

## **EXPOSITION OF PRIVACY IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS: AN ASSESSMENT ON THE BASIS OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER USERS**

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### **Abstract**

With developing new communication technologies, concept of socialization has been changing in terms of content. Social media platforms have become one of the most important tools of peoples' daily lives. This telescopic situation has revealed a security problem and vanished privacy in global context. Globally as Federal Trade Commission and International Center for Watching Violation of Rights are working on enhancing cyber security. When assessing the problem from the individual perspective, there is a clear contradiction between the need of security and privacy of users and exposing privacy on social media. (Wenger et al., 2009) In other words the facts of security and privacy are ignored by people who demand it. Exposing oneself makes individual strong as a social subject and enhancing the effort of transforming their identities to a popular Meta. The aim of this study is to display people who need respect to privacy and security presenting their privacy life on purpose at social media platforms. This paper suggests that people need to have their own security about privacy on social media first. (Ulaşanoğlu et al., 2010) 2 focus group discussions, each comprising of seven male and female students between 18-25 years at Maltepe University who have accounts both at Facebook and Twitter will be conducted for this study. In this context the study reaches the relational and causative results of sample group's sharing their private areas on ground of privacy and security. As a result it gets a perspective for describe the conscious internet user.

**Key Words:** *Privacy, Facebook, Twitter.*

**JEL Classification:** M31

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Developments in new communication technology as well as globalization have effected community construction. However, usage of computer and internet has become a necessity and a main need in people's daily life. Through this transformation, easy access to unlimited information makes social media concept stronger. Now, social media is the best example for people who are able to get involved in generating and changing content for their own wish. On the other hand, personal security and privacy are crucial in social media platform. Privacy which has been transformed during the time of modernity to postmodernity is a universal right for each individual. Authorities like Federal Trade Commission and International Center for Watching Violation of Rights refer to sharing information in virtual platform and security. This study purposes to find out why people share information about their own life in Facebook and Twitter while social media is not secure enough. Although privacy and security issues depend on cultures of each country, to elicit new point of views were purposed to find out in this paper. Based on the aim of this research paper, focus group has been chosen as a qualitative method which has the potential of providing a methodology of exploration which allows participants to express their concerns within a context that is useful to the scientific community (Byers and Wilcox et al., 1991). The sample for the focus group includes seven male and seven female students between the ages of 18-25 from Maltepe University. They have been chosen based on the criteria of having an account on both Facebook and Twitter. Results of the data analysis showed that participants have no conscious about security and privacy concerns on social media.

## **2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING**

Social media is the media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the internet, such as blogs, images, video and more, as well as online tools and platforms that allow internet users to collaborate on content, share insights and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure (Chung and Austria et al, 2010). Spreading the usage of new communication technologies all over the world is the main feature of Information community.

In recent years, new communication environments have been mentioned very frequently. They are called "new media". This concept emerged on 1970's and used in social psychological, economic and cultural studies. But it has changed into different concept with developing internet and computer technologies (Dilmen, 2007). New media not only enables communication systems to develop

and to produce new systems, but also allows users/consumers to control and change the content. Thanks to all those transformation of communication technology, limitation of psychical conditions has been disappearing.

Today, digital media are dominating the world. Facebook currently boasts over 400 million users and continues to grow at an astounding rate (Crunchbase, 2009). Twitter also exploded in 2009 and attracts "more than seven million unique visitors" (Armano, 2009). What is even more impressive is that Twitter reached its 10 billionth tweet on March 4, 2010, doubling the amount of tweets in just four months (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington and Kizer, 2010). There are two main approaches about Internet Communication technologies:

(1) Liberal Approach: According to this approach, development and progress of community can only be possible with information.

(2) Critical Approach: On the contrary of liberal one, critical approach suggests that technology will be move ahead and will be more important than people.

Although those approaches advocate different views about communication technology, it is crucial that internet destroys physical borders between people. Thus a new cultural environment comes into life and all common platforms are affected by that environment. Internet enables users to access all kinds of information easily, to make people's spare time more enjoyable and even allows people to shop online (Balci and Ayhan, 2007). Internet is seen as a third medium makes all people feel together (White Paper, 2007). According to Poster (1997), internet is an environment for community. That environment is just a tool to create new relation types between people. So it is clear that internet can be regarded as a new medium for people to communicate (Timisi, 2003). Social media also gives a huge opportunity to people to share their videos, photographs and other contents. Mayfield suggests that (2010) social media encourages users to generate a community in virtual world. With emergence of internet and spread usage of this environment, individuals as a web based services are able to create profile for common platforms, share their own lists and give permission to see connection of their friends with other people (Çetin, 2009). All these probabilities may depend on each web site's rules (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Statistics about social media in 2009 is below; (Kahraman, 2009)

1. People have been more interested social media platforms than porn sites in 2009.

2. The growth rate of Twitter is %1.500.

3. %66 percent of people on earth visits social media platforms.
4. One hundred million Video has been watching on YouTube and also videos have been uploading in a day
5. Eight billion minutes have been spending on Facebook and 285 million contents have been sharing by people in a day.
6. Facebook as a social media platform has more than 350 million user.
8. From the first time Twitter was been released, 6.7 billion tweet has been sent.
9. The rate of using social networks users is %68.
10. Turkey is one of the most active country using Facebook (There are more than 14 million Facebook users in Turkey).
11. Most popular country is Turkey in Frenndfeed.
12. People in Turkey spend most of their time on Internet.

