Privacy issues concerning the disclosure of personal information on Social Network Sites:

Case study of Vietnamese Facebook teen users

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Abstract—In the current digital age, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) plays significant role in lives of individuals. Its function as an important mediated interpersonal communication makes the number of people who become members and interact on these platforms increase rapidly in recent years. To become member of SNSs, users have to provide certain amount of personal information, also by using SNSs, users usually reveal their detailed information. The raising concern of privacy issues, especially among teen users on SNSs merits the attention from researchers. According to SocialBakers, from 2012 to 2013, the number of Facebook users in Vietnam has increased 14 million, became one of Facebook's Top 10 countries with highest user growth. Facebook also draws the largest number of unique visitors among the social networks operating in Vietnam (According to emarketer.com). Thus, Facebook has been chosen as a representative of SNSs to explore the privacy concern of Vietnamese teen users. This paper aims at assessing the privacy settings of Vietnamese Facebook teen user, specifically, examining what kinds of information that users consider private or public content. Furthermore, the research also focuses on Facebook privacy policy awareness by looking at users' perception of privacy on Facebook. 20 respondents has been recruited to participate in the survey. It was found that the majority of teen users have low level of privacy awareness and over disclose their personal information. Recommendations for future research include figuring out the motivating factors that influence the disclosure of teen users' personal information on Facebook.

Keywords—Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Facebook, teen users, privacy issues, settings, policy awareness, reveal, personal information

1. Introduction and theoretical background

1.1 The dramatic growth of Social Network Sites and privacy concern

Nowadays Social Network Sites (SNSs) have integrated into our daily life and become an integral part of users' social life. The number of users of SNSs has dramatically increased in recent years, together with the huge revelation of information. Although SNSs vary in usage patterns, design and so forth, SNS share the main characteristic: they provide users with chance of creating their own profile – which can be considered as their self-presentation, network-building, sharing interest and also the platform to express themselves. On the one hand, it bring to our modern life another platform for maintaining current relationships and starting seeking for new friends and communities. On the other hand, with the disclosure of profile information, also the revelation of other personal data to the friends or unknown audiences, it raises the concern of privacy.

Indeed, Boyd (2008) and Papacharissi & Gibson (2011) have emphasized the persistence, searchability and shareability features of online divulged data, since it is digitally stored. Together with vast amount of personal information being divulged, these features make the concern of privacy become much more prominent, particularly with teen users, as they over-disclose detailed personal data like birth date, gender, school affiliation, family member, sexual orientation, partner's name and so forth, often without caution that their information are viewable by strangers. In users' own SNS sites, which they consider as private, cause they have control over their data and for whom can see, user-generated content has the potential to be seen by millions of online viewers.

It has also been supported by the number of researches that users tend to underestimate the privacy dangers of self-disclosure. And the possibility for third parties to pass on personal info and, transfer it into other contexts being asked to take into further consideration. Regarding this, self-disclosing behavior can bring along unwanted and unexpected consequences for SNSs users.

1.2 Privacy paradox and implementation in SNSs personal information disclosure research

With the huge number of SNSs user, "SNSs itself have become popular sites for youth culture to explore themselves, relationships, and share cultural artifacts"(Jenkins and Boyd, 2006, par.7). According to Boyd and Heer (2006), the characteristic that attracts students to SNSs is their ability to maintain their relationships, share digital cultural artifacts & ideas, and connect to networks of people. However, participating in these sites means becoming one of these virtual communities' members, users (especially heavy users as teenager) disclose large amount of information. Therefore, together with these potential benefits, scholars, privacy advocates and the media have raised concerns about the risk associated with the disclosure of personal information on SNSs (Govani & Pashley, 2005) (Barnes, 2006) (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

The discrepancy between the concern of privacy and actual behavior or users while disclosing detailed personal information on SNSs emerges the coming of privacy paradox

(Barnes, 2006). And in the situation of privacy invasion concern arisen strongly as mentioned above, this research tendency attract the attention from many scholars.

The privacy paradox describes the differences between individuals' intentions to disclose personal data and their actual behaviors (Barnes, 2006). Barnes's research paper has the prominent structure of the research in privacy paradox. It can be listed as follow: provide information of the dramatically increase tendency in SNSs' number of users, the current situation of a vast amounts of information has been disclosed through SNSs, problem of privacy paradox, the reasons behind it, challenges in dealing with problem, and proposed solution. In this paper, author uses social networking in the United State as a case to take a closer look at the privacy paradox.

