

Facebook Related Privacy Issues; Perception and Awareness among Albanian Users

Esmir Demaj, B. A,

Epoka University, Albania,
Email: edemaj@epoka.edu.al

Abstract; Social media has become a must for everyone to stay in touch with the rest of the world. Immense information and data are exchanged through social media every instant. With more than 800 million active users¹ Facebook has turned to be both a basic tool for and a mirror of social interaction, personal identity, and network building among users. However with the increase in usage of Facebook there are certain privacy issues and perceived risks associated with its usage. In this paper is investigated upon the privacy awareness of Albanian users on Facebook by analyzing the perception and behaviors of university students. The author tries to find out the extent Albanian users are concerned about how their identity information may be misused in different ways by third parties and how they understand the potential threats to their privacy. One more thing that was of much interest is whether Albanian users did allow Facebook to share their information with third parties or not. It is intended to figure out the behavior patterns of users affected by their awareness level. For this purpose a survey was conducted to 100 respondents. It is decided to focus more on university students as recent researches reveal that they are the most frequent Facebook users. Several papers and articles related to the topic were analyzed prior to start conducting the data analysis in order to get a clearer idea of the subject matter. The author came through interesting conclusions which are explained more in details in the Findings section.

Key Words: Facebook, Social Media, Privacy issues

1. Introduction

Even though still considered a relatively young technology, we can talk about social networking as a global phenomenon. According to a 2010 study done by PewResearchCenter nearly half of the users who have access to the Internet around the world are members of some online social networking.²

Information sharing in the form of hyperlinks, videos, status updates or photographs, has gained increasing popularity with the advent of online social networking sites.² Especially among young people Web 2.0 technologies are viewed to have revolutionized their ability to communicate and exchange information without the need for face to face meetings (Anderson, 2007).

According to Boyd & Ellison (2007) social network sites are web-based services that allow users to construct a public or quasi-public profile within a system, to have a list of users' friends and provide a view of their list of connections and those made by others within that system. As Shafie et al. (2011) state in their work the popularity of social media networks is due to their conversational tone as knowledge is effectively shared through a process of discussing, storytelling and collaborative editing.

Among social networks Facebook is definitely the most used social networking service by worldwide active users.³ We have come to a point that the life of a young boy/girl is almost unimaginable without having access to Facebook. Unlike other online networks, Acquisti & Gross (2006) state that Facebook offers its members very granular control on the searchability and visibility of their personal information (in particular, by friend or location, by type of user, and by type of data).

Despite the popularity Facebook has gained there are certain aspects of the privacy problem that have been examined by many researchers and still users keep on complaining about. There is a common belief that users shall be given as Hansen (2008) stresses "control of their identity" and so they will have greater control over their own privacy because as Bonneau & Preibusch (2009) admit there is now "strong evidence that the social networking market is failing to provide users with adequate privacy control". Through Facebook, users have the chance to share information and

¹ www.facebook.com/statistics

²Global Publics Embrace Social Networking. PewResearchCenter, 2010, Retrieved from <http://pewglobal.org/2010/12/15/global-publics-embrace-social-networking/>

³ A January 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the most used social networking service

create their own social networks, however not everything is as easy as it seems because there are risks associated with sharing information with many people.

Users must be aware of the consequences that might happen with the information they and their friends reveal on Facebook, so that they make proper decisions about how to share their information.

In this perspective we will have a look at previous related works regarding Facebook privacy issues and after designing our hypotheses we will analyze our own findings through the conducted survey. Finally we will present our own conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Due to the huge and rapid development of social media in a few years of time, many researchers have done many studies on the impact of social media on individuals and society, often by focusing on the main problem social media raises that is privacy risks. Facebook privacy issues have been a subject matter for; Debatin (2009), Acquisti and Gross, (2006), Hansen (2008), Bonneau et al. (2009), Tuunainen et al. (2009), Tow et al. (2010), Liu et al. (2011), Stutzman, (2006), Boyd, (2010), Fletcher, (2010), Dwyer et al. (2008), Hey Tow et al. (2010), Lewis et al. (2008) etc.

