Perceptions of Facebook Privacy and Career Impression Management

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Abstract. Facebook was initially designed as a social tool representing a person's social life, yet today it functions as a platform synthesizing all facets of life, including the work context. Within the frame of the social capital theory, a survey was conducted measuring Facebook users' experience, perceptions of privacy and career impression management. Results found that higher Facebook experience was related to increased levels of trust and career impression management in terms of self- monitoring and work relations. Higher work privacy was related to career impression management in terms of lower work relations and higher perceived workplace outcomes; and career impression management in terms of higher perceived self-monitoring and workplace outcomes were related to lower levels of privacy awareness. It was concluded that how one uses Facebook and one's perceived value in presenting an image of an employable person is influenced by how ones views their Facebook privacy.

Keywords: Facebook, privacy, impression management, employability, social capital theory

1 Introduction and Background

Facebook is a platform that has the potential to synthesise all facets of a person's life in one space [1]. It allows users to present an overall picture of who they are rather than present a compartmentalised image based on the audience. The content and amount of information users share are within their discretion, however Facebook's influence, reach and domination of web-based experiences has implications for user's that are unaware of the exposure they receive on Facebook, especially within the context of their work life. The onus thus lies with the user to be cognisant of their exposure online, the level of accessibility of the content shared, and the potential effects of this shared information on their work image. Facebook has already reared its tentacles in the world of work as a recruitment tool [2]. Yet in the instance of already employed individuals Facebook can be used by employers, either consciously or unconsciously, to monitor their employee's activities outside of the office, or screen content that has the potential to place the company or the employee in a negative light [3].

Thus, this paper's line of enquiry is as follows: Is the image one presents of oneself on Facebook fitting for the work context and does one perceive importance and value in presenting self-worth as an employable person. The research questions were as

follows: Is there a relationship between how one uses Facebook and how one manages one's work impressions on Facebook? Is the way in which one uses Facebook and one's view of Facebook privacy related? Does one's view of Facebook privacy relate to one's work impression management on Facebook?

2 Related Work and Theory

The Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory reveals that Facebook's appeal is inherent in its social capital value, that is, the value that is derived from ones' social network [1]. This social capital is related to indices of psychological wellbeing including self-esteem [1]. Self-esteem, as a person's overall self-evaluation of their worth, assumes that all individuals have a vital need to maintain or raise their self-esteem and strive for positive self-presentations [4]. Translated into Facebook terms, it is expected that the value acquired from Facebook influences a person's self-esteem positively, which is then emulated in the way the person presents themselves online. That is, the value derived from using Facebook results in a specific image presentation aligned with ones' appraisal of self-worth. Thus, the social value drawn from Facebook will influence the image presented, but both the value and the image will be duly influenced by what Facebook is used for and who makes up one's audience: who are one's friends, how many different areas of one's life make up this group of friends, and how many watching eyes are within this network of friends [5]. Essentially the audience is vital as it supplies the platform from which social value is drawn. In this sense, Facebook architecture is an extension on Foucault (1977) imagery of the Panopticon (within a society the effect of constant observation is constant behaviour monitoring by the observed [6]). Facebook constitutes a society where one is constantly being observed yet in turn constantly observing others too [7]. Thus, there are different categories of users: those that use Facebook to share content, and those who use it to observe. Either grouping of users is subject to the same reality, which sees Facebook allowing large and diverse friend networks requiring monitoring of one's self-presentation on the basis of the convergence of social contexts (social convergence) [1;8]. However, what constitutes a positive image will not be the same across all social groups.

Facebook Career Impression Management and Privacy

A 'socially converged' audience challenges the ability to consciously control selected activities for a desired impression on a particular audience [9]. That is, self-representing in the Facebook context is not the same as traditional impression management contexts [10]. Thus, by drawing from existing theory this paper explores the degree to which the particular audience of the represented self is work-centred. Behaviour monitoring at work is directed at increasing the likelihood of fulfilling financial and social goals, and avoiding possible negative consequences [11]. Thus creating and sustaining a desirable image on Facebook suitable for work, assumes that users will monitor their image and activities on Facebook to maintain favourable relations

at work, to present the image of an employable person or suitable candidate that is promotion worthy with career advancement prospects, and to avoid possible negative workplace consequences (such as dismissal or disciplinary proceedings).