The blurred boundary of public versus private life with the illusion of privacy on Internet is a factor makes teen users not aware of their data disclosure. Another factor causes this illusion is from sign-up procedure. When sign-up for the SNSs, user have to provide information such as email, phone number, and so forth, also agree with requirement for membership. It is this part makes users thinks that it is safe for their data, since only they have the control over data, and have feeling of safety when control who can interact with them, without knowing that on the Internet, their data is available for others to read.

Privacy paradox – the discrepancy between the voice about privacy concerns of SNSs users and the behavior of providing personal information on SNSs, especially in young generation can served as basis for further research of SNSs, particularly SNSs and other privacy issues. One of the popular tendency follows this research direction is examining the type of information that users post on SNSs, investigate the extent to which they consider private of public information, the relationship between characteristics and self-presentation on SNSs. The information divulged by users of SNSs can be a tool to explore the reasons behind privacy paradox.

Many scholars, such as Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, & Arsoy (2010), Day (2013), Young & Quan-Haase (2009) have conducted researches to figure out the type and amount of information that SNS users disclose on these platforms, and further link it with users' characteristics, usage motivation.

2. Research method

In this paper, online survey has been used to examine the amount and type of information disclosed on Facebook and teen users' privacy perception. 20 teenagers has been recruited to participate in the survey. They were asked to base on their Facebook using experiences to fill in the survey. Because of the limitation of time and resources, this paper has been considered as a small scale research for further study.

3. Result

The survey result provides insights into the amount and type of personal data that teenage users reveal on Facebook. It indicates that majority of respondents reveal huge amount of personal information on Facebook, regarding their gender,

birth date, school/ employment, interest, relationship status, email address, phone number and address. 20% of respondents said that they updated their Facebook status one or more than one time per day, 25% of respondents said they updated their status more than one time a week. Besides, 65% of respondents set their post and profile as publicly viewable, 30% made it as friends only. Based on the usage and privacy settings situation provided by these 20 respondents, it can be seen that teen users often disclose large amount of personal information on Facebook.

Regarding identifiable information, the result shows 75% of respondents used their real name to be account name (8 participants used partial name and 7 participants used full name). In addition, 70% of respondents set their own photo as profile picture, 20% of them used group photo and only small percentage (2 participants) said they used cartoon or celebrity photo as profile picture. By revealing many identifiable information, teen users has already made their searchability and identifiability risk much higher on social network sites.

The research also found that majority of respondents lack awareness of privacy settings and searchability risk on Facebook. Almost half of respondents (9 subjects) said that they haven't changed their default privacy settings and 40% of them thought they cannot be looked up through Facebook. When being asked about how they made the setting as who can look them up by email address that they provided, 50% of respondents said that they do not know. The situation is almost the same with the phone number look up (45% said they do not now about this settings). About whether users want other search engines to link to their Timeline, 45% of respondents said they do not know and 30% of them chose yes.
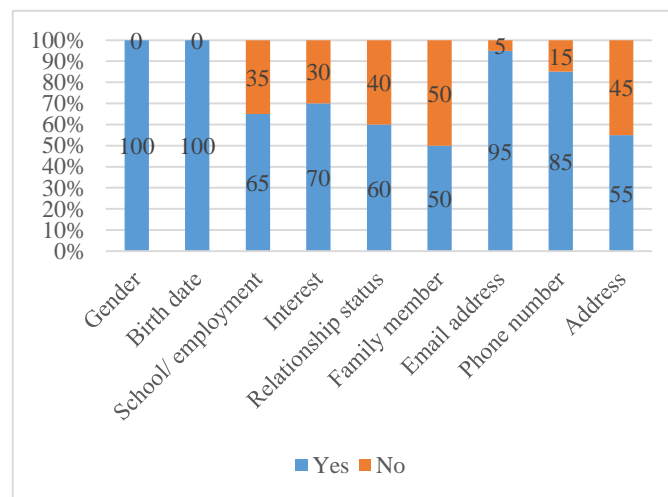

Figure 1. Percentage of type and amount of revealed personal information on Facebook

4. Discussion

The result indicated that Vietnamese teen users over-expose themselves on Facebook by providing many detailed personal information, including identifiable data and contact details. Furthermore, they lack awareness of privacy settings and policy. Half of the participants have no idea of the setting that make them searchable by the information that they disclosed and many of them have not changed the default privacy settings.

However, due to the limitation of time and resources, this paper can only be seen as a small scale research (with 20 respondents participated in the survey). A larger scale research should be conducted to provide more insights into the field. Moreover, the demographic factors should also been taken into consideration, in order to further link study to personal information disclosure motivation and privacy strategies research.

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