Among many other researchers Brooks (2007) states that the real privacy risks arise when users disclose identifiable information about themselves online to people who they do not know well or normally would not trust (Brooks, 2007). Actually we need to have a clear idea about the meaning of privacy when analyzed in this context and as Bergman (2009) define it "Privacy...means the right to self-determination regarding data disclosure...each user should be able to control how much personal information he is willing to give to whom and for what purpose" (Bergman, 2009).

Facebook has been often blamed for its failure to protect users' privacy. In a report of the watchdog organization Privacy International following a six-month investigation into the privacy practices of 23 key Internet based companies Facebook was ranked in the second lowest category for "substantial and comprehensive privacy threats"⁴.

When someone first registers on Facebook, by default Facebook privacy settings will make his entire information viewable by anyone. The new user's profile is also viewable by anyone who is "friends" with him on Facebook. Meanwhile anyone who is not a friend of the new users even though cannot view his profile, by default they can still locate him using a global search function as well as view a version of his profile with only of his photograph, name, and some few other information. Lewis et al. (2008) from Harvard University state that in order to make yourself totally 'hidden' and not searchable to non-friends on Facebook there are several not easy steps that you have to follow in order to limit the visibility of your profile to strangers.

Hoffman (2010) in his work states that privacy is an issue for older people as younger people value the value of connection and transparency. This is supported by the research of Gross & Acquisti (2005) whose findings indicate that users are unconcerned about privacy risks. Furthermore Zuckerberg in his keynote Open Graph speech in 2010 would say "We're building a Web where the default is social" letting us understand that the Facebook guys believe the age of privacy is over. Unfortunately in this way Facebook users expose themselves to various risks like cyber risks, data theft, personal information used by advertisers without consent etc. Furthermore according to Tuunainen et al. (2009) unauthorized access to private information may cause economic losses to the individual (Tuunainen et al., 2009).

As stated in a joint document published by Facebook and the Province of Ontario's Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, "at any point in time and potentially without any notice . . . information from your profile and logs of your online activities may be used and disclosed in unexpected ways that can affect your privacy", showing that even Facebook admits that users' data may be used without any consent: (Cavoukian & Facebook 2007, p. 3).

Acquisti and Gross (2006) show in their study that the majority of Facebook members claim to know about ways to control the visibility and searchability of their profiles, however a significant minority of 30% of students are unaware of those tools and options. They claim that users do not know much about privacy settings and about who can have access to the information they share eventhough surprisingly users have high trust in Facebook and find their information safe. But Boyd & Ellison (2010) state that Facebook has a history of leaving default privacy settings at an open stage assuming the user wants to broadly share information.

Govani & Pashley, (2005) showed Facebook users having low levels of awareness about Facebook's privacy policies. Furthermore, their study showed users' awareness of Facebook's privacy options/policy didn't have a significant effect on the utilization of privacy tools.

⁴ ("A Race to the Bottom," 2007) <https://www.privacyinternational.org/article/race-bottom-privacy-ranking-internet-service-companies>

A study done by Dunlap (2012) shows that even though 65% of respondents of a survey he conducted said they were comfortable with privacy protections on social media sites; they still were concerned about potential privacy risks. Based on the same study 28% percent of them expressed they were relatively uncomfortable about privacy protections. And among those who avoided social media sites, 73% cited privacy concerns as their main reason for not participating.

The findings of Reynolds et al. (2009) reveal that while overall privacy concerns are not reflected in posting behaviour, awareness and familiarity with privacy controls is reflected.

This is supported by Govani and Pashley (2007) too, as it results to them that 84% of participants in their study of Facebook reported that they are aware that they can change their privacy settings, but of those people, only 48% made use of the privacy settings, thus showing a big discrepancy among perception and actual behavior of Facebook users. Regarding this paradox Rauhofer (2008) argues that as long as people agree to give away their information in exchange for very small rewards this shows that they do not put much value on their privacy.

