

PJ6100 Research Methods

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Abstract

This research proposal investigates user awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms. It examines the impact of complex privacy policies and terms on user behavior and explores how businesses can simplify their policies to promote better awareness and safeguard user privacy rights.

Part I: Developing the research problem, aim, and objective

Introduction

Social media has become an essential part of our lives, enabling us to connect online in today's digital world. However, with the increasing use of these platforms, concerns about data privacy and violations have become more prevalent. Users are willing to trust these platforms by actively sharing their personal information, including their location, interests, and preferences. However, this act of trust also exposes them to vulnerabilities that could compromise their confidentiality and put their safety at risk.

Objective and aim

The research proposal investigates the impact of the complexity of privacy policies and terms on user awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms. The research examines whether users are aware of data privacy issues on social media and how they perceive and behave in response to those issues. Privacy policies can be challenging to understand, leading to confusion and disengagement from data privacy. Thus, the research will explore whether user's confusion and disengagement contribute to their lack of awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms. The motivation of this study is the need for more attention to data privacy rights and vulnerabilities in this field.

The research project aims to fill gaps in knowledge by examining user dynamics, perception, and awareness when using social media to safeguard our personal information, gain new insights, and bring clarity to a practical problem.

The problem and background

Social media is a mass media platform where users communicate and share information by building communities (*Britannica*). The omnipresence of data and the vast amount of information collected and analyzed have led to concerns about transparency and accountability in how businesses operate and manage data. The significance of this problem lies in the fact that as more people opt for convenience and digital solutions, due to the high amount of information, it could lead to data violation and misuse.

Around 8 billion people worldwide (*Worldometer*) and approximately 60% of the world's population are social media users (*Statista, 2023*). From a user's perspective, the onboarding step is a necessary process. Many websites or applications require an authentication process like sign-up and login service. Registration for a product forms a relationship between the user and the business. It also indicates that the user trusts the company by providing personal information. Is the average internet user aware of all the acts and policies offered by the party, or are there confusing and ambiguous terms?

The overwhelming amount of information and complex privacy policies often cause confusion and disengagement, leading to negligence of privacy rights. It is essential to address any implications; for example, data collected without consent can lead to privacy breaches.

My potential research question will be, “How can businesses simplify privacy policies and terms to make it easier for consumers to understand and promote better awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms?”

The process

In the transition into a digitized society, the concept of data privacy has come to precedence, especially on social platforms. In recent years, regulatory frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (*GDPR*), a set of data protection rules, came into public view in Europe in 2018 (*European Commission*).

Similarly, we find legislation in the United States of America, such as the CCPA (*California Act*), amended in 2020. Both regulations provide guidance, impose laws, and secure consumer privacy rights. Businesses and organizations under the subject are responsible and are requested to exercise these rights. The principles urge companies to integrate the privacy rights of their services. Such regulatory compliance ensures that the business operates fairly and ethically. It also aims to protect consumers from harm.

Part II: Discovering and applying existing knowledge***Plan***

This section aims to delve into the existing body of literature. The objective is to find information to understand the area better. I will divide the goal into three phases - plan, seek, and assess. For the planning phase, I propose the following: Identify keywords as concepts to prepare for searches in the database to gather and present evidence to support my claim. To conduct my search, I have created a list of potentially valuable keywords relevant to the topic. For each keyword, alternative terms express that concept with the help of the synonym dictionary *Oates* (2020, p.86).

Keywords	Concept	Concept	Concept
Social media	Social media platform	Social media network	Social media service
Data privacy	Confidential	Personal information	Personal data
Data breach	Data leak	Data loss	Data exposure
Privacy policy	Privacy regulation	Privacy rule	Privacy protection
User awareness	User understanding	User education	User insight
Regulatory compliance	Act	Enforcement	Law

Seek

In order to ensure the quality and credibility of sources, I will use databases like ACM and IEEE, which provide peer-reviewed and high-rated journals related to IS and computing. For my initial search, I will use two concepts, "User awareness" and "privacy policy."

