

AN EVALUATION OF FACEBOOK USERS' BLOCKING TENDENCIES REGARDING THEIR PRIVACY AND SECRECY SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The need for communication seems to be growing even more as we are exploiting more and more of 'smart' communication tools available. Nowadays, communication has been renaming itself through various channels and formats. One of them is mobile communication. It is a communication network that runs without cable or wire connection between two entities. The other one is social media that is the collective of online communications channels. It involves community-based input, interaction; content-sharing and collaboration that enable us to stay connected to each other across global networks. With today's millions of users, Facebook can be given as an example to such networking sites. This study aims at evaluating Facebook users' blocking tendencies in light of their awareness of privacy and secrecy settings on Facebook. The sample of the study is comprised of a group of approximately 400 participants who were randomly selected. The questionnaire used in the research consists of two parts. The first part is intended to collect information related to participants' demographic features. The second part is related to the questions aiming at finding out what strategies Facebook users adopted in blocking others as a self-preservation reaction as far as restrictions and permissions allowed by their account settings are concerned. Assessed through a statistical instrument, overall data from the study shows that Facebook users do not show indifference to their privacy and secrecy configurations. They rather take some actions about it. Among their demographic characteristics, a significant relationship between age and blocking behaviour and between gender and blocking behaviour was found.

Keywords: social networking, social media, surveillance, Facebook, privacy, secrecy

Facebook Kullanıcılarının Güvenlik ve Gizlilik Ayarları Kapsamında Engelleme Eğilimlerinin Ölçümü

ÖZET

Mevcut 'akıllı' iletişim teknolojilerini daha fazla kullandıkça iletişime duyulan ihtiyaç gittikçe daha çok artıyor gibi görünmektedir. Bugün, iletişim kendisini çeşitli kanal ve formatlar aracılığı ile tekrar isimlendirmektedir. Bunlardan bir tanesi mobil iletişimidir. Mobil iletişim, iki birim arasında kablosuz veya telsiz bağlantı üzerinden çalışan bir iletişim ağıdır. Diğeri ise çevrimiçi kanalların bütünüdür.

tanımlayan sosyal medyadır. Sosyal medya, bizi küresel ağlar üzerinde birbirimize bağlayan toplum temelli veri girdileri, etkileşim, içerik paylaşımı ve işbirliğini kapsamaktadır. aracılığı bizi birbirimize bağladığı bir kanaldır. Bugün milyonlarca kullanıcı ile Facebook bu tüe ağlara bir örnek olarak verilebilir.. Bu çalışma Facebook kullanıcılarının Facebook üzerindeki güvenlik ve gizlilik ayarları farkındalıkları ışığında engelleme eğilimlerini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini rastlantısal olarak seçilmiş yaklaşık 400 katılımcı oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada kullanılan anket iki bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölüm Facebook kullanıcısı olan katılımcıların demografik özelliklerine yönelik sorular içermektedir. İkinci bölüm katılımcıların Facebook kullanıcı olarak hesap ayarları içerisinde kendilerine tanınan izinler ve sınırlandırmalar bağlamında kendilerini koruma tepkisi olarak başkalarını engelleme adına ne tür stratejiler benimsediğine yönelik sorular içermektedir. İstatistiksel bir araç kullanılarak değerlendirilen araştırmanın verileri Facebook kullanıcıları gizlilik ve güvenlik ayarları konusunda kayıtsız kalmamaktadırlar. Tam tersi bu konuda eyleme geçmektedirler. Kullanıcıların demografik özellikleri içinde, yaş ile engelleme davranışları arasında ve cinsiyet ile engelleme davranışları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sosyal ağlar, sosyal medya, gözetleme, Facebook, mahremiyet, gizlilik

Introduction

In the highly digitized world, it's easy for anyone to collect information about each other if we are using some form of technology. When we are plugged in, we become more vulnerable and exposed to the virtual world. In fact, the more we put technology as part of your life, the easier it is for others to gather intelligence about us. So, these bring us to the question: Are we trading away our privacy for the sake of a captivating social network? Or is our privacy on social media dead? This makes us recall the issue of surveillance. Nowadays, surveillance is much more concerned with our online presence which is under a big threat. This would also require a closer look at the situation through various studies as people's secrecy and privacy have been a great concern for ages.

