

**Putting Myself Out There: Factors Predicting One's Willingness to Share Information
Online**

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Abstract

The pervasiveness of social media use has prompted extensive research examining the motivations of interactivity using this medium. The factors that contribute to one's willingness to share information are garnering greater attention in current scholarship. This study focuses primarily on factors of privacy, personal disclosure, use of the social web, gender and the information sharing habits of others on individual's behaviors. Findings of two online surveys indicated that willingness to personally disclose information and perceptions of others sharing habits were significant factors. Specifically, those who believe their "friends" are sharing information were more likely to disclose information about themselves.

Keywords: information sharing, privacy, gender, social web

Introduction

A high school outside of Denver, Colorado was rocked by a “sexting” scandal in November 2015 when thousands of nude or graphic photos of students were found in secret telephone apps (Martinez, 2015). The photos—many taken with subject consent—were shared among dozens of students, and while no criminal charges were found, several football players were implicated in the incident and a high school football game was canceled based on the number of players involved. The students allegedly shared the images with others without the knowledge and consent of the subjects—that is, the photos are just “out there.”

This incident, and many others, indicates the prevalence of intimate and or graphic images being circulated in social media. More concerning than the presence of the images, however, is the lack of control an individual has over that content. Once images of any kind are put on the social web, the author loses virtually all control over its distribution. Therefore, we are interested in whether young adults have concerns about their lack of privacy on the web, their views on disclosing personal information online and whether that concern may impact their willingness to share information.

For this paper, we define the social web as Internet applications such as blogs, SNS and picture/video sharing platforms where the primary function is social interaction—that is, online locations where an individual may obtain and share information about oneself and others (e.g., Taddicken, 2014). Young adults are often considered the most fluent in sharing information online, through chats, social media and other information-sharing platforms. This action is part of their daily lives. Ninety percent of young adults use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Pew, 2015). Additionally, the information they share online has changed over time. Between 2006 and 2012, teen social media sharing of photos, school names, where they live, email address, and cell phone numbers increased significantly. In addition, the vast majority of teen social media users share their real name and their birthdate online, at 92% and 82% respectively (Pew, 2013).

Within this climate, we are interested in learning about this population’s concerns about privacy, their attitudes about sharing information online, how likely they are to disclose personal information, and whether an individual’s gender can influence that process. Some research suggests that women and men share information differently (See e.g., Muscanell &

Guadagno, 2012), although those findings are mixed. The findings of this study will provide empirical evidence about what factors influence an individual to share information online, which will be helpful for both scholars and advertisers interested in targeting specific consumers in the social media realm.

Literature Review

Ninety percent of young adults use social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Pew, 2015), sharing and receiving information faster than ever. Use is even greater among teenagers. Cingel, Lauricella, Wartella, and Conway (2014) report that social media use is highest among teens between the ages of 13 and 17, and smartphone use has increased the use of social networks among users generally. Sometimes called “digital natives,” (e.g., Prensky, 2001) this population uses social networking sites to freely interact with mutual followers and friends as sites provide users with platforms designed to give young adults a space for sharing personal information, posting photographs, and sharing thoughts and opinions (Boyd, 2014). Even though use of specific social networking sites may change, understanding how this group engages with social networking sites and with each other through social networking sites provides valuable insights into how they form identities, negotiate status, and socialize with peers (Boyd, 2007).

Studies suggest that the social interaction capabilities of the social web--applications including social networking sites as well as wikis and blogs--are the main characteristics sought and obtained by individual users (Taddicken, 2014). In other words, the more kinds of social web applications that an individual uses, the more social interaction they are seeking or obtaining. In particular, this study examines use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter and other visual/text sharing applications.

On social networking sites, some scholars have argued individuals have full control over their self-presentation, unlike in face-to-face situations. A study looking at four Facebook features found that people with extravert and narcissist traits had more Facebook friends, wall posts and physically attractive profile pictures (Ong, Ang, Ho, Lim, Goh, Lee & Chua, 2011). The authors suggested this finding occurred because extraverts like having social interaction and narcissists like having full control over everything they posted online (See also Kapidzic & Herring, 2014).