### **3. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND PRIVACY CONCERN**

People live in a web community where production and consumption are based on information and global speed is reflected all aspects of daily life. In this interactive content, people communicate each other both on physical and virtual environments. Social Web theory which emerged on 1930's is based on group dynamics explains relations between users of Web (Vural and Bat et al, 2010). According to this theory construction of social web is more important than users.

Social networking is the ultimate manifestation of user generated content, and as such, holds more potential for growth than any other form of content on the Web today (IAB, 2008). User generated content and social networks have been transforming the media ecosystem. Today's model is collaborative, collective, customized and shared. It's a world, in which the consumer is the creator. Social networks enables user to share information with other users and spreading that information between other member (Vural and Bat, 2010). Besides this definition Downes (2005) suggests that social networks are combination of personal connects which are brought together by relations set.

Social networks allow people to share their personal information such as photographs, videos and even where they have been locally. Users by him/her are able to limit this sharing. For an instance, a user can block other users not to see his/her own profile. At this point, privacy issue becomes an important factor for a user in social media. Content sharing by a user is very personal and user should

have a control on it.

As it is known, privacy or private space means a universal and personal right that people can decide their relations and communication style on their own wish. In other words, people should have a control on sharing their life (Yüksel, 2003). Privacy became an important factor with modernism. Before modernism, individual has not his/her own privacy. Then it became a personal right with rules. This concept emerged from different kinds of needs. Leaving alone and desire to being an individual is one of the reasons for privacy. Second reason is to have relationship with friends freely without a control and pressure of other people. Last reason is about preferring to be in public life without any of pressure (Yüksel et al, 2003).

Most of practitioners indicate some threats about privacy. Governments are one of the threats for privacy in terms of telephone tapping and hidden records. Although governments are the first coming to mind, corporations are also one of the big threats for individual privacy. In conjunction with developments in communication technology, violating individual privacy has been occurring easily. Therefore, legal arrangement is needed for invasion towards individual privacy in cyberspace age. (Yüksel, 2003:183)

Privacy in social space is also brought forward by international organizations. Particularly, sharing personal information in cyberspace raised an issue about violation of private space in virtual.

There are three main threats against privacy;

- (1) Self-revelation
- (2) Curiosity
- (3) Surveillance

In Self-revelation, people reveal themselves on their own. It is seen that privacy not always threatened by other people. In other words, privacy can be violated. Curiosity can be regarded as a universal tendency for mankind. Although it depends on cultural and geographical differences, with the help of new communication technology, privacy can be violated easily. With surveillance people's privacy can be captured and have a control and limit on them (Yüksel et al, 2003).

In recent years, International Commissions has been trying to take attention of people about privacy issues on social media. They concern caused controversies

about people's sharing on social media platforms can be a violation on virtual environments. International Center for Watching Violation of Rights presented a report about social networking sites investigation and suggested that it is inevitable to arrange some regulations about social media usage and have a critical view about those networks. The same report also specifies that social networks trigger moral values to be lost and cause basic security problems and so affect personal relations negatively (UHIM, 2011). Federal Trade Commission in its 2010 report about privacy in social media, expressed that corporations should take responsibility about protection of users' information. According to the report of FTC consumers live in a world where information about their purchasing behavior, online browsing habits, and other online and offline activity is collected, analyzed, combined, used, and shared, often instantaneously and invisibly. On the other hand some consumers are troubled by the collection and sharing of their information. Others have no idea that any of this information collection and sharing is taking place. And some consumers – some teens for example – may be aware of the sharing that takes place, but may not appreciate the risks it poses. (FTC, 2011:5-6)