Behaviour monitoring for a specific audience brings to focus a user's friend strategy [9]. A friend strategy is the approach employed when selecting who to add, accept, or reject as a friend. It is concerned with who a person selects to be a part of their network and the selection criteria thereof [12]. Strategies range from accepting everybody requesting to accepting only people known personally or face-to-face. The chosen strategy influences what and how much a user presents [13]. Furthermore, 'privacy control' as a component of one's friend strategy sees users determining which parts of their network can access specific information. Users can select different settings, 'everybody, friends of friends, friends only', in terms of every wall post, photo tag and status update [14]. Having the ability to select friends and what they can see, facilitates a sense of trust in Facebook and in one's friend network, thus encouraging and stimulating information disclosure [15].

Facebook's inherent privacy controversies centre on information exposure to the wrong audience. One's view of Facebook privacy directs the classification of the wrong audience and the amount of information at this audiences' disposal. How one views Facebook privacy will influence the degree to which privacy is managed, that will in turn affect the quantity and nature of the content shared, the friend strategy employed, and what Facebook is used for.

3   Instrumentation, Methodology and Results

Within the frame of the Social Capital Theory, a survey was conducted measuring Facebook users' experience, perceptions of privacy and career impression management. This section presents the sample, methods, and measuring instruments.

Participants

The snowball sample comprised of 217 participants (mean age 35.93; age range 20-67; standard deviation =12.11; male 86; female 123); of which 181 participants were recruited on various social networking sites and 36 recruited as part of a company sample. Within the overall sample of 217, 188 participants were classified as Facebook users, defined as those participants that had a Facebook account (mean=34.93; range 20-67; standard deviation=11.26), and 28 were classified as non-users, i.e. not having a Facebook account. The following industry categories were identified within the sample: 4.37% law; 7.28% human resources; 6.31% consulting; 5.83% fulfilling support staff positions (receptionist, secretary); 8.74% finance; 2.43% service industry (make-up artist, chef); 3.88% in information technology; 17.48% in academic roles; and 1.94% in advertising.

Procedure and Instruments

An electronic survey link was posted on the researchers' Facebook wall (with a network of 800+ friends) consistently over the 4-week collection period and the link was sent through private inbox messaging. It was posted on different group forums on LinkedIn as well as on the researcher's profile, and it was tweeted on the researchers' Twitter profile. The link was emailed to all of the researchers' contacts. Lastly, the link was distributed by the Director of the Human Resource Department across the corporate body of a South African based IT company. Ethics Clearance was obtained from the University's Ethics Committee. The first point of the snowball sample was the researchers' own networks which raises possible biases in sampling. This was addressed by drawing participants from various sources including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, email as well as within a company. Although the data is largely South African and raises possible generalizability concerns.

The survey comprised of a Facebook experience scale, perceptions of Facebook privacy scales (privacy awareness, work privacy, trust) and perceptions of Facebook career impression management scales (self-monitoring, work relations, workplace outcomes). It allowed both users and non-users to participate in the research by framing items in the active and passive form. Non-users scored zero (0) for the Facebook experience scale. This was done to ensure that the whole range of use/non-use was included.

The Facebook experience scale was made up of six items (exemplar: "On average, how many times a day do you use Facebook?"). The perceptions of Facebook privacy scales comprised of three privacy awareness items ("My privacy settings on Facebook are important"); three work privacy items ("It is acceptable for my superior to be my friend on Facebook"); and three trust items ("I trust that my privacy is secure on Facebook"). Facebook career impression management scales were made up of six self-monitoring items ("I monitor what I post on my Facebook profile"); three work relations items, ("I use my Facebook profile as a work tool, post my current employment, work achievements etc."); and six workplace outcomes items ("I manage my impression on Facebook because I am concerned that it may have negative consequences on my employability"). All the items were scored on a 5-point Likert type scale.