It is worth noting, however, that some social media sites make it difficult for users to have “full control” over their self-representation. Labeled “content collapse,” scholars such as Vitak (2012) and Marwick (2011) suggest that functionality among social media sites make it challenging to keep audiences separate, and to vary content for certain audiences. While, we acknowledge this issue, we don’t find it is a large concern for the general population of young adults, particularly as it relates to this study. In fact, their online sharing is purposeful for their audiences. Therefore, it follows that some individuals believe they maintain a carefully crafted online persona, which may or may not reflect their true selves. Studies have found that the personality reflected in SNS profiles often mirrors a person’s actual identity rather than an idealized version of one’s self (e.g., Back et al, 2010; Livingstone, 2008). This indicates that the content individuals put in their SNS profiles and the information they disclose reflects not only how they view themselves but how they want others to view them. In effect, these individuals are employing social media to develop a connection with others, along with an idealized presentation of self. Both will be discussed further below.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have suggested that young adults use social media sites as a way to network and communicate among one another—along with their desire to belong (Gangadharbatla, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). Nadkarni & Hoffman (2012) suggest a dual-factor model that explains social media use—specifically Facebook—is driven by two basic needs: 1) belonging and 2) self-presentation. The authors argue that SNS provide individuals the opportunity to feel part of a group, interacting with others and feeding into their own self-efficacy and self-worth. “A drop in self-esteem serves as a warning signal of a potential social exclusion and motivates the individual to take steps to avoid rejection and improve one’s standing in the social hierarchy,” (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012, p. 245). They describe self-presentation as the continual need of impression management. That is, the motivation for individuals to share information online serves mainly as a way to improve how others see them. Each need operates independently in this model, and either one need or both may contribute to one’s SNS use, along with individual personality traits, such as introversion, extraversion and self-esteem.

Several studies have attempted to test this proposed model. Satici and Uysal (2015) proposed a continuum of Facebook use, based in part on the two factors. The authors looked at type and

frequency of usage. Excessive use of Facebook—ostensibly to feed the need to belong and need for self-presentation—can be problematic on the well-being of young adults. Lee, Ahn, and Kim (2014) examined the connection between personality and self-presentation and found that extraversion was most positively related to sharing information on SNS. More extroverted individuals were more likely to post photos, like other photos and use more communicative features of SNS. Our study examines whether these two factors influence an individual's willingness to share information.

While similar to uses and gratifications theory, this model extends its reach from a solely media effects theory into media content, as the self-presentation factor examines how individuals create their online persona. The “belonging” factor then monitors a specific gratification that the user can achieve through their use of social media. Other studies who employed this model were able to develop predictive traits of those who use social media. For example, in examining four Facebook features, Ong, Ang, Ho, Lim, Goh, Lee & Chua (2011) found that people with extravert and narcissist traits had more Facebook friends, wall posts, and physically attractive profile pictures. The authors suggest this result is due to the social interaction needs of extraverts and the control needs of narcissists. Further, the ways people portray themselves online is a reflection of how they view themselves, and self-portrayal is common among adolescents and young adults (De Vries & Peter, 2013). Therefore, the images posted by individuals of themselves may demonstrate how they wish others to see them. Using the reports of four friends of social media users, Back et al. (2010) constructed an accurate-self profile of individuals. They also used self-reports of those users to create an ideal-self profile. The results of a content analysis of the users' SNS profiles indicated the personality portrayed in the SNS profiles more closely reflected the results of the actual-self profile (Back et al., 2010), so profiles may genuinely reflect a users' personality. This suggests that the need for self-presentation may, in fact, be the need to present an actual self, instead of an “idealized self.”

