

Poster: Relationship Privacy in a Connected World: A Case of Facebook Friendship Page

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1. INTRODUCTION

The feature of “See Friendship” is a recently released feature on Facebook, which aggregates two friends’ interaction information into one single page [2]. As soon as this new feature automatically replaced prior Wall-to-Wall feature on Facebook, it triggered users’ privacy concerns, discontent, anxiety, as well as mass media’s questioning of privacy breach. As this feature intensively involve friends’ personal information besides individuals’ private information, it brought about a new set of privacy considerations and challenges. When a user discloses her personal information in OSNs, the personal information moves to a collective domain where the user and her social ties become co-owners with joint responsibilities for keeping the information safe and private [3]. The need for collective privacy management arises due to the inability to monitor others on the network and being uncertain about their behaviors.

To address the newly emerging privacy concerns for collective information management in Online Social Networks (OSNs), this research is proposed as a first step in understanding the emergence of OSNs users’ collective privacy concerns, attitudes, and considerations. In order to do so, we present a content analysis of user comments posted on the official blog of Facebook, in response to the launching of Friendship Pages.

2. USERS’ COMMENTS ON FRIENDSHIP PAGES

2.1 Friendship Pages on Facebook

Friendship Page is launched in Oct 2010 to replace the traditional Wall-to-Wall feature. This new feature chronicles the Facebook history between two Facebook friends. On the friendship page between a user and any of her Facebook friends, the user is able to see wall conversations between herself and her friend, photos that they both have been tagged in, mutual friends, mutual events which they both attended, and mutual pages that they both “like” (see Figure 1). With this new feature, a user can not only browse her friendship with one of her friends, she can also search friendship information between any two friends whom she is connected with. Overall this new feature shows that social ties are becoming more and more linked together, which is encouraged through the system design. On the one hand, functionalities enabled by this feature aggregate all the social interaction details between two friends on Facebook, which may encourage more social interactions among users by providing conveniently accessible history information. On the other hand, such

aggregation of pieces of historical interaction information between two friends may also trigger users’ privacy concerns toward relational information.



Figure 1. Illustration of Friendship Page (Adapted from [4])

2.2 Analyzing User Comments

As we aim to explore the specific privacy problems encountered with the use of the Friendship Pages on Facebook, qualitative analysis is considered to be well suited for this type of exploratory research [1, 5]. Particularly, we conducted a content analysis of users comments posted on Facebook blog in response to the new release of Friendship Pages. We believe that analyzing actual users’ reactions by using such a rich dataset enabled us to better understand users’ collective privacy concerns. Such approach would allow us to not only obtain a large data set but also reach real users who are privacy sensitive on Facebook.

Facebook Blog is a public platform for Facebook designers and developers to introduce new features and announce significant events. This platform also enables Facebook users to discuss and give feedbacks toward these blog entries. As of Jan 14th 2011, a total of 1463 user comments regarding the launching of Friendship Pages were downloaded from Facebook blog. We reviewed all of these comments posted on Facebook blog. We carefully examined each comment and extracted 308 comments that were related to users’ privacy concerns, attitudes and

outcomes. **Figure 2** presents an overall picture of our analysis and results.

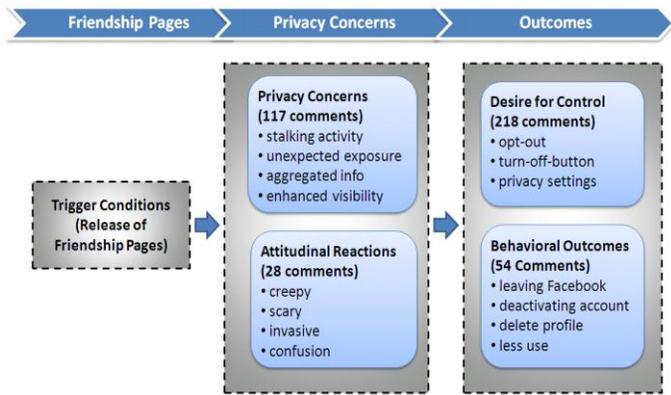


Figure 2. Findings from Content Analysis

2.3 Results

As shown in Figure 2, a large number of users expressed their concerns either explicitly or implicitly, among which 117 comments described their privacy concerns directly, including the easiness of stalking, unexpected exposure, aggregated information, and enhanced visibility. Although most users were aware of the fact that the visibility of information displayed on Friendship Pages would be determined by their privacy settings, they still expressed their discomfort as well as worries about the negative consequences caused by the aggregated information displayed on Friendship Pages. For example, one user commented:

“... That competitive friend / jealous partner who will compare how many times you sent a message to your other friend or how many photos you took together or how many events you attended...”

Another user also complained:

“... I understand that all of this is visible anyway, but putting it all in one place is too much, especially since you can view two other people, and not just your own relationships...”

Besides expressing their explicit concerns on privacy, 28 user comments directly expressed their emotional attitudes towards this feature. These comments were quite pleading by using the adjectives *creepy*, *scary*, and *invasive*, etc.

In terms of user demands for privacy settings, there were 218 comments highlighting their demands for more privacy control features. Because there are tremendous genres of information on Facebook, the existing privacy settings on Facebook are not easy for users to directly control the display of friendship information. As the lowest level of privacy control requirement, 169 comments asked for an opt-out feature. Among these contents, there were 49 comments calling for specific privacy settings for Friendship Pages. For example, one user commented:

“...at least consider that it would be absolutely better if you could view your own friendships...rather than those of other people with one another. Or at least create a privacy setting limiting this feature on different levels should it be desired”.

By directly providing feedback to the introduction of Friendship Pages on official Facebook Blog, outraged users expressed their

desperate needs for privacy control settings to manage their friendship information. Many users even indicated that they would leave Facebook or deactivate their accounts if no privacy control features will be provided. A total of 54 comments were related to behavioral outcomes, e.g., deleting profiles, using Facebook less frequently, deactivating account, and leaving Facebook (see **Figure 2**).

3. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our analysis of user comments posted on Facebook Blog provided preliminary evidence in users’ privacy concerns toward relational information. Users pointed out that this feature broke the natural flow of social interactions on Facebook by aggregating friendship information at a single and easily accessible page. Besides raging users who want to instantly shut down this feature, other more rational users appealed for more privacy control options for this feature. According to the design team, control of this feature was actually embedded within the global privacy setting on Facebook. By adjusting their privacy setting, users could avoid unwanted views of relationship information. However, our analysis of user comments identified confusions from users. It seems that they did not understand how the global privacy setting would affect the view of their friendship pages, which make them feel frustrated. One user commented:

“Wayne Kao’s post about “Friendship pages” is ambiguous: Mr. Kao says “You’ll be able to see a friendship page if you are friends with one of the people and have permission to view both people’s profiles,” but the privacy settings are more fine-grained than that. I let “Everyone” see my photo, my name, and my city--- does that counts as “permission to view” my “profile”? If so, this new feature is a terrible, terrible privacy violation, because it displays things that I specifically marked as private.”

In summary, the new feature of Friendship Pages further blurs the boundary between individual users and their social circles, which makes the collective privacy management issues more complex than ever. We are in the process of developing a theoretical framework to extend the notion of privacy from an individual perspective to the interpersonal level, which examines *collective* privacy concerns related to social interactions and content sharing among social ties.

4. REFERENCES

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