Online Surveillance and Privacy

Piirsalu (2012) states that the issues of online privacy have been a problem for the general public for a long time and now it has started to grow even more rapidly due to technology. Sharing services like smart phones easily enable anyone to make content and share it. Through such these services, amount of personal content available online has been increasing rapidly in the last years. From every angle, social media is anathema to privacy. People share ideas, humour, emotions, preferences, prejudices, priorities, and often misguided attempts at profundity. For this reason, social media is not simply a collection of online places that allow private information to escape, but social media sites are organized to draw as much participation and information out of us as possible (Claypoole, 2014).It is a collective mind that leaves tracks of our steps online.

As mentioned in Lace (2005), Lyon defines surveillance as any collection and processing personal data for the purpose of influencing or managing those whose data have collected. Magnet and Gates (2009) state that surveillance practices, in all of their technological forms, are part of cultural rituals of modern societies. According to Lyon (2007), struggles over surveillance frequently refer to the idea of privacy. As definitions of “privacy” vary, even in the West, such that ‘the right to be left alone’ or ‘the ability to control communications about oneself’ may each count.

Finally, Marx in Hier & Greenberg (2007) shows the difference between two forms of surveillance. For him, the new form of surveillance relative to traditional surveillance extends the sense and it has low visibility or it is invisible. Compared to the old one, this form of surveillance is definitely faster and more likely to be involuntary. With new technologies for collecting personal information, today’s surveillance goes beyond the limits of the physical and liberty enhancing limitations of the old.

Facebook and Privacy

Since its inception in 2004, Facebook has gained more than 600 million active users, making it the fastest-growing and biggest social networking site by far. Millions of people log in to it every day, readily updating their statuses and checking out updates by their friends. When it comes to social networking sites like Facebook, privacy issues that are at risk basically remain on two levels. One is on the individual level, publicizing our life on the net, where all our posts and comments get into the open for people whom we may or may not wish them to have access to, doesn’t seem to be ideal. In the broader context, the mysterious data-mining capability of Facebook is a powerful and scary thought, especially when most of us are unaware of the actual extent.

Although Facebook provides us with privacy settings, such that we can configure our account to only allow our friends to view our posts, it’s sufficient to guarantee that our data is only visible to people whom we want to. People can still tag each other in their own photos (before others try to remove them), and that can be seen by their friends or strangers (if they make their profile public). Even if we make it a point to only reveal our posts to our friends on the list, there’s still and many ways for people to gather information about us. For one, they can peek into a mutual friend’s account and see what they have posted. So, our privacy still remains questionable.

Every move we make online leaves cyber footprints that are collected as a vast amount of information and it can be used for giving new insight into all aspects of everyday life. Social psychologist James Pennebaker says: “Facebook is built on what's yours is private” as cited in Jayson (2014). Who is to be blamed for this vast amount of surveillance and tracking of our privacy has received both positive and negative comments.

Related Research

Studies related to online privacy, secrecy and surveillance issues are not limited to some common social networking sites such as Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. The ones that are directly relevant to Facebook and privacy control and settings are also ample in literature on this issue..As a part of social media studies, research background related to Facebook can be started with privacy issues and it can be extended to other similar social media platforms and the role of age and gender in it.

In his study on online privacy, Litt's (2013) findings indicate that during technology-mediated communication on social network sites, not only does traditional privacy factors relate to the technological boundaries people enact, but people's experiences with the mediating technology itself do, too. The results also identify privacy inequalities, in which certain groups are more likely to take advantage of the technology to protect their privacy-this suggests that some individuals' information and reputations may be more at risk than others.

