

Behind the Screen: Dangers in The Loss of Privacy

As a member of the generation that grew up with the internet, I am familiar with the use and popularity of social media. Almost all of my peers are associated with social media in some shape or form. As a result, the topic of social media is deeply ingrained in my culture. Similarly, privacy was rooted in the culture of the United States of America since its inception. Many of the amendments protect society's innate preference for privacy, yet Edward Snowden proved that the United States of America has abused the trust of its citizens through NSA's surveillance. In light of this recent exposure, it is important for users to become aware of the impact of social media and privacy. The growing prominence of social media is correlated to the compromise between privacy and peer to peer interaction. Peer to peer interaction can be defined as any type of interaction that uses an online platform to help users communicate. These interactions have an overall negative impact on the users. Though the prominence of social media and the loss of privacy may seem related through causality, there is actually an underlying cause that causes both. The user base is this underlying cause. The compromises exist due to the will of the user. These compromises can benefit users through awareness but can also harm users through physical danger, monetary manipulation, and career interference. All of the aforementioned consequences set precedents for future abuses. Privacy is a right that users should regard.

Social media is commonly perceived as the primary cause of the loss of privacy. Correlation is not equal to causation though. Correlation states that the prominence of social media and the decline in privacy are related, but causality states that the prominence of social media causes the decline in privacy. The compromise between privacy and peer to peer interaction is not directly caused by social media. Social media has indirectly caused users to lose their privacy. Social media is the medium in which users themselves forfeit their privacy.

Users themselves are the underlying cause that causes both the prominence in social media and the decline in privacy. In the article "Social Media and Our Misconceptions of the Realities", Sanvenero argues that all platforms of social media require users to agree to the terms and conditions that the platform has set before access is given to the users. Sanvenero claims that users themselves consciously forfeit their privacy when they decide to enjoy the features that social media has to offer (Sanvenero). Under such policy, it is clear that the users are the ones causing the decline in their privacy. If at any point the users feel abused by the power of social media, they can prevent it by discontinuing its use. Tempel, a cartoonist for the popular news source *The Odyssey*, exposes users in his political cartoon for ironically blaming social media when the users are the ones leaking their own information (Tempel). In fact, many social media platforms offer its users a large amount of easily accessible privacy settings (Sanvenero). Through these settings, users have the option to choose how much content that wish to display. When users have such a large amount of choice, it is simply impossible for social media to be the cause of the declining privacy rates. Social media is not directly facilitating the loss of privacy.

The impact of the loss of privacy commonly receives a negative connotation. The impact of the loss of privacy, though, also benefits the user. Truylens and the Eeckes commends social media for being one of the quickest way to spread information this generation (Eecke). Whether intended or not, many users are connected. The ability to share a photograph or an idea throughout the entire world with a few taps or clicks is highly beneficial. Humans are social creatures and thus humans feel compelled to share their experiences with their peers. Conversely, they want their friends to share their experiences with them. Trottier believes that the large user base of social media is derived from users creating accounts due to "peer pressure, either from new friends at university or high school classmates" (Trottier, "Interpersonal Surveillance on

Social Media"). This cyclic behavior is what amplifies **the social** reach of all social media platforms. Social media isn't always just a medium in which friends can keep updated **with each other**. Social media has the power to connect large groups of people from across the entire world. Social media can raise awareness. Social media can inform. **Exposure is a type of privacy that is lost purposely**. Social media has coined the term **"viral"**. When a trend becomes extremely popular due to social media, it has gone viral. According to Deighton, the ALS Association was able to raise approximately \$115 million dollars due to "Ice Bucket Challenge" becoming viral. Victims of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis across the globe received a greater prospect for a cure as the funding for research surges (Deighton). Such awareness would be almost impossible without the integration that social media provides. **In fact, during one of the most recent tragedies, the terrorist attack in Paris, social media played a crucial role in uniting the world. Not only did social media broadcast and spread information regarding the attack throughout the world, it was the main contributing factor in the speed of distribution. On November 13th, the date of the attack, the world stood with France against terrorism. Being connected to our peers is the fastest way towards societal progression. In the event of the ALS bucket challenge and the terrorist attack in Paris, social media even demonstrated that it can bring out the altruistic nature of humans.** Exposure due to social media should not always be associated with negative impacts.

Exposure due to social media may not always be beneficial towards the user. In fact, in one of Trottier's case studies, he found that users are put at harm by being a frequent user of social media. Being an active user of social media often **puts minors** in danger of predators. Online **predators use** social media to stalk and creep on their victims. By simply becoming an active user of social media, many researchers found that the many users' email, address and phone number become accessible **(Trottier, "Interpersonal Surveillance on Social Media")**. Even

with the privacy settings that most social media sources provide, **outside sources were able to access the information of users.** On April 2011, one of the most popular social media platforms, Facebook, launched the tagging feature. Tagging is a feature that uses a facial recognition algorithms to match people with photographs that they are present in. This feature indirectly put users' privacy in risk. As long as the predator is friends with the owner of the original photograph, the predator is given access to photographs of other users, regardless of **the** privacy settings of the victims (Trottier, "Interpersonal Surveillance on Social Media"). In addition to photograph creeping, **predators** take advantage of the GPS tracking feature. **Social media** platforms, such as Facebook, offer features for you to find friends nearby using your GPS. Sanvenero **states** that these "location tracking capabilities" allowed predators to pinpoint your location and placed you in further harm (Sanvenero). The loss of privacy is often associated with one's online presence and sense of virtual security, but the risk of online predators using information leaked from social media to reach users generates a new danger. The possibilities of the user receiving physical harm due to the loss of privacy is extremely dangerous.

