminal law, harassment, sexual predation, intellectual property rights, and many others (de Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson, & Phillips, 2011). The Federal Communication Commission, (2009) identified many risks related to OSN use; in particular, for teenagers and young girls and men, the most important risk is exposure to inappropriate content, fraud and scams and privacy impairment. Psychological studies have attempted to investigate the psychological aspects related to online disclosure behaviors, bearing in mind that in the online context the same definition of self-disclosure can change.

On the Web, in fact, self-disclosure refers not only to the amount of information that an Internet user decides to reveal to others (Joinson & Paine, 2007), but also to the ease with which a user can be identified as a real person (Gandey, 2000), and in fact one relevant aspect of online interaction is the opportunity to remain anonymous. Using the Social Identity model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Spears, Lea, Corneliusen, Postmes, & Harr, 2002), some authors (Coffey &

* Corresponding author. Address: Dipartimento di Psicologia Via di San Salvi, 12, Padiglione 26, 50135 Firenze, Italy. Tel.: +39 055 2055861; fax: +39 055 6236047.

E-mail addresses: stefano.taddei@psico.unifi.it (S. Taddei), bastianina.contena@unifi.it (B. Contena).

Woolworth, 2004) have underlined the central role of anonymity which can elicit discrimination and inappropriate behaviors, and even permits people to express unpopular views, obtaining attention for minority groups (McKenna & Bargh, 1998), and increases the degree of self-disclosure in shy people (Brunet & Schmidt, 2007). In particular, as underlined by Papacharissi (2002), Web space is an ideal setting for the self-presentation of individuals: according to Goffman (1959), online environments seem to be like a stage where people can manipulate information, choosing what to disclose and what to hide. On the Web, people can choose to express the characteristics that they recognize as more important for themselves or more suited to the context: for example, on online dating sites people build avatars that represent and emphasize features that they consider relevant for the context (Vasalou & Joinson, 2009). In online environments this ability to choose information and maintain a certain degree of anonymity can increase self-disclosure (Joinson, 2001), reducing privacy concerns (Moon, 2000). However, people explain their unwillingness to disclose personal information in an online context with privacy concerns and worries about their control over information (Metzger, 2004).

If, on the one hand, online environments can elicit self-disclosure thanks to their characteristics which decrease vulnerability (Ben-Ze'ev, 2003), on the other hand the perception of having to reveal certain information can increase privacy concerns and decrease online self-disclosure (Joinson & Paine, 2007), highlighting a direct relationship between privacy concerns and self-disclosure. This seems especially true with regard to OSNs, which represent environments in which self-disclosure is not only an outcome of interactions but a necessary requirement for their use because they consider the interaction between people to be a specific aim of their functioning. On OSNs, users are encouraged to post photos and videos and to share personal information about interests, hobbies, sexual preferences, religious beliefs and social attitudes (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, & Swafford, 2011), in line with the principle that the presence of other users who disclose information could increase the reciprocity of the process, fostering self-disclosure itself. However, this openness of self implies a major threat to privacy, and to understand this paradoxical relationship other aspects, like trust and control, seem relevant.

1.2. Privacy, trust and control: between mediation and moderation

Privacy is defined as a process of anonymity preservation and so it is strongly connected with control over information about the self. In online environments, people who perceive higher threats to privacy are less disposed to disclosing information about the self because they perceive themselves as less able to control information and protect themselves too. Contrarily, when people perceive lower privacy risks and higher control, such as when privacy policies are clearly exposed, they disclose more personal information (Weber, 2009). A chain of relationships has been described in which the perception of control influences the general trust, and the general trust reduces the perception of privacy risk (Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, & Hildebrand, 2010). This last dimension determines self-disclosure behaviors (Fig. 1). In this model, trust – defined as the belief that legal structure, providers' characteristics and OSN members' characteristics inhibit opportunistic and

dangerous behaviors because of their competence, benevolence and integrity (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002; 2000) – is a necessary condition for disclosing information, but its influence on self-disclosure is only indirect (Zimmer, Arsal, Al-Marzouq, & Grover, 2010).

With regard to the relationship between trust and self-disclosure, other authors (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Frye & Dornisch, 2010; Mesch, 2012) underline instead that trust influences self-disclosure directly: users with a high level of trust are more comfortable with intimate topics and so they disclose more personal information; moreover, it could be the construct of privacy to influence trust and not vice versa. Even regarding the relationships between control over information and privacy risk, some authors describe a different direction of influence: Olivero and Lunt (2004) underline that a lower level of privacy concern increases the perception of control over information and consequently of trust, producing a higher amount of online self-disclosure. From this point of view, it is possible to identify an effect of privacy concerns on control and a direct effect of control on trust, which seems to influence online self-disclosure, as illustrated in Fig. 2.

The different results of the varying studies allow the hypothesis of a complex role for privacy risks that could moderate the relationship between trust and self-disclosure. As pointed out by Joinson, Reips, Buchanan, and Paine Schofield (2010), the nature of the relationships between privacy, trust and online disclosure behaviors is problematic and it makes an interaction between privacy and trusting in their action on self-disclosure possible. Some authors (Mothersbaugh, Foxx, Beatty, & Wang, 2012) have in fact emphasized that worries about privacy do not have an overall effect on disclosure but act only on the most sensitive information when trust is low, interacting with this variable, suggesting a moderation role for privacy concerns that could interact with trust to determine online self-disclosure (Fig. 3).

1.3. Aims

In online environments, not only self-disclosure, but many variables that influence it, appear to be difficult to define. If online self-disclosure includes the opportunity to be identified as a real person, privacy refers to the maintenance of anonymity, control to the ability to manage information, and trust involves the belief that others could be benevolent, honest and competent, the relationships between all these components seem to be very complex and, as underlined by Joinson et al. (2010), not yet established indisputably. As mentioned in Section 1.2, it is possible to point out three different points of view about the relationship between control, trust, privacy concerns and online self-disclosure: on the one hand (a) the perception of privacy concerns could be determined by trust and the worries about privacy could directly influence the amount of self-disclosure behaviors; on the other (b) privacy concerns could directly influence control, which could determine the degree of trust, which to determine the online self-disclosure; and (c) privacy concerns could be unable to predict self-disclosure behaviors in the online environment, unlike trust. In this way, privacy concerns should be a moderating factor in the relationship between perceived control, trust and online self-disclosure.

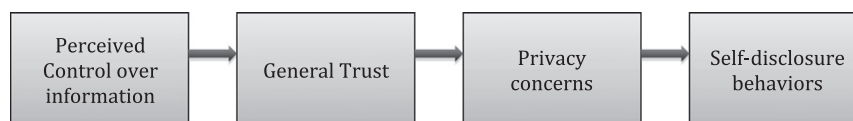


Fig. 1. Mediation role of privacy concerns in relationship between general trust and online self disclosure.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات