Students' Safety of Private Information on Social Media: Risks of Dissemination and Educational implications

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating Moroccan students' online behaviors exhibited through social networking sites. Such social facts have raised the interest of many researchers and stakeholders alike to provide immunity for vulnerable adolescents and teach them how to manipulate social networking sites with minimum risks. For that reason, privacy and safety measures need to be invested and promulgated. Still, there is a lack of research covering issues related to safety and privacy, and the role of school education on triggering students' awareness towards such conducts. To this end, 288 Moroccan secondary school students were surveyed on a) their frequency of registration into social networking sites accounts, b) their attitudes towards privacy and safety measures, and c) whether they perceive any role of school education to empower students cope with issues of privacy and safety. Findings of the present study show that i) students share different personal information ii) they are not aware of personal information privacy, iii) they scarcely adopt techniques to escape cyber-bullying, and iv) they hold negative attitudes towards the implications of school education regarding the risks of online personal information.

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS), mainly Facebook (FB), have recently gained many affiliates, especially among teenagers. SNS omnipresence do not only supply users with entertainment, interaction and communication, but also raise privacy and security concerns [1]; [2]. One common characteristic of SNS is that they are easily accessed by different social classes and age groups. Being the weakest and vulnerable circle in society, teenagers are within the center of interest of both social networks outlets and research. In this context, Moroccan teenager students' (MTS) situation is underlying online misuses and presentation of personal information (PI) across SNS. In fact, the situation deserves deep reflection and investigation due to the amount of risks MTS undertake as they disseminate PI publicly. Because teenagers are in "era of increased media saturation and rampant consumerism, it is crucial that youth develop tools for critically engaging with the copious amounts of information and ideological material" [3, p.3]. Accordingly, the present paper argues that MTS are over exposed to social media, which augments the risks of being targets to PI deface and misuse. Consequently, MTS display insecure behaviors which reflect a non informed young e-community trapped and exposed to permanent cultural mutations. Today, parents and education stakeholders feel helpless to provide teenagers with safe practices while SNS afford different features, that children make use of: the profile and the community [4].

Statement of the problem

Nowadays, teens, unaware of risks, use SNS to meet others and explore identity formation. The present study reflects on relevant questions related to the paradox of PI privacy and dissemination through world 'web 2.0'. Such behaviors are analyzed by investigating different types of shared PI, respondents' awareness towards safety practices, frequency of connection and the amount of time they spent online, and the extent to which SE provides tools to handle the issue. Teenagers who are overexposed to SNS may develop psychological disturbances called 'Facebook depression', a behavior which develops when teens spend a great deal of time on SNS and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression [5].

The objectives of the study

The study aims at providing insights into:
a) The nature of PI shared
b) Teenager's awareness towards privacy and safety of PI
c) Teachers and school contributions to support MTS handle SNS and minimize risks of cyberbullying

   d) Students awareness vis-à-vis safety measures and risks they may undertake because of online information sharing behaviors.

In order to achieve these objectives, the study has tried to provide answers to the following research questions:
   1) What type of PI do MTS share online?
   2) Do MTS care about safety and privacy measures of online PI
   3) Does SE have any role in students risk awareness?

Methodology

To investigate MTS attitudes towards PI safety and privacy, a questionnaire was administered to 288 male (125; 43,4%) and female (163; 56,6%) students in two Junior High schools (Jabber Ibn Hayyan and Allal Elfassi) in Meknes, Morocco. Their age varies between14–16. For organizational purposes, the questionnaire was set into four blocks of sub questions:
   1) MTS visibility on SNS and frequencies of use, registration, and logging;
   2) Participants' safety and privacy, strangers' acceptance, fake identity strategy, degree of caring about PI safety, and policy registration;
   3) Online PI management and behaviors of PI posting and downloading;
   4) The role of school education and teachers' output.

Results and Discussion
SNS frequency Use

As far as the first block of questions is concerned, the return rate suggest that 88,9% of respondents are registered to social networks sites(SNS) among whom 83,7% are on Facebook, 88,5% log more than one hour per day and that 90,6% check their SNS profile more than once.   Similar results are provided by Lenhart *et al* [6] who admit that 95% of Teens ages 14-17 go online and 73% have a profile on FB. Accordingly, online constant visibility may endanger teen students' reputation among family and peers. In addition to their frequency of use, teenager students share a wide range of PI online, which makes them victims of 'cyberbullying'.

Online PI management

This section considers students' reactions to posting of real names, passwords, phone numbers, photos, and videos. Caring about privacy of PI significantly influences safety behaviors of teenagers' visibility online. In fact, respondents show deliberate negligence and unsafe behaviors as they post considerable PI online. The results reveal that 69, 4% share real names among whom are 25, 69% of males and 43, 75% of females. Phone numbers are shared online as 50,7% declare that they actually do and 69, 8% admit that they share personal photos. Moreover, passwords, one important PI that should be kept secure to diminish the risks of children intimidation, are also investigated. 29,2% admit that they share password with other teenagers, a behavior that paves the way for scammers to have "access to the victim's e-mail account (and possibly bank accounts) and can wreck financial or reputational havoc" [7,p.246].

In this regard, it is clear that respondents are not aware of the risks they run as they divulgate personal passwords. For Gender difference, it is revealed that 29,2% of respondents, 22, 92% of females and 6,25% of males admit that they actually share their personal passwords with other teenagers.