Despite the positive aspects that may be present while disclosing personal information in Facebook, there are potential negative consequences too that have to be taken into account. Peluchette and Karl, (2008) state that Facebook profiles have been used in assessing users' employment candidacy, and that students have been suspended from school and others criminally charged based on the information they posted on Facebook. Muise et al., 2009 observed that information disclosed in Facebook may potentially have a negative impact on romantic relationships of users.

The literature review above identifies the need for more investigation in order to understand why the phenomenon of disclosure of information on Facebook occurs despite knowledge of the potential privacy risks and consequences and ways how to prevent them.

Based on the literature review above, the following four hypotheses for the survey were proposed:

H1: Most Facebook users have limited familiarity with Facebook privacy settings.

H2: There is a negative relationship between Facebook users that are concerned about privacy issues and the degree their Facebook profiles are visible to others.

H3: Females seem to be more familiar with Facebook privacy settings than males.

H4: For most users, even though there is a trend of considering Facebook a waste of time it is an integral part of their everyday life.

H5: Generally speaking Facebook users do not trust that their identity information is well protected by Facebook.

H6: Facebook users aren't fully aware of how does Facebook use or share their information with third parties.

3. Method

As far as the research subject is related to internet the method used to gather the empirical data is a web questionnaire. The paper's research topic has been designed based on a survey analysis method. The survey has been adopted from Plew, M., S. (2011) from Georgia State University and Hoy & Milne (2010). The participants of the questionnaire were randomly recruited from the undergraduate and master studies of Epoka University, additionally the survey was randomly sent to few other people employed at Epoka University. The survey was mostly limited to the university environment because according to Gangadharbatla (2008), a student sample is a relevant and significant group, as college and university students fit the demographics of Social Network Sites (SNS) users. The data analysis is done based on the answers of about 100 participants; this convenience sample was justified because this is a novel research field for which data are not easy to obtain. The questionnaire was prepared by the help of Google Documents and was delivered to the students' Epoka University web mail addresses. All the participants' answers were stored to Google Docs waiting for being processed later on.

The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections and consists of 25 questions in total. Section 1 questions are close-ended demographic questions requiring participants to answer questions like gender, age, city coming from in order to get feedback from different geographical backgrounds and their year in university (freshman, sophomore, senior etc). The Section 2 questions are designed to collect information on Facebook Usage. In Section 3 the survey is focused on Facebook Privacy Issues. This section's questions require participants to give information about their familiarity with Facebook privacy settings and how concerned are they about online privacy, about whether they have read the Facebook privacy policy, if they make changes in privacy settings or not. Several other questions are designed to understand users behavior towards privacy issues like who can see their Facebook profile, what they have revealed in their Facebook accounts, whether they feel that their identity is well-protected by Facebook or not, do they portray themselves in Facebook the same way as in real life or not etc.

4. Findings

4.1 Demographics

The survey was published online up to the moment that the number of random respondents reached (n=100), and then we stopped collecting data and started analyzing the completed questionnaires. All the surveys were valid to be analyzed. Talking about the demographics of the survey respondents 57% were males and 43% females. 48% of respondents belonged to the age range 18-20 years old, 39% belonged to the range 21-23 years old, 9% of respondents declared themselves belonging to the range 24-26 years old, and only 5% were 27 or older. Regarding the city were respondents came from 44% of them came from the most populated area of Albania, from the cities of Tirana and Durres, meanwhile the remaining part came from the rest of Albania. As previously stated the survey was conducted at Epoka University, so we made a question regarding the year of university they were enrolled in and the results show that 31% of respondents are Sophomore (2nd year) students, 22% Juniors (3rd year), 16% Freshmen (1st year) students, 15% Senior (4th year) students, 11% declared themselves as Master students and the remaining 6% declared themselves Other than the mentioned categories. We asked them about the daily time they spend on internet too and a considerable percentage of 41% of the respondents declared that they spend 1-3 hours a day navigating in internet. 23% of them admitted spending up to 5 hours a day in internet, 14% of the respondents would spend more than 5 hours of daily time in internet, meanwhile 18% declare spending less than one hour per day navigating in internet.