Additionally, SNS use may play an important role in creating and maintaining social capital, particularly among college students. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found a strong association between Facebook use and bridging social capital, along with a general sense of belonging and interaction with a community, among college students. Specifically, Facebook appears to lower the barriers for those with low self-esteem to communicate with others and

may help those individuals form relationships with others, allowing them to feel a part of a community when previously they might not have. Thus, they may be able to build or develop more social capital with these additions. In a later series of four studies, Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch (2011), examined the relationship between social network use and a sense of relatedness with others. They found that a sense of disconnection from others drives Facebook use, and the resulting sense of connection developed through use of Facebook rewards increased use of the site.

Willingness to Share Information Online

To examine one's use of the social web in general, and social media specifically, it is first necessary to discuss the concept of "sharing." One of the key tenets of social media sites is that to participate, one has to be willing to share certain information—often a name, text, photos, and an email address. The goal of social media is for users to interact—to share. In this context, then, sharing involves the creation of content and release of that content for distribution online. We suggest that sharing is a continuum, and that individuals may have several reasons for why they are willing to share information. "Because sharing in social media often means contributing content to a persistent and widely accessible ecosystem, it is often mistakenly assumed to be an act of publicity ungoverned by conceptions of privacy" (Marwick & Boyd, 2014, p. 1054). Our study seeks to delve into the factors contributing to that continuum. That is, what makes them more or less likely to contribute information online?

As noted above, once content is shared online, owners lose control over it. For example, in 2012, an intoxicated and unresponsive teenager was raped by two high school football players in Steubenville, Ohio, one of whom posted photos of the girl on social media, where most of the online community were able to view and comment on the events (Singer, 2013). All told, more than 396,000 texts, photos, videos and other content was collected and reviewed as part of the investigation. Similarly, a fraternity on the campus at Penn State University was suspended after it was discovered that a Facebook page created by the group contained nude photos of women in provocative pictures, many which seemed to be without the knowledge of the women themselves (Garrity & Blinder, 2015). This issue of distributing material, often without the consent—or knowledge of—the subject that spawned the present research.

First, we want to look at the role of time spent on the social web as a way a factor—it certainly make sense that those who spend time online are likely to share more information, but it remains an empirical question that we wish to examine with our sample. We suggest that to share information, an individual must be willing to spend time online. Similarly, the dual-factor model being put forth here suggests that those with a strong need to belong and interact with others are likely to share more information on the social web. In fact, the model suggests that those individuals who have friends to share information will attempt to stay informed and engaged online, and, thus, share information about themselves to maintain that sense of “belonging” online.

H1: Individuals who spend more time visiting the social web will be more willing to share information than those who spend less time visiting the social web.

H2: Individuals whose friends share more information will be willing to share information than those whose friends share less information.

Online Privacy Concerns

According to a 2013 survey by the Pew Research Center, just 9 percent of teens are very concerned about their online information being viewed by a third party (Madden et al, 2013). The same study found that most teens have a high degree of confidence in the way they manage their privacy settings on social media. Our conception of privacy concerns was taken from Shin and Kang (2016), who defined it their level of concern that they can manage their personal information in the information age. From medical information to income tax records, individuals value their right to keep certain information confidential and away from the public domain. Some individuals, for example, do not want to release their age or birthdate although others have no qualms about releasing that information.

However, social media fosters an environment of sharing information and disclosing personal thoughts, which appears to be counterintuitive to one’s views of privacy. Indeed, when asked, people state that privacy is important to them, but their behavior often indicates otherwise- a phenomenon known as the “privacy paradox” (Norberg, Horne, & Horne, 2007). Complicating this is the increased use of social media data such as check-ins and hashtags to track the behavior of consumers, making the burden of protecting one’s privacy more

difficult (Madden, 2012). Approximately half of social media users report difficulty managing privacy on their profiles (Madden, 2012). Additionally, despite this, almost 60% of social media users report using more restrictive privacy settings to control access to their profiles, a finding that is consistent across age categories (Madden, 2012).

