CS 6474/CS 4803
Social Computing:
Social Computing Theories: Disclosure and Regulation

Munmun De Choudhury

munmund@gatech.edu

Week 5 | September 16, 2019

Why do people seek anonymity online? [People are rarely anonymous in the offline world, unless they are a criminal or a CIA agent!]

Why Do People Seek Anonymity on the Internet? Informing Policy and Design

Ruogu Kang[1], Stephanie Brown[2], Sara Kiesler[1]
Human Computer Interaction Institute[1]
Department of Psychology[2]
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213
ruoguk@cs.cmu.edu, smb1@andrew.cmu.edu, kiesler@cs.cmu.edu

ABSTRACT

In this research we set out to discover why and how people seek anonymity in their online interactions. Our goal is to inform policy and the design of future Internet architecture and applications. We interviewed 44 people from America, Asia, Europe, and Africa who had sought anonymity and asked them about their experiences. A key finding of our research is the very large variation in interviewees' past experiences and life situations leading them to seek anonymity, and how they tried to achieve it. Our results suggest implications for the design of online communities, challenges for policy, and ways to improve anonymity tools and educate users about the different routes and threats to anonymity on the Internet.

literature that exists mainly derives from studies of one or a few online communities or activities (e.g., the study of 4chan in [5]). We lack a full understanding of the real life circumstances surrounding people's experiences of seeking anonymity and their feelings about the tradeoffs between anonymity and identifiability. A main purpose of the research reported here was to learn more about how people think about online anonymity and why they seek it. More specifically, we wanted to capture a broad slice of user activities and experiences from people who have actually sought anonymity, to investigate their experiences, and to understand their attitudes about anonymous and identified communication.

Another purpose of this research was to understand the

Why do people seek anonymity online?

Category	Advantages of being anonymous	Advantages of being identified
Social connections	Avoid disliked others Avoid commitment to the community Lower barrier to new relationships Protect others one cares about	Connect to real life friends Have stronger social connections Encourages more participation
Reputation and trust	Give honest rating/ recommendation	Good for reputation building Gain trust from other users
Image building	Have control over personal image Avoid embarrassment /judgment /criticism	Avoid harsh criticism Consistent with self-image
Emotional benefit	Feel relax and comfortable Feel cool and sophisticated	Feel real, integrated Feel closer to people
Express opinion	Feel free to express views	Avoid irresponsible behavior
Privacy	Have more control over personal information disclosure	Look innocent
Security	Protect personal safety Avoid legal repercussion/spam/stalk/lost of property	Hide in the crowd
Ease of use	Saves effort to log in	Easy to remember account

Table 2. Perceived tradeoffs of being anonymous vs. being identified

Kang et al. 2013

The Secret Life of Online Moms:
Anonymity and Disinhibition on YouBeMom.com

Sarita Yardi Schoenebeck

School of Information, University of Michigan

yardi@umich.edu

Abstract

Moms are one of the fastest growing demographics online. While much is known about where they spend their time, little is known about how they spend it. Using a dataset of over 51 million posts and comments from the website YouBeMom.com, this paper explores what kinds of topics moms talk about when they are not constrained by norms and expectations of face-to-face culture. Results show that almost 5% of posts are about *dh*, or "dear husband," but these posts tend to express more negative emotion than other posts. The average post is only 124 characters long and family and daily life are common categories of posting. This suggests that YouBeMom is used as a fast-paced social outlet that may not be available to moms in other parts of their lives. This work concludes with a discussion of anonymity and disinhibition and puts forth a new provocation that moms, too, spend time online "for the lulz."

Prior work has examined how moms seek health information and social support online (Plantin and Daneback 2009; Sarkadi and Bremberg 2005). Related work has also studied the role of the Internet in family life (Boneva et al. 2004; Kraut et al. 2002; Mesch 2006). Though motherhood and the culture of information sharing has been studied extensively in offline settings (e.g. Scott, Brady, and Glynn 2001), less work has focused on how moms spend their time online. This is an important demographic to study. One-third of all bloggers are moms, older moms are one of the fastest growing demographics on Facebook, and younger moms are 85% more likely to visit Facebook than the average user (Nielsen 2009).

An interesting case of online anonymity: "*for the lulz*"

- Some of the posts on YBM are obviously playful and irreverent: *"I came home from work early and caught dh having sex with the Au Pair in our wine cellar. Should I be concerned?"*

- These kinds of posts parody the middle to upper-class woes performed by many YBM users, despite being a different demographic compared to 4chan and Anonymous.

- They also highlight a collective sense of humor and critique centered on the lives of moms.

Schoenebeck 2014

Can people be empowered when they are anonymous online?

The following stories deal with thoughts and feelings about the self, and they illustrate dilemmas about whether to reveal highly personal information about oneself to significant others (a friend, a spouse or lover, and parents). If the following statements were true of you, would you share this material? If so, when, how, with whom, and in what detail?

> I started dating a new guy from work, and it's still very exciting. We're taking it slow, so we haven't told many people. I wonder what will happen when they find out?

