Chapter 9

Is Somebody Spying on Us? Social Media Users’ Privacy Awareness

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ABSTRACT

One of the concepts that have a strong and dominant effect in transforming the culture, individual, and society of social media has been privacy. Everything that belongs to our domestic space in modern times, which should not be known/seen by others, is made public by ourselves in the postmodern age with new media tools. In social networks focusing on vision and surveillance, privacy is restricted, eliminated, or stretched by individuals themselves for the creation of ideal profiles. The privacy settings that a person thinks are under his control seriously affect the way he uses social media. This chapter will try to determine which subject/situation/images are perceived as intimate among university students, and how the boundaries of social media and privacy are drawn and transformed. The study is based on the assumption that the level of privacy awareness and the level of knowledge control influence the quality and frequency of social media sharing of users.

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INTRODUCTION

According to social-media usage statistics released in 2018, there are 51 millions of active social media users in Turkey (https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com/). Such a ubiquitous usage of social media has emerged as an inevitable result of the ease/cheapness of tools that make one’s appearance on these domains comfortable as well as the increasing domination of attitudes such as self-formation, visibility, watching/being watched by others. Social media and tools that can connect us with such domains have almost become our bodily organs with a similar familiarity and practicality of usage in real life. Aside from this fun aspect social media also offers another salient feature by allowing us to be watched by other third parties– which we may volunteer at times - Hence the aim of this study is to identify which issues/cases/images are considered private among university students and how the boundaries of privacy are drawn and transformed by social media. It is thus another objective of this study to exhibit whether or not sampling group had anxiety for privacy when using social networks and to detect if a correlation existed between anxiety for privacy and social-media usage. Via conducting random sampling technique in this study, a questionnaire was administered among Faculty of Communication students in Ege University. This study is based on the assumption that privacy awareness and information control level influenced frequency of users’ social media sharing and quality of the news they share.

RELEVANT LITERATURE ON PRIVACY CONCEPT AND ITS RELATION WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

Privacy is a concept that varies from person to person and in which individuals are not to specify its borders. Rather it is determined by socio-cultural sphere as well. As a result of being a domain in which all human perceptions on privacy intersect with the notion of privacy originating from the culture of one’s member society, it is viable to argue that there is a corresponding variety and subjectivity in privacy concept equal to the number of members in a community. Yüksel, while emphasizing this ambiguity, stated that “it is remarkably difficult to define privacy and set its boundaries” (Yüksel, 2003, p. 78). Actions that we hide from others, or we want others not to view but we practice in our private life people we know, issues and information can engulf our privacy circle. That being the case it seems unviable to reach a consensus on this concept. Nevertheless Şener (2013) reported that there are certain common grounds and he continued such;

What constitutes privacy? The answer to this question may differ with respect to the variables such person, gender, age, social class, member culture, social environment, social status hence it seems impossible to provide only one definition of privacy. Still there are also certain consensus points; in societies that experienced modernity human body, specific organs in body, sexuality, family, romantic relations, home and inner-home objects, many goods that we personalize and would rather hide from others or reveal to others in a controlled way may constitute the framework for privacy.

This concept is the derivative of Arabic word ‘haram’ (unlawful) and refers to “sincere, intimate, hidden from others, concealed, secret” (Göle, 1992, p. 128, Bağlı, 2011, p. 184). From all of these definitions it is viable to argue that privacy decisively emerges while contacting and communicating with the