4.2 Facebook Usage

Of the respondents the vast majority of 85% have a Facebook account and 52% of those who have a Facebook account declare to have created it during their high school years and 16% created it when they entered university. The very low percentage (3%) of those who declared to have created their Facebook account before entering high school shows that Facebook is a relatively recent trend in Albania.

Table 1. Class/ Facebook Pivot table

University Year?	Do you have a facebook account?		
	No	Yes	Total
Freshman (1st Year)	2	13	15
Sophomore (2nd Year)	3	26	29
Junior (3rd Year)	3	19	22
Senior (4th Year)	4	9	13
Master Student	2	8	10
Other	1	5	6

When we make a Pivot table to see whether there is any relationship between the university class and having or not a Facebook account we can see from table 1 that there is a similar trend in all the classes and we can easily say that the university class does not have anything to do with having or not a Facebook account. Of those who actually have a Facebook account 25% of respondents visit Facebook 3-4 times a day, however there are about 18% of users who don't visit Facebook every day. As the number of daily visits increases up to 9-10 times a day the percentage of visitors decreases up to 4%, but surprisingly after that point there is a sudden increase and 9% of respondents declare to visit Facebook 11 times or more per day. Further analysis on the gathered data give the chance to illustrate the time spent on Facebook daily. The highest percentage of users, about 21% of them spend 30-45 minutes on Facebook. It is interesting to see that about 27% of users dedicate from one hour to two hours a day to Facebook, which is a considerable amount of time.

Table 2. Reasons of Facebook use

Connect with people	72%
Sharing Information/files	33%
Make new friends	15%
Maintain old friends	59%
Because I don't know what else to use my time for	11%

In table 2 are presented the reasons of using Facebook and their respective percentages according to the answers of

respondents. We can notice that 72% of respondents use Facebook to be connected with people. 59% of them use Facebook as a mean of maintaining their relationships with old friends. Interestingly a considerable percentage of users declare to use Facebook as a mean of sharing information with others. This can be best supported by the recent Arab Spring riots in which people used mainly social media in order to share information with each other about the gatherings and events. Only 15% of respondents claim to use Facebook as a mean of making new friends which shows that Albanians still do not trust interactive ways of creating different relationships with others. 11% of users, in addition to other options or maybe for the only reason, say to use Facebook due to the fact they don't know what else to use their time for.

Table 3. Information revealed on Facebook

School Information	84%	Relationship Status	40%
Country	80%	Major Interests	40%
Religion	58%	About Me	38%
Favorite Music	49%	Favorite TV shows	37%
Favorite Movie	48%	Political View	25%
Favorite Books	43%	Address	19%

As seen in table 3, the majority of Facebook users openly reveal their School and Country information at a percentage of 84% and 80% respectively. At the second line interestingly comes Religion at a rate of 58%, which shows that the majority of respondents do not hesitate to make public their religious beliefs. It can be noticed that as the information comes closer to the personal identity the percentage of those making it public falls, surely due to the fact they want to ensure their privacy is protected. Political Views are among the least revealed to others in facebook, which maybe happens as they want to prevent any kind of repercussions that may be raised towards them after stating their political views. This is actually weird because generally speaking Albanians like to state their political belongings, however this result is reasonable too because maybe they fear of keeping record of their political views.

4.3 Facebook Privacy Issues

Table 4. Familiarity with Facebook Privacy Settings

Familiarity with Facebook Privacy Settings	Very Low				Very High		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8%	6%	11%	13%	15%	14%	24%

H1 predicted that most Facebook users had limited familiarity with Facebook privacy settings; therefore, they will likely make little effort to protect their Facebook profile and would less likely make any privacy settings change. However contrary to H1 respondents resulted, as seen in table 4, considerably aware and familiar with privacy settings. More than 50% of Facebook users turn to be moderately familiar up to very familiar with privacy settings. Moreover when asked about when they did make their last change in their profile privacy settings only 9% of respondents admitted not to have made any privacy change and about 34% of them claimed to have made modifications in their profile privacy settings recently in spring 2012. Another reason to oppose H1 is the fact that only 7% of the respondents admit that everyone can see their profile, meanwhile 65% claim that only their friends can see the majority of their Facebook profile. In this way H1 was not supported.

