Information Disclosure on a Chinese Social Media Platform

Lixuan Zhang  
*Weber State University*

Clinton Amos  
*Weber State University*, clintonamos@weber.edu

Iryna Pentina  
*University of Toledo*

BJ Blackwood  
*Georgia Regents University*

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ABSTRACT

The nature of social media encourages people to contribute voluntarily to public web and inevitably, leaving a persistent and cumulative repository of personal information. Aware of the privacy risks, about one third of the Internet users in the United States have expressed concerns of their personal privacy. However, users are often cavalier in the protection of their own data profile. There is often a discrepancy between users’ intentions to protect privacy and their actual heavier. This behavior is often terms as “privacy paradox”. The privacy paradox might arise because users balance between risks and benefits of disclosing information on social media. Using the privacy calculus model as the theoretical background, the study examines how perceived risks and benefits affect information disclosure behavior on a Chinese social media site. In addition, the study investigates the antecedents of perceived benefits and risks as well as the effect of gender on information disclosure behavior.

420 valid responses were collected from a Chinese crowdsourcing website. Partial Least Squares (PLS), specifically SmartPLS 2.0, was used to assess the psychometric properties of the measurement model and to test the hypotheses. The study finds that perceived privacy risk is not significantly related to information disclosure (β=-0.01, p>0.10). However, the relationship between perceived benefits and information disclosure is significant (β=0.18, p<0.001). Perceived government intrusion is positively related to perceived privacy risk (β=0.47, p<0.01) while community identification (β=0.23, p<0.01) is significantly related to perceived benefits.

The study finds significant evidence that gender is related to information disclosure. Males disclose significantly more than females.

The study makes several contributions to privacy research and practice. First, the study contributes the existing privacy literature by concluding that perceived benefits and risk do not play an equal role in information disclosure, offering some explanation on the phenomena “privacy paradox”. Second, we contribute the literature by identifying antecedents of perceived risk and perceived benefit. Two contextual factors that received little scholarly attention, perceived government intrusion concern and community identification, were investigated in the context of social media privacy. Third, the study is among the first to examine privacy in microblogging platforms in China.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lixuan Zhang received her Doctoral degree at University of North Texas. Her main research interest is social media use and interface design. She has published in *International Journal of Electronic Commerce, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, Computers in Human Behavior, CyberPsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* and many other journals.


Iryna Pentina (Ph.D., University of North Texas) is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Marketing at the University of Toledo. Her research interests include online consumer behaviour, social media marketing, internet retailing, applicability of marketing theory to online sales situations, and virtual communities. She has published in the *Journal of Retailing, European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Electronic Commerce, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, and others.

BJ Blackwood received her Master of Accountancy at University of South Carolina and is a lecturer at Georgia Regents University. Prior to entering academia Ms. Blackwood was the Chief Financial Officer and co-owner of a partial hospital, managed several outpatient physician practices, and was a practice management consultant for physician offices and other small businesses.