Sharing PI online is risk taking. The findings reveal that 69,8% of respondents post their personal photos online, 62,8% share videos depicting real life experiences. Due to this behavior, it is highly probable that some teens could be threatened and later on may face school drop and emotional distress and severe mental health conditions. Downloaded activities include 74% photos, 58% videos; however, when compared to the number of retrieved books, articles, and references the percentage tends to be feeble(only 19,1%). This shows in one or another that teenagers lack constructive feedback and orientation towards online activities that are beneficial to their studies and that contribute to school knowledge.

Safety and privacy

Respondents' attitudes towards safety and privacy measures are alarming. SNS are prevailing communication services related to digital media because of the amount of information made available. Statistics in the present study show that 94,8% do not read policy restrictions before being registered into SNS account, 78,5% care less about safety measures regarding PI share, 70,5% apply no fake identity strategy to escape PI defamation, and finally 59,7% of participants accept strangers as friends as it is illustrated in the following table:

Table 1. *Strangers' acceptance measures*

Strangers acceptance	59,7%
Use no fake identity strategies	70,5%
Do not care about PI safety	78,5%
Do not read policy registration	94,8%

Equally important, females reactions to the set of variables discussed above show discrepant feedback. Henceforth, 59.7% declare that they accept to interact with strangers showing a majority of female respondents with 36, 81%. As for safety measures, 70,5% use no strategies to preserve PI with a percentage of 44,44% of females. As for PI safety care, 21.5% do that, meanwhile 78.5% show no interest to the importance of online PI dissemination. Significantly, the statistics reveal that girls are less caring if compared to boys regarding measures of privacy and safety.

Related to privacy and security measures, 79.2% of participants do not read policy registration. Based on that, it is deduced that 45.14% of female respondents are most vulnerable as they do not consult privacy information regulations for SNS registration. In order to investigate deeper the issue of privacy and security, the paper cross-tests two variables according to cross tabulation technique showing different gender reactions as it is illustrated in the following table:

Table 2. Cross tabulation of privacy and Fake identity strategy

	Do you care about PI security measures?	
	Yes	No
Males' use of fake identity: Yes No	17 5.9% 19 6.6%	38 13.2% 51 17.7%
Females' use of fake identity: Yes No	7 2.4% 19 6.6%	36 12/3% 101 35.5%

Cross testing of variables show that 17.7% of respondents are males who neither care about security measures nor use fake strategies. On the other hand, 35.1% of respondents who neither care nor use fake identity strategies are females. It can therefore be deduced that girls

1) Accept more strangers
2) Share more PI
3) Are careless about the safety measures to secure PI
4) Pay no attention to registration policies.

Given the popularity of SNS among teenagers, the risks underlying private information and the lack of adults' monitoring and guidance on safety measures call into question the role of school education: Does Moroccan school education provide any supports to help children engage safely in social media or Web 2.0?

School Education

Results show that school is inert, and unable to develop any kind of supportive policy. This is supported by respondents' attitudes regarding school's education in empowering MTS immunity to use PI through SNS. The choice of this argument is primordial to all studies affiliated to media and education. In fact, the results are flagrantly negative. As a matter of fact, 94,8% of respondents admit that school has feeble role in helping teens confront the risks of online PI sharing, 5.21% confirm that school has actually a role on the issue. In fact, this is congruent with the weak status of national education regarding ICT integration in teaching and learning. Therefore, the statistics uphold the hypothesis that schools have no credible role in educating MTS about safety and privacy of PI.

Teachers' output is central to any study of school education. Both school and teachers are important for students' safety skills and awareness towards the risks of disseminating personal information online. When asked about the way teachers inform them about risks of private information sharing on

SNS, 65,6% of the participants admit that teachers do not devise any lessons or activities that would reduce the risks of PI sharing. Conversely, 25,7% recognize that some extra activities are delivered, and 8,7% believe that teachers provide lessons to inform students about the risks of online PI sharing. In order to mix opinions about school and teachers' role, the results reveal that 63,19% of respondents do not see any role of school and that they have never been introduced to classroom activities on the issue while only 23,26% grant that school displays no role, but still they receive some extra activities; such classroom activities are not part of any given curriculum. Strikingly enough, only 8,3% of the participants state that they have received some extra activities even though school education affords no programs. In order to provide teenagers with safer behavior on the issue, many researchers emphasized the role of school education to inform and educate teens about online PI safety and sharing [8]; [2] & [7]. In the aforementioned studies, the whole argumentation is centered on the necessity of SE to limit online risks and protect teenager students from being technologically depressed and victims of cyberbullying.

Conclusion

The amount of PI divulged by MTS is colossal. In front of this situation, MTS are permanently at risks of cyberbullying and PI defamation. It is high time that educators, parents family members found out potential dysfunctions through sound social projects regarding the issue of SE so far walked out in Morocco. Teachers, parents and schools have to brood on discussed factors in order to develop dynamic solutions and decrease the reality of unveiled dangers. Moreover, research on the issue is highly recommended and more appreciated than any time so as to bridge the gaps that separate students, parents, school, and teachers and to give thought to negative cultural reactions in unsafe atmosphere of personal information insecurity and effervescent social belonging that seem poorly managed.

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