Individuals are not necessarily only concerned about the information they share themselves. Some are also concerned that private information about themselves may be shared with others by their peers—not by them (See Chen, Ping, Xu & Tan, 2015). The authors of that study note that most social networking sites do not give decisional control to users about what others may share about them, which may lead to some image discrepancies—situations where what the individual’s desired social image is different from what image the individual perceives others actually have (p. 313). This issue may, in fact, be the primary motivation of an individual’s privacy concern.

Rowe (2014) suggests that social media sites have allowed individuals to share private thoughts about others in public areas, such as SNS, with unexpected consequences—such as the subject of the comment seeing the post. “...It might be construed that comments and criticisms posted in social networking forums, because of their wider reach and persistence, are of more concern than the old style ‘scratched in a wooden desktop’ comment” (Rowe, 2014, p. 243). Based on this information, we suggest that those with significant privacy concerns will be less likely to share information online than those with less privacy concerns. H3: Individuals who have more privacy concerns will share less information than those with less privacy concerns.

Online Personal Disclosure

Scholars have argued that SNS are often used to maintain social relationships, usually that of friends and relatives (see e.g., Utz, 2015). The disclosure of information online is an important part of this process. Through a series of focus groups focused on “privacy calculus”—the process in which individuals weigh the risks and benefits of disclosing information—Spiekermann, Krasnova, Koroleva, and Hildebrand (2010) found that the primary motivation for disclosing information through online social networks is the convenience of doing so to maintain and develop relationships and for enjoyment of social network platforms. Similarly, in her study, Utz found that individuals often receive a feeling of entertainment and

connectivity from posting online, both publicly and privately. In effect then, individuals get a sense of connection from their personal disclosures, leading to their feeling of belonging and self-presentation under the dual-factor model. However, research suggests that there is a complex set of factors influencing online personal disclosure. For example, Livingstone (2008) conducted a focus group of teens and found that while younger teens relished the idea of showcasing themselves publically online through their disclosures, older teens were focused on disclosing information to project a more “authentic” identity (p. 408).

There is a link between privacy concerns and online personal disclosure. Tufekci (2008) examined the relationship between self-presentation and privacy and found that college students manage unwanted attention online not by restricting the information in their profiles but by adjusting their profile visibility and using nicknames. Using structural equation modeling to identify the role of social factors, personality factors, and privacy concerns in the online disclosure of personal information among adolescents, Liu, Ang, and Lwin (2013) have found that privacy concerns act as a mediator between personality factors such as social anxiety and social factors such as parental influence and the disclosure of personal information online. In other words, privacy concerns *alone* have very little influence on online personal disclosure, a finding similar to Tufekci (2008). Only one factor, narcissism, was found to have a direct influence on disclosure, and respondents in their survey found to have high levels of narcissism were found to disclose more personal information online than those with low levels of narcissism.

In examining other factors relating to online personal disclosure, Misoch’s (2015) qualitative study found that anonymity in personal disclosures was not a contributing factor. That is, individuals were willing to disclose personal information about themselves on YouTube, without any promise of anonymity in the posts. Similarly, work by Taddei and Contena (2013) found that an individual’s views of personal disclosure was connected to how much “control” they felt over the information process. If an individual felt he or she could manage their information, they had more trust in the SNS system and were more likely to disclose information.

These studies suggest that one’s willingness to share information may also be influenced by the level of connectivity they receive from the disclosure. In fact, research suggests that the relationship may be complex. In early research on self-disclosure on the social web, Barak

and Gluck-Ofri (2007) examined self-disclosure in online forums and found a positive correlation between measures of self-disclosure in support forum messages and measures of self-disclosure in responses to those messages. In other words, when they found messages where individuals had disclosed personal information, they found that responses included similar levels of personal information. Later work by Nosko, Wood, and Molema (2010) sought to identify and categorize personal information made available through Facebook profiles. In a series of three studies, they found that approximately 25% of the information that *can* be disclosed via Facebook is ultimately disclosed, and disclosure decreases with age. However, perhaps pointing toward the importance of disclosure in connecting with others, their research found that those seeking a relationship disclose the greatest amount of sensitive and stigmatizing information on Facebook.

