**Title:**

**Social Media & Privacy: A Facebook Case Study**

**What is the research problem?**

This papers majorly highlights the privacy issues surrounding Social Networking websites like Facebook where people upload there personal details and allow others access to our data. The paper also points out that most of the social media users are unaware how vulnerable their

Personal information has become to information-aggregation and reselling activities and ignore the privacy settings and policies on social media websites. In the end the paper suggests possible solution to prevent such violation of privacy.

**Conceptualizing Privacy**

* The right to control access to one’s personal information i.e. the right to control the appropriate flow of personal information. One should have the right to reasonably exercise control in how and with whom one’s information is shared.
* Access to privacy has positive aspects, it also can have negative consequences. Thus, although the protection of privacy may strengthen the ability of some to avoid being violated, it also allows others to render their economic activities invisible, allows the powerful to obscure their economic ventures and thus enables them to enrich themselves, often at the cost of the poor.
* Hence the right to privacy should be seen as the right to protection of one’s privacy against the capitalist exploitation of the powerful and corporate entities, which usually occurs in the effort to enrich themselves.

**Background of Facebook**

* Facebook founded in 2004 at Harvard University with the initial intention to create a student directory containing student profiles and pictures.
* The website became available for public use in 2006.
* Facebook is characterized as a social media website which “combines features of e-mail, instant messaging, photo-sharing, and blogging programs, as well as a way to monitor one’s friends’ online activities”. Thus, Facebook functions as one-stop platform that combines various social activities for its users.
* On social networking websites, users utilize self-created profiles that act as avatars, to interact with one another through interconnected social networks. Such profiles often contain personal information such as full names, contact numbers, e-mail addresses, physical addresses, occupations, friendship networks, photos, records of activities, personal preferences, and demographic information.
* By 2008 Facebook became the most popular social media website in the world, it worth by 2015 was at least 245 billion US Dollars, and the website has over 968 million daily users and 1.49 billion monthly users, with nearly 844 million mobile daily users and 3.31 billion mobile monthly users.
* It has features like News Feed, allows users to communicate to and view their friend’s activities on the website. The previously invisible activities of people on the website became visible to others in their networks with the introduction of the News Feed feature.
* This feature allows advertisers to place advertisements directly on to a user’s news feed, thus marketing to the Facebook user directly. Facebook introduced the Beacon feature, which collected data on the activities of its users, focusing specifically on their shopping habits. However this was badly received by Facebook users and Facebook readjusted its surveillance methods. Thus, the corporation began to gather aggregate data through less obtrusive means, so as to re-sell that private information to third-party advertisers.
* Initially Facebook privacy setting were very minimal allowing everyone full to user’s profile, gradually this was changed and more sophisticated and complicated settings were introduced allowing users to fine tune what information is shared with whom.
* Even restriction can be put on third party as to what user information can be used for targeted advertisement.
* Facebook’s current data policies indicate that they collect information on the content users upload, information others upload about one another, information on the devices users connect to their accounts, as well as information related to the social networks users connect their profiles to

**Past research: How people view and use Facebook’s privacy settings**

* Past research suggests that Facebook users mainly utilized the website to communicate with one another through crafted public personas, and that although such users were often aware of how publicly visible their profiles were, they were under the impression that they could manage their profiles so as to render them private. Also it was found that early Facebook users were unaware of how much their profiles revealed about them online.
* Another research study suggested that vast majority of early Facebook users had not read the privacy and data policies related to the website. Also that nearly half chose to not utilize privacy features at all.
* Research on 2010, studied how the youth utilize privacy settings on Facebook indicated that the majority of such users had at least attempted to adjust such settings to render their profiles less visible. Also found out that Facebook users from the youth demographic group were more concerned about protecting their privacy and that their research showed that there was no gender difference in how people tended to protect their privacy.

**Facebook and personal information: Issues with commodification and privacy**

* Social Media Websites like Facebook generate revenue by gathering and selling information related to and produced by their users to third-party advertisers.
* The paper conceptualized the Facebook user as a ‘prosumer’, frames them as someone who is both a consumer of Facebook’s networking capacity, and a producer of its network content.
* Research has suggested that people actively perform this type of labor, which keeps websites like Facebook running, for free in exchange for the creation and maintenance of their social networks.
* Thus these business model work on the cycle of ‘free’ consumption, production, and reselling of private information and communication.

**Possible Solution**

* We should have opt-in privacy policies, whereas most websites currently offer opt-out privacy policies. Example Facebook currently forces its users to go through a series of steps to opt out of privacy invasions for corporate profit. Alternatively allow users the choice to sell their information to third parties, give them the control.
* Create more groups that act as watchdogs against privacy violations.
* Develop social networking websites that are not driven by a profit motive.

**Conclusion**

* This study illustrates how our privacy rights on social media websites have become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation, commodification, and surveillance. Although our privacy has become more vulnerable, we can strengthen our privacy protections by establishing opt-in privacy policies, by creating efficient privacy watchdog groups, and by creating social networks that are not driven by a profit motive.