Table 5. Privacy Concern nad Profile Visibility Pivot Table

Who can see the majority of your Facebook profile?	I am concerned about the privacy of my information on Facebook						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Blank	Total
Everyone can see the majority of my Facebook profile.	2			3		1	6
Friends of my friends can see my Facebook profile.		1		1	1		3
I restrict certain parts of my Facebook profile		1	3	2	9	2	17
Only my friends can see the majority of my Facebook profile.	5	5	19	15	10	6	60
Total	7	7	22	21	20	9	86

In H2 it is claimed that there is a negative relationship between Facebook users that are concerned about their Facebook

information privacy issues and the degree their Facebook profiles are visible to others. In order to support H2 we need to prove that the majority of those users who have set their profiles to "Only my friends can see the majority of my profile" are concerned about Facebook privacy settings. As can be seen from table 5, the respondents who prefer to make their profile completely visible to everyone have almost an equal distribution in both sides of the Likert Scale. Meanwhile those who restrict certain parts of their profiles and those who show their profiles to only their friends are clearly positioned to a vast majority in the "Concerned" side of the Likert Scale. Consequently we can say that as the degree of concern increases Facebook users tend to make their profiles less visible to others. In this way H2 is supported.

Table 6. Gender based Familiarity with Privacy Settings Pivot Table

Gender?	How Familiar are you with Facebook's privacy settings?						
	Very Low		Neutral			Very High	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Female	10.80%	2.70%	10.80%	8%	21.60%	10.60%	35.10%
Male	8.50%	6.60%	12.70%	17%	14.80%	14.80%	21.20%

H3 predicted that Females are more familiar with Facebook privacy settings than males. As can be noticed from table 6, in terms of percentage, females fall moderately to a higher percentage in the "Familiar" side of the scale than males. Consequently it can be said that H3 is partly supported.

H4 claimed that even though there is a trend of considering Facebook a waste of time it is an integral part of users' everyday life. It is very surprising to see that even though we found out that an absolute majority of respondents had a Facebook account, and that Facebook users are much related to it by visiting it at a mean of about 3 times a day and spending considerable time in it as listed in table 1, when we asked about at what extent they considered Facebook a waste of time very interesting results were taken. Facebook users at a rate of 62% consider or strongly consider Facebook as a waste of time. Only 13% of respondents do not consider Facebook as a waste of time. The findings in table 2 make us believe that there is a considerable discrepancy between the perceptions of Albanians and their actual behavior. In this way H4 is strongly supported.

Table 7. Identity protection by Facebook

On a scale of 1-5 do you feel that your identity information is well-protected by Facebook?					
No					Yes
	1	2	3	4	5
	26%	17%	23%	20%	7%

According to H5, generally speaking Facebook users do not trust that their identity information is well protected by Facebook. As seen from table 7 the percentage of those saying that their identity is definitely not well-protected is considerably high, 26%, meanwhile the percentage of those claiming that their identity information is well-protected by Facebook is extremely low, 7%. Those who think that their identity information is moderately protected and those who are skeptic in this issue are nearly equally distributed. When the data gathered from the surveys are analyzed we find out that only about 39% of respondents admit to portray themselves on Facebook the same way they do in real life, 35% does it only sometimes and the rest never portray themselves as they actually do in real life. Generally speaking we can say that Facebook users are skeptic and tend to believe that their identity information is not well-protected by Facebook. Thus we can say that, even though not strongly, H5 is supported.

H6 predicted that Facebook users are not fully aware of how does Facebook use or share their information with third parties. According to the answers gathered from the respondents we found out that about 30 % of respondents don't know how may Facebook use the information they post on their profiles. Moreover a surprising 40% of Facebook users don't know whether Facebook shares their information with third parties like advertisers. Only 33% are sure that Facebook doesn't share their information with advertisers. Consequently H6 is supported.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this paper conclude that Albanian young Facebook users are aware and concerned about their privacy and most importantly they show to be to a certain extent familiar with Facebook privacy settings. The absolute majority of respondents had a Facebook account and the majority of them claim to have created it during their high school years.