H4: Individuals who feel comfortable disclosing personal information online will share more information than those who feel less comfortable disclosing personal information.

Gender and SNS Use

Rates of social networking site use are comparable for men and women (2015). However, the ways and reasons that men and women use social networking sites can be quite different. For example, in a study of the role of gender and personality in the use of social networking sites, young men reported using social networking sites to forge new relationships while women indicated that they use social networking sites to maintain existing relationships (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). In another study, Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, and Kruck (2012) also found that finding friends was the primary reason men use social networking sites but found that women were using social networking sites to compare themselves with others and to find information. Additionally, Thompson and Loughheed (2012) have found that not only do women spend more time on Facebook than men, but they also reported feeling closer to Facebook friends than friends they see daily more than men.

Women have been found to use social media to bring awareness to certain causes and issues, as a means of networking and connecting with individuals, and to create online communities. A study conducted by Holmberg and Hellsten found that in regards to Twitter and the use of hashtags, male and female ‘tweeters’ use very similar language in their tweets, but they acknowledged that there were differences in the use of hashtags and usernames. Female users

tweeted campaigns and organizations with a “convinced attitude towards anthropogenic impact on climate change”, while male users were significantly more reserved in what they tweeted about (Homberg & Hellsten, 2015).

When analyzing social media usage among men and women, women engaged in SNS more often than their male counterparts. Correa, Hinsley, and Zuniga’s study (2010) on personality traits and the social web found that women sought out social media in order to ‘forge connections with others and build a sense of community. Although extraverted men and women frequented social media sites, it was only the men who experienced emotional instability that visited these sites regularly. Men who were described as emotionally stable were less frequent visitors to SNS.

While differences in the ways and reasons that men and women use social networking sites has received considerable attention from researchers, there has not been much attention given to gender differences in what information individuals share online, and the findings above show a conflicting picture of what those differences might be. On the one hand, women are more likely to be looking for information and to maintain their relationships with others (Haferkamp et al, 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012; Thompson & Loughheed, 2012). Additionally, women have been found to be more reciprocal in disclosing personal information online (Barak & Gluck-Ofri, 2007), and men are more likely to have privacy concerns around government or corporate access to profile information than men (Tufekci, 2008), which would perhaps lead one to expect that women are more likely to share more and more personal content online than men. However, women also reported using social networking sites in order to compare themselves to others (Haferkamp et al, 2012), which might lead one to expect women to share less in order to avoid negative appraisals. In addition, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that women are more like than men to use privacy settings to restrict access to their profiles. However, twice as many men as women reported feeling regret for some of their postings (Madden, 2012).

With this in mind, we ask the following question:

RQ1: Does gender have a significant impact on whether an individual chooses to share information?

Methods

To examine the hypotheses and research question, two online surveys were conducted from November 12 to December 2, 2014 and again from January 12 to February 27, 2015. Participant recruitment came from general education undergraduate classes at two large southern universities. The total n for analysis was 536, with 61 percent female participants; 59 percent who chose white as their race, and 66 percent who indicated they were journalism or strategic communication majors.

The main dependent variable for this analysis was an individual's willingness to share content, which was created from a seven-item index asking respondents how willing (1-5) they were to put the following content on a social media platform: their names, email, photos, videos, professions, personal experiences and personal fears/concerns (*Chronbach's* $\alpha = .81$, $M = 25.03$, $SD = 5.43$).