Analysis and Results

An initial pilot study (N=34; age 19-41) validated the developed scales. Cronbach Alphas for the scales were as follows: Facebook experience scale α= 0.91; privacy awareness α=0.72, work privacy α=0.71, trust α=0.78; self-monitoring α= 0.79, work relations α=0.67 and workplace outcomes α=0.83 [16]. One-way frequencies, Wards Cluster Analysis and Pearson's Correlation Coefficients were used to explore the nature of the relationships.

- ***Trends in Usage:*** Within the Facebook user sample, 67.37% reported that they had the Facebook application installed on their cell-phone; 65.75% of users reported that they instantly check their notifications; and the period between 12:00-18:00 was reportedly the time of the day Facebook was most used. This period corre-

sponds to traditional work hours indicating that Facebook has penetrated and is prevalent in peoples work life by virtue of its reach.

- **Facebook Friend Strategy**: The sample majority reported having less than 400 friends (65.89%), with the most commonly employed strategy (79.37%) being 'knowing someone personally' to accept them as a Facebook friend. Furthermore, 84.13% of the sample did not accept friends on the basis of being friends with their friends; 96.3% reported that they will not accept everybody who requests; and 17.46% of participants would accept friends they have heard of through others. Furthermore in terms of privacy controls, 80.63% of participants reported that they were familiar with privacy settings on Facebook; 82.98% reported that they have adjusted their privacy settings with 64.47% adjusting them to friends-of-friends; 55.15% of participants adjusted their settings on the basis of being generally private people, yet 61.05% reported that they did not adjust their settings on initial profile set-up; 14.98% reported that they customized their privacy settings; and only 13.33% of respondents reported that they had adjusted their settings for work related reasons. It is interesting to note that a mere 6.38% had their settings adjusted to 'friends only' even though the majority reported that they accepted someone on the basis of knowing someone personally. Furthermore, participant's network size was correlated negatively with their level of perceived Facebook trust. Results ($r = -0.18$; $p = 0.0084$) indicated that as network size increased, the level of trust decreased. Although a weak effect size, this finding suggests that a smaller network size has the ability to facilitate trust.
- **Perceived Social Gains**: 67.03% of users reported that Facebook facilitated social interaction.
- **User Clusters**: The cluster analyses conducted identified five groupings of users based on Facebook activities and level of usage. Table 1 presents the clusters and depicts advanced, high, intermediate, low and non-users based on their overall usage. This table illustrates that advanced users were most engaged across the spectrum of Facebook activities. Advanced and high users would be categorized as active users with intermediate and low users being described as passive users.
- *Correlations Analyses:* Pearson's Correlation Coefficients were conducted to explore the relationships amongst the constructs. All of the relevant conditions for these parametric analyses were met. The results are reported in Table 2.
- *Users vs. Non-Users:* T-tests were conducted to assess the difference between users and non-users in terms of their level of trust. Results ($t = 4.36$; $p < 0.0001$) indicated that non-users ($m = 10.76$) perceive higher Facebook trust than users ($m = 8.81$). This corresponds to the finding that increased Facebook experience is related to decreased Facebook trust.

Table 1. User Cluster Proportions

	Users (%)				
Activities	Advanced n=50	High n=43	Intermediate n=63	Low n=28	Non n=28
Connect	88	67	74	39	
Keep in touch	90	100	91	4	
Make new friends	24	19	7	4	
Job prospects	18	14	4	4	
Upload pictures	100	100	12	18	
Tag pictures	74	9	1	4	
Update status	80	21	16	4	
View others profiles	92	53	47	46	
Wall posts/ inbox messages	96	40	56	11	
Post links	52	14	9	4	
Alternative to email	74	16	22	0	
Use/develop applications	80	2	1	4	
Advertise	14	2	4	14	
Join groups	16	9	1	0	
Chat	50	12	28	4	
Events	72	30	13	11	
Sum Usage	9. 48	5.09	3.88	1.69	0

