

Understanding User Perspectives on Data Privacy in Social Media: Awareness, Concerns, and Behaviours

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Abstract

Original Research Article

With the increase in social media platforms over the years, consumers are becoming more aware of data privacy. We investigate user awareness and attitudes towards data privacy in social media settings, focusing on how users perceive and react to data collection, sharing and security practices. Even with greater media attention and more high-profile data breaches, many people still hand over personal information without fully understanding what it means for their privacy.

The research adopts a mixed-methods design using surveys to quantify user understanding of data privacy policies and the level of concern for potential data misuse, as well as interviews to gain in-depth qualitative insights regarding these topics. This paper studies factors such as age, formal education and the frequency of use of social media to understand how these can influence user behaviour and attitudes.

In our preliminary findings, we observed a very high level of concern among the subjects but a complete disconnect between this and what they actually do (or much to protect their privacy). There is also a significant lack of the knowledge on what platform-specific privacy policies and TOS agreements mean. The study concludes with the observation that there is scope for relaxed judgements if not more transparent and user-friendly privacy policies along with better educational tools to improve user's involvement in configuring their preferences from amongst those available.

The implications of the study are such that if people became more aware, then an increase in data security for individuals would occur and a better privacy culture may develop in digital environments.

Keywords: Data Privacy, Social Media, User Awareness, Data Security, Privacy Policies, User Behavior, Digital Privacy Culture.

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, social networks have become central to how we communicate, experience and engage with the world around us. From general demographic information to gender, sexual orientation, location, online and real world activities, personal interests and tastes, these platforms have gathered massive amounts of data (Boerman et al., 2021). Though social media helps people connect better with each other and personalized usage on each platform, concerns about data privacy have increased over the years (Bonneau & Preibusch, 2010). Frequent news of data breaches, abuse of personal data, and ambiguous privacy policy has increased the users mistrust in how these platforms collect, store and use data (Cain & Imre, 2021).

While understanding of data privacy risks has increased among people, the general user still often shares personal material at levels exceeding optimal abuse (Hollenbaugh, 2019). Users demonstrate varied attitudes to data privacy, where some pay much and others less attention (Lewis et al., 2008). User behavior, in terms of changing privacy settings or restricting information shared, is often motivated by awareness of privacy hazards (Agosto & Abbas, 2017). Yet, there is a discrepancy between privacy awareness and protective behaviors, suggesting a potential area for further research (Hazari & Brown, 2013).

This research examines multiple elements of user actions

behind data privacy on social media to what degree user awareness, the factors influencing privacy-conscious actions, and the demographic variables—such as age, education level, and frequency of social media use—that may affect these behaviors. As digital privacy concerns gain prominence, this research is timely for both social media companies and users striving to protect their digital identities (Krämer & Schäwel, 2019).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to:

1. Measure the level of user awareness of data privacy policies across different social media platforms.
2. Examine user attitudes towards how social media platforms handle their personal data.
3. Identify the relationship between user awareness and privacy-conscious behaviors, such as adjusting privacy settings.
4. Assess the impact of demographic factors (e.g., age, education, and social media usage) on data privacy awareness and attitudes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study aims to measure and describes user awareness of, attitudes, and behaviours towards data privacy on social media platforms, thus the descriptive research design would be the most appropriate. The data were obtained through a survey method that provided quantitative data on privacy concerns and behaviour. This approach of using demographic characteristics to relate them directly to outcomes allows a deep dive into the ways that factors such as age, education and social media use influence privacy knowledge and behavior. This study does not involve variable manipulation but rather a description of the perceptions and behaviors of the users in relation to data privacy.

Sampling Method

The target population comprised active social media users aged 18 and above. The sample size consisted of 200 participants, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse demographic representation across age, gender, and education levels. Out of 200 invited participants, 137 completed the survey and were included in the final analysis.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured online survey was used as the data collection

instrument, comprising closed-ended questions in the following sections:

1. Demographic Information: Collected details on age, gender, education level, and frequency of social media use.
2. User Awareness of Data Privacy: Included questions about familiarity with privacy policies and frequency of reading privacy terms.
3. User Attitudes toward Data Privacy: Assessed concern levels about data use and trust in social media platforms.
4. User Behavior Regarding Data Privacy: Explored actions such as adjusting privacy settings and limiting personal information sharing.

Responses were recorded using Likert scales to quantify the levels of awareness, attitudes, and behaviours.