However, Lange (in Siapera, 2012) in his study on social networks on YouTube reports that there are effectively two kinds of networks, those labelled as publicly private where people disclose their personal and technical information by choosing popular tags for their videos to make them accessible by Google searches and those understood as private public networks where people withhold their private information often using aliases or masks to hide their identities in shared videos

O'Brien and Torres (2012) in their study investigate Facebook users' perceptions of online privacy, exploring their awareness of privacy issues and how their behaviour is influenced by this awareness, as well as the role of trust in an online social networking environment. The study reveals over half of Facebook users have a high level of privacy awareness with an element of uncertainty. Privacy concerns are prevalent especially relating to third parties' access to Facebook users' information. This study also shows Facebook users are alert and cautious when using the social networking site. However, Facebook users are not

completely informed or aware of all activities concerning privacy on the social networking site.

Another research by Mohamed and Ahmad (2012) also provides the evidence that users who are concerned with information privacy use the privacy measures in social networking to protect their privacy. It is worthwhile noting that information privacy concern, however, is a weak predictor of privacy measure use. In light of social networking sites, pervasive use and information privacy concern and the issue of gender sheds a new light. The research found that the female group was more concerned about their information privacy than the male group. Thus, female users were more likely to use privacy measures to protect their information privacy. Likewise, those who find it easy to use privacy measures have concerns with information privacy in social networking sites. The result implies that individuals' strong judgment about their ability on protective behaviour has an impact on their information privacy concerns. This in turn, drives them to enable the privacy measures in social networking sites instead of leaving them at default setting. The finding suggests that individuals who are concerned with their information privacy will likely use privacy measures to protect their privacy.

Finally, another study by Chakraborty (2013) states that an elderly Facebook user may share several pieces of information in terms of the attributes of his/her Facebook profile that is visible to the public. Upon the creation of a Facebook profile, some information is shared publicly by default. Some of this information includes photos, education and work related information. The default sharing mode is "public" on Facebook. Therefore, the privacy-preserving action decision made by the older adults would involve actually opting out of the information sharing default.

Method

Based on a field study whose data collection was carried out via questionnaire, the research used a set of related questions applied to a number of participants. Chi-Square Independence Test was used in order to study the relationship among qualitative variables. After the questionnaire data were collected, they were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Research Question

Considered to be one of the most commonly used social working sites, Facebook offers liberties as well as restrictions for its users to choose between. So, "what kind of

reactions do Facebook users take to let others in or leave them out” and “what role do age and gender play in that?” were the questions that formed the basis our hypothesis in this study and answers to these questions were sought through an elaborate assessment of Facebook users’ related tendencies in the process.

The Research

The sample of the study consisted of randomly selected 400 people over 18 years of age in the city of Istanbul between January 2014 and April 2014. Before the application of the questionnaire, each participant was asked for his/her consent. Those who gave their consent were given the questionnaire which they filled in through face-to-face interaction. Overall, 20 participants provided missing or incomplete data. During the application process of our questionnaires, we also encountered 50 people who either froze or deleted their accounts long time ago or never used Facebook. No such data were considered within the scope of this study and not included in it.

Data Collection and Analysis Instrument

Questions in the questionnaire form used in the study and available to all Facebook users were originally transferred from Facebook’s current general settings out of which the ones that are mostly related to privacy and secrecy and blocking were selected. After collecting demographic information (sex, age, education level) about the participants, the questionnaire progressed with further questions directed at users’ blocking tendencies regarding their privacy and secrecy settings on Facebook..

Data Analysis and Findings

Gender and Privacy

Table 1. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Gender” and “Who can send you friend requests?”

Crosstab

			Secrecy		Total
			Friends’ Friends	Everyon e	
Gender	Male	Count	40	122	162

	% of	10,8%	33,0%	43,8%
Total	Count	102	106	208
	% of	27,6%	28,6%	56,2%
Total	Count	142	228	370
	% of	38,4%	61,6%	100,0%
Total	Count	142	228	370
	% of	38,4%	61,6%	100,0%
Total	Count	142	228	370
	% of	38,4%	61,6%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22,827 ^a	1	,000		
Continuity Correction ^b	21,809	1	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	23,394	1	,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				,000	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22,765	1	,000		
N of Valid Cases	370				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 62,17.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “gender” and the question “Who can send you friend requests ?” at (p:0,000). For this choice whose default status is “Everyone”, female users compared to their male counterparts restricted themselves to “ Friends’ friends” option. This means that female participants are not willing to accept “friends’ request from everyone.