#### **4. RESEARCH AND FINDINGS**

The research was conducted with users who have both Facebook and Twitter account. Due to Facebook and Twitter which are most popular social sharing platforms in the world are chosen for this study. As it is known that Facebook was designed as a particular network for Harvard University students in 2004. After 2005 it was speeded all over the world. Twitter which is a micro blog was developed by Jack Dorsey in 2006 and regarded one of the most popular social networks today. Especially it was used effectively in USA by President Barack Obama in 2008 elections. Regarding to social media platforms' intensively affecting to daily life of people, focus group discussions have been conducted with 7 female and 7 male users who have accounts at Facebook and Twitter. This paper aims that reveal those users' personal opinions and manners about privacy and confidentiality. It was made an announcement to students who have account on these platforms at Maltepe University Communication Collage. It was determined that 7 female and 7 male users are willing to participate to focus group discussion. There were two different focus groups and each of them took about 30 – 40 minutes. and was recorded in a digital audio format. Firstly, all of the male participants expressed that they did not read privacy policy text before opening an account at Facebook and Twitter. They have no need to read privacy policy, because they think that they never share any private information. About privacy

fact in virtual environment, 5 of the male participants qualified it as 'personal financial information'. So according to the 5 participants, excluding financial information, every information can be shared. Privacy means 'private life' according to 2 other participants. They stated that they did not disclose anything about their private life. In terms of confidentiality, 3 of the participants pointed out that this matter was an important fact only for women. Also they added that confidentiality was not significant event. Other 4 users mentioned that confidentiality means 'family'. They also added that never share any information or content about their families. According to them, that kind of information which belongs to the immediate family must not share. 6 of the users set forth that have no information about Facebook accounts could be erased or not. Other 1 participant expressed that he heard from entourage that Facebook accounts are not be able to erase. It was determined what are the contents of sharing were personal addresses, education information, dates of births, genders, domain knowledge, political and religious views, personal photos, personal and general videos, instant messages and location information. 4 of the participants stated that Facebook and Twitter are unique world and they want to be part of them about the reasons of sharing the instant messages and location information. Accordingly, they want to present an opinion in terms of order of the day of media. They also added that proving their identities by the contents just like the other people who are in their friends' list. In terms of the sharing process, the participants indicated that sharing photos and location information shows their socio-economic status, due to being more attentive to share those kinds of contents. The reasons of the other 3 participants' sharing that their doings, locations and how their daily life is are concerned by their friends and also they pay attention that the contents have humorous extend. Besides they feel more popular when the contents are taken 'likes' and 'comments' a lot by the others.

The open ended questions which had directed to the male participants were said over to women participants as seriatim. Accordingly, 2 of the female participants said that they read privacy policy of Facebook and Twitter. Other 5 participants expressed that dart a glance at the policies but had thought that's a too long text. Because of this, they could not read the all of it. All of the female participants have same opinion about the policy. According to them, the privacy and confidentiality do not to cause any dangerous circumstance. They also emphasized that if there is any dangerous situation about policy, Facebook and Twitter cannot be popular all over the world.

2 participants who read the policies have information about how is an account be able to deactivated and deleted but that is not important to them. It is observed that the other 5 participants have no idea about the topic. All of the female users described the information which should be confidential that as 'personal financial information' just like the 5 participants in the male group. Also they told that they have never done online shopping or have never shared any financial information in virtual environment with any reason. All of the female participants expressed that the event of confidentiality evoked to them kind of 'personal history', 'sex' and 'nakedness' means and they emphasized that have never shared any content to violate it. 4 of the female participants share instant message, photo, video, personal information and use location information application, in spite of that other 3 participants do not share anything except instant messages, location information, personal photo, living place and interests. About the reasons of sharing contents 5 of them indicated that their lifestyles are unique and they want to share the contents which describe that uniqueness. Besides they added that this sharing gives happiness to them. Accordingly their smallest act, change or someone' comment at Facebook and Twitter that create a new order of the day and this operation makes feel them important. In spite of this other 2 women users mentioned that the shared contents make a sensation in the opposite sex and a virtual attention can be return to a real relationship. They also added that there are so many examples and stories just like that and this probability adds some fun and meaning to their daily lives.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Today, developments in the new technologies and social media are indispensable parts of the daily life. Social sharing platforms are one of the alternative culverts where a person can position him/herself. Recently it has been mentioned that the large majority of the world population has one or more than one membership at social sharing platforms, notably Facebook and Twitter. Kinds of privacy and confidentiality events have come up conjunction with the reasons of proliferation of usage the internet, usage of the social media become a world trend and there has not been is any consciousness about the contents of shared.

According to the results of this study, it has come up that a desire to make a sensation at the other users with the contents of shared, self-positioning effort in the virtual environments which have been done by the participants. Having a hidden feelings of confidence about the universal popularity brands of Facebook and Twitter and have no worry about the privacy and confidentiality are one of the



data which has been obtained. Thus it is possible to say that the users have not constituted any foresight or concern about how the contents can effect to their personal confidentialities which are shared by themselves in the virtual environment.

Also it is earthly to express that the general system remains incapable to generate the conscious internet user much as the contents' qualification and quantity belong to users' initiative and privacy policies are shared by law. Creating a consciousness related how internet and social nets can be used effectively will be the competence of the social nets just like Facebook and Twitter as universal brands.

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