Independent Variables: Perceptions that others are willing to share content was created from a seven-item index asking respondents how likely it was (1-5) their friends and family were to put the following content on a social media platform: their names, email, photos, videos, professions, personal experiences and personal fears/concerns ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 29.04$, $SD = 5.68$). Visiting the social web was created from a six-item index asking respondents how frequently (with range from 1, never, to 8, at least once per hour) they visited blogs, SNS, Wikis, discussion forums, picture-sharing platforms and video-sharing platforms ($\alpha = .71$, $M = 37.02$, $SD = 10.67$). The variable for privacy concerns was created as a six-item index asking respondents how concerned (1-5) they were that their posts could be seen by: friends, peers, co-workers or classmates, teachers, parents or relatives, or strangers ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 15.47$, $SD = 5.78$). Personal disclosure was created from a six-item index asking respondents how comfortable they were on a 1-5 scale disclosing personal information online, if they feel less nervous disclosing personal information, if they were less embarrassed disclosing information online, if they feel they can be more personal during Internet conversations, if they can be open when communicating online, and if they feel more comfortable disclosing personal information online rather than in person ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 15.13$, $SD = 6.35$).

Results

To examine these questions, all data analyses were conducted in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. First, Pearson correlations were run on each of the variables to determine the relationships among them. A moderate correlation was found between an individual's willingness to share and their perception of other's willingness to share information ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). Low-level correlations were found between an individual's willingness to share and personal disclosure ($r = .14$, $p < .01$) and visiting the social web ($r = .29$, $p < .01$) and personal disclosure. Visiting the social web and perception of others' willingness to share ($r = .15$, $p < .01$) were correlated, along with personal disclosure and visiting the social web ($r = .11$, $p < .01$). Finally, privacy concerns was correlated with personal disclosure ($r = .11$, $p < .05$). The full results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Partial Correlations Among Variables

	Others' sharing habits	Personal disclosure	Visiting social web	Privacy concerns
Others' sharing habits	--			
Personal disclosure	-.07			
Visiting social web	.15**	.11*		
Privacy concerns	.01	.11*	.01	
Individual sharing habits	.44**	.14*	.29**	-.03

Notes: ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$;

To answer the hypotheses and research question, a linear regression was conducted examining predictors of individual's online sharing habits. The single block analysis accounted for 25.4 percent of the variance. Statistically significant betas were found for perceptions of others' sharing habits ($\beta = .41$, $p < .01$), personal disclosure ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) and visiting the social web ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$). Specifically, those who reported spending more time on the social web were more willing to share information online than those who those who less frequently visited the social web, which supported H1. Those who perceived their online friends shared more information online were likely to have similar sharing habits,

which demonstrated support for H2. Finally, those respondents who felt more comfortable disclosing personal information online were more willing to share information online, which supported H4. There was no statistical support for H3, which suggested that those with more privacy concerns would share more information than those with less privacy concerns.

Our research question asked about the role of gender in influencing information sharing on social media. As noted in Table 2, there was no statistical relationship between gender and an individual's online sharing habits, suggesting that there is no relationship between the two variables. However, to further examine the role of gender in this study's proposed model, we ran an independent sample comparison of mean test examining how gender impacted all the variables within the study. The results are shown in Table 3. Our analysis found significant difference between men and women in their perceptions of others' sharing habits, with the mean responses for men at 29.73 ($SD = 6.31$; $p < .05$) compared to women ($SD = 28.32$; $p < .05$), which suggests that men believe that more of their friends share information frequently on social media than do women. Similarly, a significant difference was found between men and women in their comfort level with online personal disclosure (women $M = 17.01$, $SD = 5.82$, $p < .01$; men $M = 14.04$, $SD = 6.72$, $p < .01$). This finding suggests that women are more comfortable than men sharing more details of their personal life online than in person.

Table 2: Linear Regression Examining Predictors of Individuals' Online Sharing Habits

	Standardized Final Beta	Variance (R²%)
Gender (Female = High)	.02	
Visiting Social Web	.21**	
Others' content sharing	.41**	
Privacy Concerns	-.05	
Personal disclosure	.11*	
Total R²		25.4%

Note: ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$

In effect then, while gender did not have a direct effect on an individual’s sharing habits in this analysis, some differences were found between how men and women view online sharing habits.