Table 2. Pearson's R Correlation Matrix (* Significant at $\rho<0.05$)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) F. Experience	1.00						
(2) Privacy Awareness	-0.01	1.00					
(3) Work Privacy	-0.02	-0.15*	1.00				
(4) Trust	-0.16*	0.13	0.11	1.00			
(5) Self-Monitor.	0.26*	-0.23*	0.09	0.03	1.00		
(6) Work Relations	0.23*	-0.01	-0.30*	-0.03	0.28	1.00	
(7) Work Outcomes	-0.02	-0.22	0.27*	0.99	0.53	0.06	1.00

The trends in usage point to Facebook's position in users' lives and its prevalence in the work context. In terms of friend strategy, the sample majority reported that they had adjusted their privacy settings and had a friend network of less than 400. Correlations indicated that there is increased trust in smaller networks and as network size increased, trust decreased. Non-users have greater trust in Facebook than users, corresponding to the finding that as Facebook experience increases trust decreases. The perceived social gains indicated that participants recognized the social value of Facebook, aligning with the premise of the social capital theory. Users were clustered into five groups indicating that there are varied levels of usage. The correlation analyses, although weak, indicated that there are associations between how one uses Facebook, views privacy, and manages their work impression.

4   Findings and Discussion

Table 2 shows that although significant relationships found were weak, how one uses Facebook and ones' perceived value in presenting an image of an employable person is influenced by how ones views their Facebook privacy. With greater Facebook experience being related to higher perceptions of self-monitoring and work relation, it is deduced that the more active one is on Facebook the more likely one is to perceive value in monitoring the image of an employable person and using Facebook to manage impressions within existing work relationships. A user will only present an image of themselves that they consider favourable as it facilitates and stimulates the feelings of self-worth [5]. This favourable image aligns with that of a desirable employee.

Furthermore greater Facebook experience was related to higher perceptions of trust such that the more active the user the less trusting. Trust can be viewed as the currency of social capital, which is acquired through mutual exchanges and interactions between people [5]. With Facebook stimulating interaction by way of mutual exchanges the way in which Facebook is used and the level of usage influences one's level of trust. The fostering of trust may also be influenced by one's friend strategy. 'Knowing someone personally' as a pre-requisite for addition to a network allows for a select and limited group of friends, stimulates greater trust within this network. Perceiving greater trust could also be influenced by one's network size, such that smaller networks facilitate a more trusting environment as exposure is more limited (majority of respondents friend networks were less than 400). Even though the majority of users did not limit their settings to friends only, having the ability to select who can access shared content builds trust.

One's perceptions of self-monitoring and workplace outcomes were related to low levels of privacy awareness (Table 2). That is, monitoring activities to present the image of an employable person and believing that Facebook can have real workplace outcomes are related to decreased levels of privacy protection and information disclosure. In this way, impression management is related to decreased disclosure of information as shared content is selected and managed on the basis of presenting the specified image. This shows that how one views their privacy online ultimately affects how much information is shared and how impressions are managed.

High levels of work privacy were related to low levels of perceived work relations. Believing that work-associated people should not form part of one's friend network as employers monitor activities is related to low levels of using Facebook as a work tool. Thus having a network that is free from work-associated people means that profiles do not have to be managed in line with work. Furthermore, high levels of work privacy were associated with high levels of perceptions of workplace outcomes. The belief that employers utilise Facebook to monitor employees is aligned with perceiving that Facebook can affect ones potential for promotion, career developments and possible dismissal or disciplinary action. Viewing privacy in this way will affect what information is shared and how it is managed in order to emulate the image of an employable person. In conclusion, the focus and findings of this paper explored the nature of relationships that have a direct effect on work practices and people's lives. Facebook users who recognise the link between their work and Facebook lives derive

social value from Facebook and simultaneously appreciate the value in presenting a favourable work image online.

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