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Zhuoran Jiang

University of Texas at Austin, zhuoran.jiang@mcombs.utexas.edu

Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa

University of Texas at Austin, sirkka.jarvenpaa@mcombs.utexas.edu

Patricia Moravec

Indiana University, pmoravec@indiana.edu

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The Influence of Temporal Focus on Self-Disclosure on Social Networking Sites

Zhuoran Jiang (zhuoran.jiang@mcombs.utexas.edu); Sirkka L. Jarvenpaa (sirkka.jarvenpaa@mcombs.utexas.edu); Patricia L. Moravec (pmoravec@indiana.edu)

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Twitter and Facebook, have increased individuals' self-disclosure, which poses challenges to privacy. Existing literature has interpreted self-disclosure as the result of normative benefit-risk tradeoffs (Dinev and Hart 2006), however, certain SNS characteristics have rendered such tradeoffs especially complex and deviated users from making rational choices. First, SNSs are designed to be hedonically oriented, promoting the entertaining aspects (e.g., a great number of likes) (Krasnova et al. 2012) while providing little visibility on the harm (e.g., unwanted audience) of self-disclosure. Such information asymmetry leads users to a hedonic mindset, pursuing benefits and overlooking risks. Second, on SNSs, users are habitual to constant checking and immediate feedback. They become focused on the present and may discount potential consequences in the distant future (Zimbardo and Boyd 2008). In combination, the hedonic and present-focused mindsets may drive SNS users to overemphasize the immediate benefits of self-disclosure, which can put them at long-term risk from massive data harvesting. To account for these complexities, in this study, we view self-disclosure as an intertemporal choice (Loewenstein and Prelec 1992) between receiving present gratifications (e.g., access to services) and experiencing future privacy harms (e.g., embarrassment). To explore heterogeneity in users' intertemporal preferences over the two, we focus on *temporal focus*, a situational variable describing the extent to which people direct their attention to the past, present, and future at a moment in time (Shipp et al. 2009). We use online experiments to manipulate people's temporal focus (i.e., past focus, present focus, future focus) and examine its effects on SNS self-disclosure. We hypothesize that SNS users who are focused on the present (vs. the past or the future) are more (vs. less) likely to make self-disclosure. This study will provide practical implications for both SNS design and policymaking.

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