Table 3: Comparison of Mean Tests Examining Online Sharing Differences Between Men and Women

Variable	Mean Men (SD)	Mean Women (SD)	T-value
Individual Sharing Habits	25.09 (5.83)	24.84 (4.74)	.38
Perception Others’ Sharing Habits	29.73 (6.31)	28.32 (4.98)	1.99*
Privacy Concerns	14.90 (5.77)	16.03 (5.43)	-1.68
Personal Disclosure	14.04 (6.72)	17.01 (5.82)	-3.95**
Visiting Social Web	34.84 (6.37)	33.45 (8.96)	1.33

Notes: ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$;

Discussion

This study examined what factors influence young adults to share information online. Our findings suggest that perhaps the key factor is the perception of others’ sharing habits—that is, an individual is likely to share information if he or she believes that others are also sharing information. One’s willingness to disclose personal information was also a significant predictor, as was the frequency of visiting the social web. We also examined the role of gender on individual sharing habits and found that although men and women appear to have different views on personal disclosure and perceptions of others’ sharing habits, no differences were found in sharing habits by gender.

In terms of significance strength, the strongest predictor of one’s willingness to share information was the perception of others’ sharing habits. That is, the more an individual perceives his or her friends share status updates, photos, videos and other information, the more likely that individual is to give information. On the surface, this association makes sense, as friends tend to share information in the same pattern. It is the “peer pressure” model of conformity. Similarly, the finding that those who visit the web more frequently are more likely to share information about themselves. If an individual sees other continually posting content, sharing photos and videos, there is greater likelihood that they will participate in similar behaviors.

These results are indicative of the theoretical framework employed in this study. Our findings link back to the dual-model of social media use put forth by Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012), who suggested individuals are motivated by their need to belong and their need for self-presentation. The significant finding of online personal disclosure and the perception of others' sharing habits indicate that individuals seem to be motivated—at least in part—by a need to belong. Similarly, this finding that comfort with personal disclosure supports prior work by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007), who found that Facebook allows those with low self-esteem to contribute to community discussion and bridge social capital. Although our study did not examine self-esteem and social capital directly, our findings suggest that individuals are using SNS to obtain some type of personal psychological or social gratification. Perhaps this need to belong is stronger for some than others, as indicated by Nadkarni and Hoffman (2012), while others employ SNS to gain a larger community. Certainly, the idea that one engages with social media to gain individual fulfillment or to expand his or her social network makes sense, although more research is needed to make sense of these individual study findings. Perhaps a meta-analysis would shed additional light on this topic.

The significant indicator of visiting the social web suggests, although to a lesser extent, that self-presentation is also a factor in one's willingness to share information. Our findings indicate that while time spent online is one element to this picture, to gain a fuller picture, researchers need to examine what the individual does only. If the user "lurks" in social media, only engaging minimally with others, the sense of belonging and self-presentation would likely be much less than that individual who constantly posts, shares information and actively connects with others. We suggest that visiting the social web is likely a necessary but not sufficient predictor of willingness to share information online.

Concern for privacy does not appear in this analysis as a factor of influence; thus, one's need to fit in with their peers, interacting with their friends and acquaintances appears more influential in their online sharing activities. The lack of direct effects of privacy on one's willingness to share information follows prior work by Tufecki (2008) and Liu, Ang, and Lwin (2013). However, it also suggests the need to further explore privacy as it connects to one's online activity. Liu, Ang, and Lwin (2013) argue for privacy as a mediator between

personality and social factors, but other research (e.g., Livingstone, 2008; Marwick & Boyd, 2014) suggests that privacy is intertwined with the functionality/usage requirements of the social media sites itself.