Showing 1-25 of 103 results for **user awareness AND privacy policy** x

Figure 1. IEEE

170,428 Results for: [All: user awareness] AND [All: privacy policy]

Figure 2. ACM

We noticeably see the difference in the results between IEEE and ACM from the initial searches. We have 103 results in IEEE, which is decent considering the initial search. ACM has way too many records, which is evident because ACM contains more repositories.

To continue with my findings, I will narrow down the results returned by applying boolean operators and system symbols accordingly. ACM allows more advanced searches in this area. I have kept a search log that tracks my combination and search results that will help me for reference.

Topic	Database	Search Term	Filter	Publication Year	No. of results	Notes
Awareness	IEEE	user awareness AND privacy policy			103	
Awareness	ACM	user awareness AND privacy policy			170,428	
Data Privacy	IEEE	"privacy poli" AND "social" AND "user awareness"		2015	3	https://ieeexplore-ieee-org.sgms.idm.oclc.org/document/7509963
Data Privacy	IEEE	"data privacy" AND "social media" OR "social"	Year 2020-2024	2022	25	social media privacy issues, threats and risks
Awareness	ACM	"increase in" AND "data privacy" WITHIN/2 "social media" AND "user awareness"	Year 2022-2023	2022	105	increase in awareness
Perception	ACM	"data breach"AND"social media"AND"perception"		2016	109	user perception vs behavior
Privacy	ACM	"increase"AND"businesses"AND"data breach"AND"social media"AND"perception"		2021	55	privacy fatigue, alleviate privacy fatigue
Vulnerability	IEEE	"data breach" AND "social media"		2022	11	security concern
Privacy	ACM	"data privacy"AND "transparency"AND "businesses"AND"social media"AND"perception"		2018	182	we are the product
Policy	IEEE	"privacy policy"AND"social media"		2016	17	exploit privacy policy

Figure 3 Search log

Assess

The objective of the literature review is to present a comprehensive analysis of how users perceive data privacy concerns on social media platforms and examine their corresponding actions and behaviors in response. User awareness is an integral part of data privacy on social media platforms. Understanding the information and potential risks associated with the service is essential. However, understanding the policy is challenging, and services have their context on top of it. With the increasing popularity of social media, numerous studies have identified concerns regarding data privacy. While privacy policy is a part of social media to protect user security, many do not read the privacy policies simply because of obfuscating legal jargon. Studies have shown that complex language makes the information unclear. *Ismail* (2016, p.68). A recent study at a large scale of 50,000 privacy policies acknowledged that policies are challenging to comprehend and require some college education. An astonishing report made in 2008 shows that it would cost \$781 billion for US internet users to read privacy policies. *Wagner* (2023, p.32:4). Although the notion of data privacy exists, demographic background and culture influence awareness. *Ismail* (2023, p.70).

Despite privacy concerns, people still share personal information online, which seems paradoxical. This paradox shows that while individuals value privacy, disclosing confidential information is challenging. Moreover, people often feel powerless to protect their data, contributing to a sense of vulnerability. Consumers are willing to trade their privacy for the service, regardless of what data is collected. *Ibdah* (2021, p.4). Younger generations believe preserving confidentiality is nearly impossible and inevitable because they have no control. *Fiesler* (2018, p.3). On the contrary, a survey shows that some consumers blatantly believe the platform "Facebook" respects their privacy and further believe they have total control by setting their profile to "private." *Blasbalg* (2012, p.9).

A study has also shown that user data on social media is managed with applications owned by affiliates. With the entitled right of access, these applications collect user information without the consumer's knowledge. Typically, this information is used for profiling, but these businesses primarily focus on financial gains, which can make it vulnerable and easily exploitable, potentially harming the consumer. *Ismail* (2016, p.67). Interestingly, they gained more trust if service providers were upfront with their business model rather than being evasive with their terms and service. *Ibdah* (2021, p.4). Another group pointed out that businesses are not charities; we are using the services for "free," and it is expected they make money. You can opt-out; the benefit outweighs the tradeoff, which is fair. *Fiesler* (2018, p.53).