Data Collection Procedure

The survey was distributed via social media posts, direct messages, and email invitations. Data collection lasted for two weeks, ensuring voluntary participation and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained before participation, with respondents aware that their data would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Used to describe the demographic profile, user awareness, attitudes, and behaviours (mean, median, standard deviation).
2. Inferential Statistics:
 - Correlation Analysis: Examined the relationship between awareness of privacy policies and privacy-related behaviours.
 - Regression Analysis: Assessed the influence of awareness and attitudes on behaviours.
 - ANOVA/T-tests: Evaluated significant differences in awareness and attitudes across demographic groups.
3. Hypothesis Testing: Statistical significance was determined at a p-value < 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

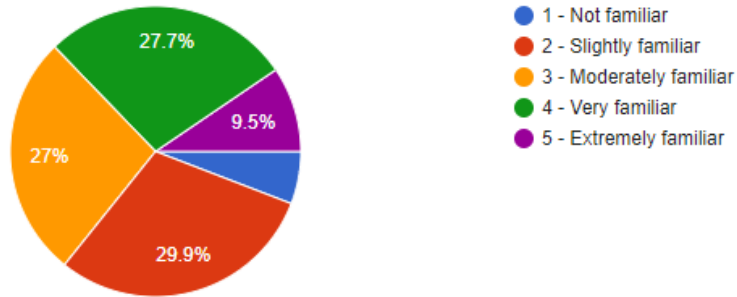
User Awareness of Privacy Policies

The analysis indicated varying levels of awareness, with only 30% of participants reporting high familiarity with privacy policies. The remaining 70% had limited to moderate awareness, indicating a gap in user understanding of data privacy.

1. How familiar are you with the privacy policies of the social media platforms you use?

(Scale: 1 = Not familiar, 2 = slightly familiar, 3 = moderately familiar 4 = Very familiar 5 = extremely familiar)

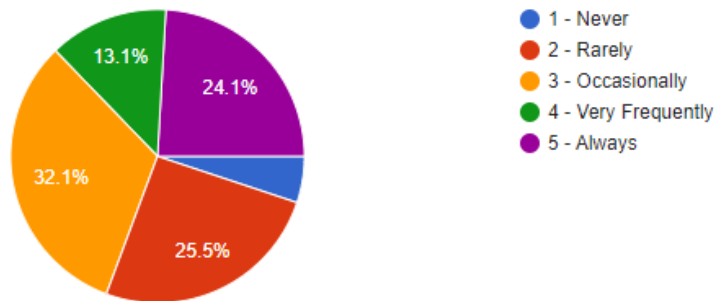
137 responses



2. Do you regularly read privacy terms when signing up for a new social media platform?

(Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Very Frequently 5 = Always)

137 responses



User Attitudes toward Data Privacy

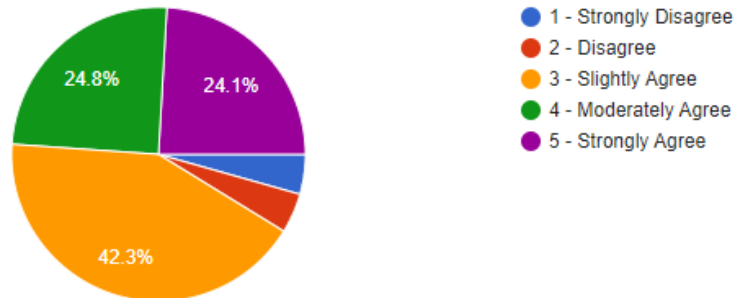
Attitudes toward data privacy showed that 60% of respondents expressed concerns about how social media

platforms handle their personal data, while 25% trusted the platforms' data protection practices. Negative attitudes were more prevalent among older age groups and those with higher educational attainment.

1. I am concerned about how my personal data is used by social media platforms.

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Agree, 4 = Moderately Agree 5 = Strongly Agree)

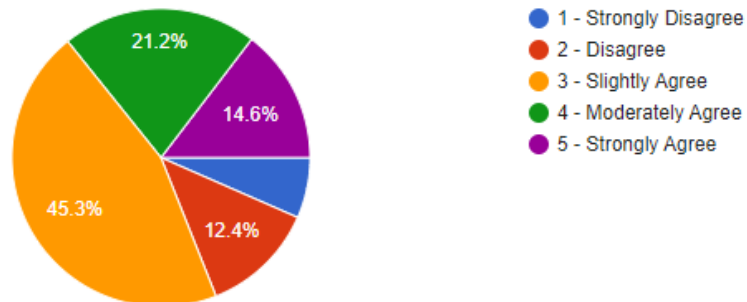
137 responses



2. I trust social media platforms to protect my personal data.

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Agree, 4 = Moderately Agree 5 = Strongly Agree)