We argue that perhaps privacy may be more complex, in that other users may impact one's content. As noted earlier in this piece, recent news events such as the “sexting” scandal and the Penn State fraternity Facebook page suggest that another dimension of privacy could focus on individual fears that others will share information about them without their consent. The prevalence of voyeuristic videos, photos and texts posted without the consent of the subject may indicate a revised look at current conceptions and operationalizations of “privacy concerns.” Our findings indicated that 26 percent of our respondents were concerned about their content and information being seen by strangers. That they are not concerned about sharing content, but that the content would be pulled from their control—if it was ever in their control at all.

The low-level correlation of privacy concerns and personal disclosure did not seem to suggest that the two were binary opposites—which has been suggested in some studies (see Utz, 2015). The present work supports the idea that they are separate but related concepts. Our findings may have, in fact, been part of the “privacy paradox” discussed by Norberg, Horne, & Horne (2007) that whatever their concerns about a lack of privacy, their personal disclosure decisions are not based on those concerns. Our findings clearly indicated that an individual's willingness to disclose personal information was significant in one's willingness to share information. Privacy was not.

We argue that this finding makes sense when put into the context of the current online climate and our population. Younger adults are consistently told about the risks of strangers (employers, stalkers, parents, etc.) seeing their information, so their awareness of keeping information private and hidden from public viewing is likely high. Conversely, these individuals have grown up with the internet, beginning with chat rooms and discussion boards, so their level of comfort with personal disclosure is also probably higher than other populations. It feeds into their feelings of connectivity and entertainment, supporting prior work by Utz (2015). Thus, both privacy concerns and willingness to disclosure personal information can exist in tandem.

Further, support for the need of self-presentation harkens back to our operationalization of personal disclosure. We asked participants if they were more comfortable revealing information about themselves online than face-to-face and if they feel nervous or embarrassed disclosing personal information. This is self-presentation—making sure that one is putting an ideal (or at least approved) version of themselves out online—when that individual may not be able to disclose that information in person. Future research should delve into the type of information individuals are willing to disclose about themselves to further flesh out this theoretical framework.

What then, does this finding mean for the work of Taddei and Contena (2013) who argued that the level of an individual's perceived control over his or her information online, the more trust of SNS? That could also be the case as well. We focused on five key variables as predictors of one's willingness to share information—gender, frequency of use, other's willingness to share, privacy concerns and willingness to self-disclose. Trust and perceived control over information are latent variables that may have mediated effects on one's willingness to share information. That is, we didn't look into their individual predispositions toward these actions, which is clearly an area ripe for future research.

Finally, the lack of significant findings involving gender in this analysis warrants some discussion. Men and women were not found to share information differently, as none of our variables demonstrated gender differences. As noted above, gender findings have been mixed, so our research can add to that list. However, we did find some significant gender differences in their perceptions of others' sharing habits (men think their friends share more than women do) and personal disclosure (women have more concerns than men about sharing information). In some ways, these findings do not add clarity to previous research. Our contention was that women and men have some differing communication patterns, based in part on socialization and gender roles, and that likely includes online communication as well as in-person communication. Our findings may reflect that, but that is about all we can discern from our nonsignificant findings.

A few caveats are necessary in this analysis. First, we conducted a cohort study in fall 2014 and spring 2015 at two universities in southern United States. This method limits generalizability of this research to a larger population of young adults. We also had a

majority sample of mass communication students, which may have different social media habits than other young adults. Our findings were based on the self-reporting of respondents—thus, we did not measure their actual times visiting the web or what they actually post to SNS. Finally, we merged the datasets of the two data collections together for this analysis, which increased the total n; however, the data collections were about three months apart; thus, some element of history could have occurred between the two collection times (of which we were unaware) that impacted the results.

Despite these limitations, this study adds to the current theoretical framework on the dual model of social media use and on individual communication patterns. Mass communication scholars will likely seek to expand this model more definitively as the growth in scholarship of social media increases. In particular, the complexity of “privacy” that appears to be brought out in this research may help guide some future scholarship.



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