Gender and Timeline**Table 2.** Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Gender” and “Who can post on your timeline?”**Crosstab**

			Timeline		Total
			Friends	Only me	
Gender	Male	Count % of Total	124 33,5%	38 10,3%	162 43,8%
	Female	Count % of Total	124 33,5%	84 22,7%	208 56,2%
Total		Count % of Total	248 67,0%	122 33,0%	370 100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,808 ^a	1	,001		
Continuity Correction ^b	11,054	1	,001		
Likelihood Ratio	12,047	1	,001		
Fisher's Exact Test				,001	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11,776	1	,001		
N of Valid Cases	370				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 53,42.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “gender” and the question “Who can post on your timeline?” at (p:0,001). For this choice whose default status is “Friends”, female users compared to their male counterparts chose “Only me” option. This means female participants. This means female participants prefer to restrict their timeline. By doing this, they block possible comments of others on themselves.

Age and Privacy

Table 3. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “ Age and ” and “ Who can send you friend requests ?”

Crosstab

			Privacy		Total
			Friends’ Friends	Everyon e	
Age_mea n	29 under	Count % of Total	64 17,5%	166 45,4%	230 62,8%
	Over 29	Count % of Total	76 20,8%	60 16,4%	136 37,2%
Total		Count % of Total	140 38,3%	226 61,7%	366 100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28,482 ^a	1	,000		
Continuity Correction ^b	27,307	1	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	28,337	1	,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				,000	,000

Linear-by-Linear Association	28,404	1	,000		
N of Valid Cases	366				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 52,02.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

In the questionnaire, age mean was found 29. Thus, participants were categorised as over and under 29 and that was included in the analysis as “age variant”

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “ who can send you friend requests” at (p:0,000).). As Compared to the participants who are 29 and under, it was found that those who are over 29 restricted themselves to “friends’ friends” option more.

Age and Timeline

Table 4. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “ Age ” and “ Who can post on your timeline ?”

Crosstab

			Timeline		Total
			Friends	Only me	
Age mean 29 and under	Count		174	56	230
	% of Total		47,5%	15,3%	62,8%
Over 29	Count		72	64	136
	% of Total		19,7%	17,5%	37,2%
Total	Count		246	120	366
	% of Total		67,2%	32,8%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)

Pearson Chi-Square	20,003 ^a	1	,000		
Continuity Correction ^b	18,986	1	,000		
Likelihood Ratio	19,715	1	,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				,000	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19,949	1	,000		
N of Valid Cases	366				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 44,59.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “who can post on your timeline?” at (p:0,000). Compared to the participants over 29, participants at 29 of age and under opted more for “Friends”. Participants over 29 chose “Only Me” option, which shows that they prefer to limit themselves about their posting on their timeline.

Age and Blocking

Table 5. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Age category” and “ Did you prepare restricted list?”

Crosstab

			Blocking		Total
			No	Yes	
Age mean 29 and under	Count		62	166	228
	% of Total		16,8%	45,1%	62,0%
Over 29	Count		60	80	140
	% of Total		16,3%	21,7%	38,0%
Total	Count		122	246	368
	% of Total		33,2%	66,8%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9,604 ^a	1	,002		
Continuity Correction ^b	8,910	1	,003		
Likelihood Ratio	9,494	1	,002		
Fisher's Exact Test				,003	,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	9,577	1	,002		
N of Valid Cases	368				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 46,41.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “Did you prepare a restricted list?” at (p:0,002). Compared to the participant over 29, participants at 29 of age and under opted more for “Yes” to the question “Did you prepare a restricted list?”

Table 6. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Age category” and “ Did you prepare block app invites list?”

