A Study on Privacy and Security Aspects of Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Social web has changed the concept of leisure time. As a result street neighbors have been replaced by e-neighbors and walls have become e-walls to share ideas and gossips. Despite so many advantages we cannot ignore potential threats to user privacy and security. In order to be extremely usable, such systems should have strict security and privacy policies in place. In this paper the authors focus on “Facebook” to understand privacy and security problems by carrying out a web based survey. Based on the findings from empirical data the authors propose different enhancements for the improvement of user privacy and potential threats to user account security.

Keywords: Facebook Privacy, Potential Threats, Security, Social Networks, User Data Security

1. INTRODUCTION

People in society want to socialize with each other and technology has evolved dramatically to connect people. As a result, world has become a global village. Social web has revolutionized the human socialization practices (cf. Coyle & Vaughn, 2008; Lane & Coleman, 2012; Moqbel, 2012; Gurteen, 2012; Chen, 2013). People keep on updating their status, posting information about events happening in their life. Facebook is an important social web application where users can register and make a user profile. Users can benefit from the facilities like newsfeed, messaging, voice/video calling, and picture-sharing asf. Facebook is used for different objectives by users e.g. to improve education (Ellison et al., 2007; Madge et al., 2009) to conduct business (Shih & Benioff, 2009; Weber, 2009; Michaelidou et al., 2011), managing nonprofit organizations (Waters et al., 2009; Butcher, 2009; Curtis et al., 2010) healthcare (Hawn, 2009; Chou et al., 2009; Chou et al., 2009; Krowchuk et al., 2010) political discussions (cf. Westling, 2007; Williams & Gulati, 2007; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011) etc.
Despite this huge usage there are severe privacy and security concerns by the users, which hamper the usability of these platforms. There are many studies that looked into privacy and security issues in social websites. A survey by Siegel+Gale on privacy policy of facebook found that facebook users are confused about privacy policy. Furthermore, many Facebook users found the total system of setting up privacy and security settings is confusing and tedious Siegel+Gale (2013). Acquisti & Gross (2006) found that social networks provide exciting communication opportunities, however it raise new privacy issues. They further highlight that Facebook stands out of other social websites due to its huge membership. As a result it has huge potential for knowledge revelation behavior of numerous young adults. Dwyer et al. (2007) based on their study of Facebook and MySpace found that Facebook users were more willing to describe data in their profile whereas; MySpace users were more focused towards the development of recent relationships.

Keeping in view the importance of this issue, in this paper we have focused on Facebook to understand privacy and security concerns of Pakistani users. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the details of empirical study followed by discussion in section 3. Section 4 will conclude the paper.

2. EMPIRICAL STUDY

In order to gather empirical data we established a questionnaire. We selected freeonlinesurveys.com to post our survey. We floated survey link to thousands of users. More than 370 users participated in survey to give their opinion. 341 participants were from Pakistan and 33 were from USA. Despite of our effort we were not able to get view of people from other countries due to short period of time. As a result our findings are mainly limited to Pakistani users. Age classification is important to understand responses of users. In our survey 55% of users reported their age between 16-21 years when they started using facebook. The starting age (21-30 years) covered 22% and 20% respondents were 30 + in age, as shown in Figure 1.

In our survey, about 53% of users said that they have not read the privacy policy of facebook. The main reason could be that when user sees his/her home page privacy policy is

![Figure 1. Age of Facebook user at start time](image-url)
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