Summary

The literature review presented a comprehensive analysis of how users perceive data privacy concerns on social media platforms and examined their corresponding actions and behaviors in

response. The review highlighted that user awareness is integral to data privacy on social media platforms, and understanding the information and potential risks associated with the service is essential. However, understanding the policy is still challenging, and services have their privacy terms and context on top of it. Many studies have recognized data privacy issues as social media gains popularity. The review also pointed out that despite privacy concerns, people still share personal information online, which seems paradoxical. Moreover, people often feel powerless to protect their data, contributing to a sense of vulnerability. Consumers are willing to trade their privacy for the service, regardless of what data is collected. Younger generations believe preserving confidentiality is nearly impossible and inevitable because they have no control.

The review identified gaps in the current research, such as the need for more research on how social media companies can balance their business interests with user data privacy concerns.

Research is needed to make privacy policies more understandable for social media users.

Much of the existing research on user perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms has focused on the fact that users often lack awareness due to complex legal jargon, and some users simply do not care about their privacy altogether. However, there has been a lack of research on how users would prefer privacy policies to be presented or on educating users about their rights and level of control. Despite the GDPR's Article 12.1 requirement for “*concise, transparent, intelligible, and easily accessible privacy policies in clear and plain language*” (GDPR (2023, Art 12.1), privacy terms and agreements have had an adversary effect on consumer perception. It begs the question: Would users continue to utilize the service if privacy policies were presented in a simplified and visualized way?

Overall, the review showed that data privacy is a critical issue on social media platforms, and users' perception of data privacy concerns and corresponding actions and behaviors in response is complex. The review also highlighted some trends and gaps in the current research on data privacy on social media platforms.

Part III: Constructing your research strategy

I intended to use a mixed method approach to complete my project, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach will help me comprehensively understand the research problem and provide a more robust analysis of the data collected. For the quantitative research method, I plan to distribute online surveys to diverse social media users to explore their understanding of complex privacy policies and their willingness to share personal information on social media platforms. The questionnaires will be constructed to generate reliable data that can be analyzed. For the qualitative research method, I will conduct interviews to understand better users' experiences and perceptions of data privacy issues on social media. I will thematically analyze the qualitative data collected to identify patterns and themes in users' responses to the interview questions.

Furthermore, using triangulation in mixed methods research will help me confirm the results obtained using different methods, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of my research findings.

In conclusion, the mixed method strategy I intend to use will allow me to collect and analyze data using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, providing several advantages, including increased validity and reliability of my research findings. This approach is suitable for

conducting a comprehensive and robust study on the impact of the complexity of privacy policies and terms on user awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms.

Part IV: Critically evaluating your approach

In this research proposal, the aim is to investigate the impact of the complexity of privacy policies and terms on user awareness and perception of data privacy issues on social media platforms. The research will examine whether users are aware of data privacy issues on social media and how they perceive and behave in response to those issues. To achieve this, I have planned to conduct a literature review and data analysis using databases like ACM and IEEE, which provide peer-reviewed and high-rated journals related to IS and computing. I will use two concepts, "User awareness" and "privacy policy," and narrow down the results returned by applying boolean operators and system symbols accordingly. This study aims to fill knowledge gaps by examining user dynamics, perception, and awareness when using social media to safeguard our personal information. The findings will clarify a practical problem and provide insights into improving data privacy policies and regulations. This research is essential in the transition into a digitized society, where the concept of data privacy has come to precedence, especially on social platforms. However, there are some limitations to this study.

The collected data may not represent the entire ethnography, and the data collected may be subjective. To ensure ethical standards, I will obtain informed consent from participants and keep their data confidential. Overall, this research project aims to contribute to practice and academia by providing insights into how we can improve data privacy policies on social media platforms. It should be attractive to others concerned about data privacy and how it affects users on social media.

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