137 responses



User Behaviour Regarding Data Privacy

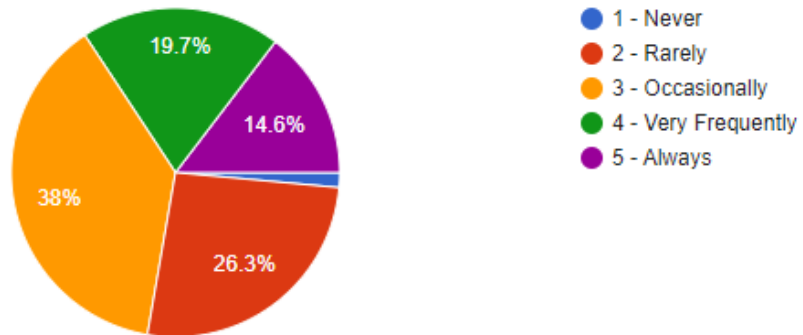
Behavioural analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$) between awareness and the frequency of adjusting privacy settings. Users with higher

awareness were more proactive in limiting the sharing of personal information. Additionally, attitudes influenced behaviour, as participants with negative perceptions of data privacy practices were more likely to restrict the data they shared.

1. How often do you adjust your privacy settings on social media platforms?

(Scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Very Frequently 5 = Always)

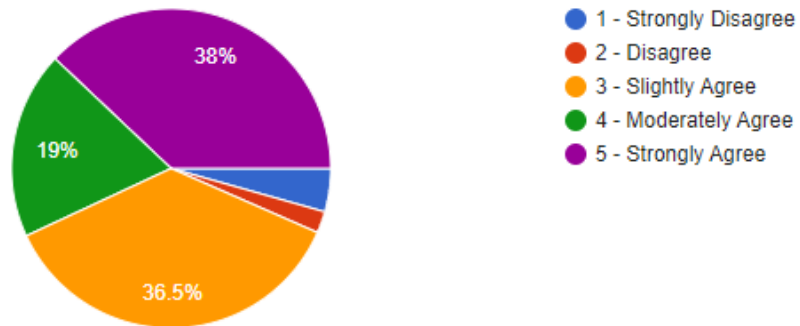
137 responses



2. I limit the personal information I share on social media due to privacy concerns.

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly Agree, 4 = Moderately Agree 5 = Strongly Agree)

137 responses



Demographic Factors

Demographic analysis found that:

- **Age:** Older participants were more concerned about data privacy than younger users, supporting the hypothesis.

137 responses

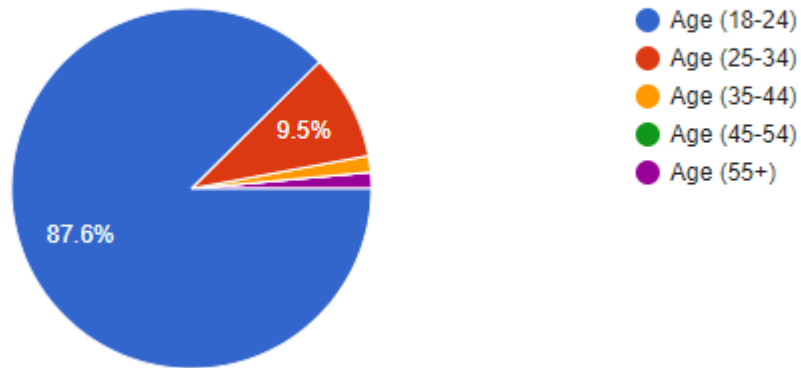


Figure. Demographic Information of 137 Respondents on Data Privacy Concerns by Age

- **Education:** Higher education levels were associated with greater awareness of privacy policies.