In addition to physical endangerment, corporations manipulate users for monetary purposes. Kryder describes how many social media platforms are recording the browsing history of its users. With the browsing history, the platforms create a profile of the user. If an ad matches the profile of the user, the ad is shown to the user. With this feature, social media platforms are able to target users with ads. Once a user goes **online the user's** habits are recorded and "total anonymity becomes impossible" (Kryder). This type of action **is manipulative.** Users should not be manipulated to purchase products **based on** browsing/purchasing history. Users should be in control of their consumption, not the advertising corporations. Users are put in serious danger when corporations, whose sole purpose is to earn profit, are able target and manipulate a large

part of the population. The user's hard earned income should be under the discretion of the user, not the corporations.

Although some users are not affected by the physical and monetary drawbacks induced by social media, essentially all users can have their profession hindered. With the prominence of social media, the idea of surveillance is much more relevant. Trottier claims that social media is a "low-risk, low-cost" method in which employers can use to profile their applicants (Trottier 69). Such surveillance is an unfair method to judge the the applicants. Parsi asserts that information regarding "sexual orientation, relationship status, and the kind of relation the user wishes to pursue" should not be considered when hiring an employee. Considering what users are likely to post, users are much more likely to post photographs of themselves attending a party than they are of them studying at a library (Parsi). As long as it does not affect their occupation, what employees participate in outside of work should not be used to negatively profile them. The core of the issue lies within the accessibility of the information. Social media has made such private information much more accessible in the application process. More often than not, this accessibility to information negatively affects the applicants. If the information is not available, corporations have chance to profile.

Of course, employers are not only scrutinizing applicants; employees are also at the same risk. Employees are discouraged from posting controversial ideas or photographs because of how easily the ideas and photographs can be associated with the employer. Baumhart concludes that social media links an employee's opinions with their professional life (Baumhart). Even the use of an online pseudonym often proves ineffective. Faresi found that the repeated use of the same pseudonym linked the account to the real life identity of the user (Faresi). The freedom of expression of the user is disrupted because social media links two completely

separate entities and relates them. Baumhart explains that employers are not illogically trying to agitate the first amendment rights of the user. Employers are forced prevent employees from posting anything that can affect public appearance of the company because of the way social media affiliates the privacy of the user with the cooperation (Baumhart). For example, controversial opinions regarding religion made by an employee of an openly pious company may make consumers believe that the company is incohesive. The opinions of employees should have no correlation to the traits of the company. Social media has indirectly linked the two together, disregarding privacy, to the disadvantage of the user.

Although it should be apparent that the loss of privacy caused by social media is harmful to the user, skeptics may still believe differently. Many of these skeptics may argue that the loss of privacy due to social media is very minor. This belief is understandable. Faresi affirms that losing privacy is part of the the movement of this generation and should be considered a norm (Faresi). The current state of the danger is not necessarily stagnant though. The consequence of today's action may magnify the impact on future users. Humphrey explains that a large portion of the perceived negative impacts are not derived from current conditions but from very likely future actions. Humphreys also believes that being accustomed to our privacy leaking is extremely risky (Humphreys). Baumhart explains that due to the current nature of the Internet, most laws regarding privacy are clearly defined. Even in the lower courts, judges "have struggled when deciding whether SNS (Social Networking Sites) users have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their accounts" (Baumhart). Many of the standards have just not been set yet. Humphrey notes that as users begin to accept their loss of the privacy on social media, they are setting precedents (Humphreys). If left unchecked, the idea of someone gathering every single

aspect of your life with a single click becomes very realistic. The true danger in the loss of privacy is the risk that users are putting themselves at in the future.

Ultimately, social media has indirectly impacted users adversely through their respective platforms. **These platforms may not be intentionally harming users but the loss of privacy is correlated to social media.** Although the loss of privacy can be beneficial to the user, when compared to the drawbacks, the users are definitely put at a disadvantage. **The fault of the impact of the loss of privacy needs to shifted to the user base, though.** Parsi's research discovered that 60% of users are indifferent about third parties accessing their information (Parsi). All social media platforms are corporations in search of profits. Such companies are under the direct influence of the consumers. The users are the consumers. Much like how voters decide the direction of a democratic society, users are the ones that have the ability to alter the abusive conventions of social media. If the idea of being barred from a job because of a post you made ten years ago or having stranger look through an album of pictures intended only for your friends terrifies you, you have the power to prevent it. You can choose not to post private information. You can request higher levels of security. You can request that social media does not reveal your information. The rights that you cherish are the rights that you keep. Do not let others abuse something you cherish.

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