Their behavior towards privacy issues suggests that they are attentive as an absolute majority of them told us to have restricted their profile visibility. However when it comes to trust that Facebook protects their identity information, they show skeptic attitudes. Interestingly we viewed a discrepancy between how they considered Facebook as a waste of time and still they give strong reasons to make us believe that Facebook is an integral part of their daily life. We noticed that users are not fully aware about how may Facebook use their information and share it with third parties even though they say it is very important that they are aware and knowledgeable about how their personal information will be used when submitted online. Finally we suggest that Facebook users need to be further educated about the risks and potential threats to their privacy and encouraged to be careful about their identity information posted on Facebook. We hope that our findings in this paper may contribute to this process.

References

- Acquisti, A. and Gross, R., Imagined communities: awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. From PET 2006. (Cambridge, June 28–30, 2006,
- Acquisti, A., & Gross, R. (2006). Imagined Communities: Awareness, Information Sharing, and Privacy on the Facebook. (G. Danezis & P. Golle, Eds.) *Privacy Enhancing Technologies*, 4258, 36-58. Springer. doi:10.1007/11957454_3
- Anderson, P. What is Web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for education. JISC Technology and Standards Watch, Feb. 2007
- Bergman, M. (2009). Testing Privacy Awareness. *The Future of Identity in the Information Society*. IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology, Volume 298. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2009, p. 237-253
- Bonneau, J. & Preibusch, S. The Privacy Jungle: On the Market for Data Protection in Social Networks. The Eighth Workshop on the Economics of Information Security (WEIS 2009). University College London, England. 24-25 June 2009
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Brooks, G. 2007. "Secret society", *New Media Age*, 13 December, p. 10.
- CAVOUKIAN, ANN & FACEBOOK (2007) Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, Available at: http://www.ipc.on.ca/images/Resources/up-facebook_ipc.pdf 'When online gets out of line'
- Gangadharbatla, H. (2008) 'Facebook me: collective self-esteem, need to belong, and internet self-efficacy as predictors of the iGeneration's attitudes toward social networking sites', *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 5–15.
- Govani, T., & Pashley, H. (2005). Student Awareness of the Privacy Implications When Using Facebook. *Evaluation*, (Whelan). Retrieved from <http://lorrie.cranor.org/courses/fa05/tubzhlp.pdf>
- Hansen, M. User-controlled Identity Management: The key to the future of Privacy. *International Journal of Intellectual Property Management*, Vol 2, No. 4, Pp 325-344, 2008
- Lewis K., Kaufman J., Christakis N. (2008) The Taste for Privacy: An Analysis of College Student Privacy Settings in an Online Social Network. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 79–100 International Communication Association
- Muise, A., Christofides, E., & Desmarais, S. (2009). More information than you ever wanted to know – Does Facebook bring out the green-eyed monster of jealousy? *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(4), 441-444.
- Palen, L., Dourish, P.: Unpacking Privacy for a Networked World. In Proc. of the Conference on Human Factors and Computing Systems: CHI 2003, ACM Press 129-136 (2003)
- Peluchette, J., & Karl, K. (2008). Social networking profiles: An examination of student attitudes regarding use and appropriateness of content. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11(1), 95-7.
- Rauhofer, J. R. (2008). Privacy is dead, get over it! Information privacy and the dream of a risk-free society. *Information & Communications Technology Law*, 17(3), 185-197.
- Reynolds B., Venkatanathan J., Gonçalves J., Kostakos V. (2009) Sharing Ephemeral Information in Online Social Networks: privacy perceptions and behaviours.
- Shafie, L. A., Mansor, M., Osman, N., Nayan, S., Maesin A. (2011) Privacy, Trust and Social Network Sites of University Students in Malaysia. *Research Journal of International Studies* - Issue 20 (September, 2011)
- Tuunainen, V. K., Pitkänen, O. Hovi, M. (2009). Users' Awareness of Privacy on Online Social Networking sites – Case Facebook. 22nd Bled eConference; Facilitating an Open, Effective and Representative eSociety June 14 - 17, 2009; Bled, Slovenia