1. Demographic Information.

EDUCATION:

138 responses

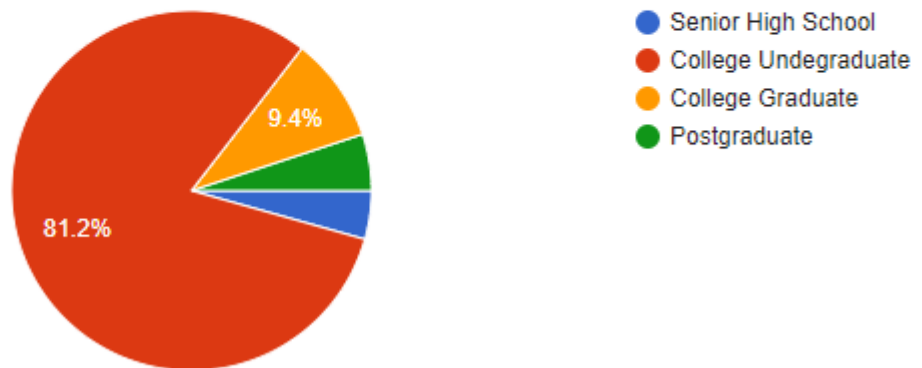


Figure. Demographic Information of 137 Respondents on Data Privacy Concerns by Education

- **Frequency of Social Media Use:** Users who accessed social media more frequently demonstrated higher awareness but did not necessarily exhibit better privacy practices.

137 responses

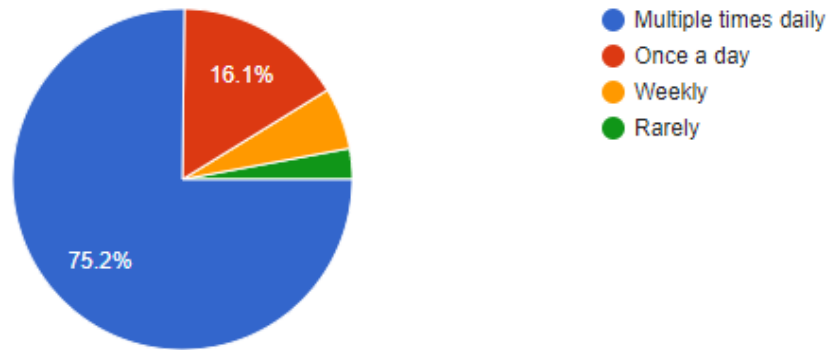


Figure. Demographic Information of 137 Respondents by Frequency of Social Media Use

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study aimed to assess user awareness, attitudes, and behaviors regarding data privacy on social media using a descriptive research design. The survey findings provided valuable insights into the level of privacy awareness among users and the factors influencing their behaviors.

Objective 1: To assess the level of user awareness regarding data privacy on social media

These discoveries revealed the very low complexity of users' knowledge with regard to data having a potential risk for their privacy, enabled by online social platforms who have access to their personal information. Most of the participants expressed concerns around privacy but showed no understanding of privacy policies and how their data was shared. Such concerns underscore the need for social media companies to be more transparent and for users to better understand their rights regarding the collection of their data.

Objective 2: To analyze the factors influencing user privacy-conscious behaviors

The results revealed that demographic factors like age, education level, and frequency of social media use have a strong influence on privacy-conscious behaviors. Where no one used social media more than younger users who did not seem to care much more about privacy risks than older users. Likewise, those with more education had significantly higher rates of adjusting their privacy settings and reducing the personal information they posted online. These revelations — which suggest that educational interventions could close the gulf between privacy concerns and actual user behavior — are part of a larger research effort.

Objective 3: To examine the relationship between privacy awareness and user behavior on social media

This study found that users who are more aware of data privacy issues are more likely to take steps to protect their personal information on social media. For example, individuals who

understand privacy policies often adjust their settings to limit what others can see or reduce the amount of personal information they share online. A positive relationship was observed between awareness and behavior—those who had more knowledge about privacy were more cautious with their data.

However, not all users who are aware of privacy risks take action. Many participants expressed concerns about privacy but still did not modify their settings. Some found the process of changing settings too confusing or believed that protecting their data was not worth the effort. Others felt that sharing personal information was simply part of using social media.

The findings showed that while awareness is helpful, it is not always enough. Although 58% of respondents were concerned about how their data is used, only 36% had taken steps to protect it. This highlights a gap between knowing and doing. To encourage action, social media platforms should simplify their privacy settings and offer clearer instructions so users can take better control of their personal data.

Overall, the study underscores the need for increased privacy education, clearer policies from social media companies, and stronger regulatory measures to protect user data. Future research could explore strategies to bridge the awareness-action gap and investigate the long-term impact of privacy-conscious behaviors on digital security.

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