Crosstab

			Blocking		Total
			No	Yes	
Age mean 29 under	Count		68	160	228
	% of		18,5%	43,5%	62,0%
	Total				
Over 29	Count		64	76	140
	% of		17,4%	20,7%	38,0%
	Total				
Total	Count		132	236	368

Crosstab

		Blocking		Total
		No	Yes	
Age mean 29 and under	Count	68	160	228
	% of Total	18,5%	43,5%	62,0%
Over 29	Count	64	76	140
	% of Total	17,4%	20,7%	38,0%
Total	Count	132	236	368
	% of Total	35,9%	64,1%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9,520 ^a	1	,002		
Continuity Correction ^b	8,842	1	,003		
Likelihood Ratio	9,436	1	,002		
Fisher's Exact Test				,002	,002
Linear-by-Linear Association	9,495	1	,002		
N of Valid Cases	368				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 50, 22.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “did you prepare a block app invites list?” at (p:0,002). Compared to the participant over 29, participants at 29 of age and under opted more for “Yes” to the question “did you prepare a block app invites list?”

Table 7. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Age category” and “Did you prepare block event invitations”**Crosstab**

			Blocking		Total
			No	Yes	
Age mean 29 and under	Count		90	138	228
	% of Total		24,7%	37,9%	62,6%
Over 29	Count		72	64	136
	% of Total		19,8%	17,6%	37,4%
Total	Count		162	202	364
	% of Total		44,5%	55,5%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,256 ^a	1	,012		
Continuity Correction ^b	5,722	1	,017		
Likelihood Ratio	6,248	1	,012		
Fisher's Exact Test				,016	,008
Linear-by-Linear Association	6,239	1	,012		
N of Valid Cases	364				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 60,53.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “block event applications” at (p:0,012). Compared to the participants over 29, participants at 29 of age and under opted more for “Yes” to the question “Did you prepare block event invitations list?” This means

those who chose “Yes” option intended to automatically ignore future event requests from that friend.”

Table 8. Crosstab and Chi-Square Test Results for “Age category” and “ Did you prepare block apps list?”

Crosstab

		Blocking		Total
		No	Yes	
Age mean 29 and Count under	Count	76	152	228
	% of Total	20,9%	41,8%	62,6%
Over 29	Count	60	76	136
	% of Total	16,5%	20,9%	37,4%
Total	Count	136	228	364
	% of Total	37,4%	62,6%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4,233 ^a	1	,040		
Continuity Correction ^b	3,785	1	,052		
Likelihood Ratio	4,205	1	,040		
Fisher's Exact Test				,044	,026

Linear-by-Linear Association	4,222	1	,040		
N of Valid Cases	364				

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 50,81.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

There is a significant relationship between “age category” and “block apps list” at (p:0,040). Compared to the participants over 29, participants at 29 of age and under opted more for “Yes” to the question “Did you prepare block event invitations list?”

Discussion

Also supported by overall data from this study, it can be observed that blocking behaviour related to privacy and secrecy settings management and configuration on Facebook has become more and more important as Facebook itself and its users tend to act more carefully and secure about online personal privacy issues. Users’ demographic profile in this issue presents itself as an essential variable. Mostly focused on gender and age-based concerns of great significance, findings of this study are meant to draw further attention to privacy and secrecy issues on Facebook as one of the most common social networking sites.

Our study shows that gender and age play an important role in Facebook users’ blocking attitudes and tendencies regarding the management and configuration of privacy and secrecy settings on Facebook.

According to this, findings related to male and female Facebook users’ use of blocking on Facebook show that female users are more restrictive in accepting invitations from others or giving authorizations. This finding is also supported a study done by Mohamed and Ahmad (2012) where they found that the female group was more concerned about their information privacy than the male group. Thus, female users are more likely to use privacy measures to protect their information privacy.

Second finding from our study shows that the older Facebook users are, the more restrictive they become about providing access and authorization to their online community members. Referring once again to the study by Chakraborty (2013), an elderly Facebook user may share several pieces of information in terms of the attributes of his/her Facebook profile that is visible to the public in default mode at first. But later it was observed that the privacy-

preserving action decision made by the older adults would involve actually opting out of the information sharing default.

Limitations

This study encountered two basic limitations: The first one is lack of related literature which provides direct and specific reference to the current study. The second is that the study was done with a limited group of participants (400) in the city of Istanbul. Further research in the related field with a bigger sample group is expected to contribute more to theoretical approach and practical experience underlined and observed by this study.

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