> I am really unhappy and unmotivated most of the time. My friends see me as a happy person. They also see me as a goal-oriented person. The only person whom I can tell about how I really feel is my husband.

> I got a great job offer in Atlanta last week. I want to talk to my girlfriend about it, but she wants to stay here, so I don't know what I'd say.

Greene et al.

Self-disclosure refers to communication of personal information, thoughts, and feelings to other people, especially in interpersonal relationships

BENEFITS

Therapeutic Effects   Socialization   Social Validation

Rewards

1. Self-Knowledge/Understanding

 - gain insight and a new perspective on oneself

2. Coping with Problems

 - lighten the "burden" of a problem

 - support/advice coming from others helps

Rewards

3. Improving Communication with Others

- the more we understand the other person, the better we can communicate with them

4. Establish Meaningful Relationships

- self-disclosing shows trust to that person, while listening to the other shows respect and care

Can Blogging Enhance Subjective Well-Being Through Self-Disclosure?

Hsiu-Chia Ko, Ph.D.[1] and Feng-Yang Kuo, Ph.D.[2]

Abstract

Based on the self-disclosure theory and the social capital theory, this study investigates if bloggers' self-disclosure enhances their social capital and if these capitals in turn enhance perception of subjective well-being (SWB). The results reveal that the self-disclosure of bloggers significantly and directly affects a blogger's perception of social integration, bonding social capital, and bridge social capital, which in turn promote bloggers' SWB. It appears that as bloggers share their inner thoughts of their moods/feelings with others through writing, they may gain greater social support and improve their social integration. Therefore, self-disclosure through blogging may serve as the core of building intimate relationships. Furthermore, social capital, built through blogging, may improve a blogger's satisfaction with his or her social contact, interpersonal communication, and overall quality of life.

Introduction

THE INTERNET HAS BECOME an integral part of daily life in today's sociotechnical environment. In the view of Amichai-Hamburger and Furnham, the Internet brings numerous positive benefits to our lives, such as enhancing the quality of life and well-being of marginal groups, constituting social recognition of individuals, and improving relationships of intergroups.[1] Liu and Kuo also discovered that individuals' social capital contributes positively to their perception of well-being.[8–10] For bloggers, it is likely that the more they disclose themselves in their blogs, the higher the social capital they can build and, eventually, the more well-being they can acquire.

Based on the self-disclosure and the social capital theories, this study investigates how self-disclosure influences users' perceptions of social capital and subjective well-being. Specifically, we study how self-disclosure influences its users

Opening Up: Therapist Self-Disclosure in Theory, Research, and Practice

Margaret F. Gibson

Abstract While most therapists report that they do disclose some information about themselves to their clients, therapist self-disclosure continues to be both controversial and nebulous in clinical theory, research, and practice. This article considers what makes therapist self-disclosure so challenging to define and study and provides an overview of the empirical and theoretical literature. It then concludes with a consideration of therapist self-disclosure in contemporary legal, ethical, and technological contexts of clinical work.

Keywords Self-disclosure · Theory · Practice research · Feminist practice · Psychodynamic theories · Humanistic theories · Sexuality · Illness · Disability · Best practices · Ethics · Common factors · Reflexive practice

In this paper, I examine some of the ways in which the concept may be defined and the theoretical underpinnings of these definitions. I go on to discuss the existing research into the uses and effects of TSD, looking first at the challenges of conducting this research, then summarizing some findings on who is using TSD, when, with whom, and with what effects. This exploration considers the impact of diverse social locations of therapists and clients. I then examine how TSD is addressed in different practice theories, and how it connects to other "common factors" of therapy and pan-theoretical ethical and legal responsibilities. Finally, I consider the impact of the Internet on TSD in the 21st century.

Research Practice and Self-Disclosure

Anonymity and Self-Disclosure on Weblogs

Summary

- The paper examines the relationship between anonymity and self-disclosure
- Two types of anonymity studied – visual and discursive
- Study utilizes an online survey of bloggers
  - questionnaire completed by 220 participants, with ~50% being 22-25
- Research questions:
  - RQ1: What is the relationship between visual anonymity and self-disclosure on blogs? Is more visual anonymity related to more self-disclosure?
  - RQ2: What is the relationship between discursive anonymity and self-disclosure on blogs? Is more discursive anonymity related to more self-disclosure?
  - RQ3: How do discursive and visual anonymities interact to potentially influence self-disclosure on blogs?
  - RQ4: How are different target audiences related to the types of anonymity and range of self-disclosure on blogs?
  - RQ5: To what extent do bloggers worry about negative consequences of their online posts? Is anonymity perceived as a viable solution to such concerns?
- Main finding: discursive, but not visual anonymity is related to the amount of self-disclosure, especially for blogs intended for certain audiences.

The Qian and Scott study on blogs dates back almost 10 years, over which Facebook has now emerged as a complex ecosystem of nuanced privacy features. How would these privacy settings impact self-disclosure today?

BUSINESS

The Future of Anonymity on the Internet Is Facebook Rooms

BY DAVEY ALBA 10.27.14 | 1:56 PM | PERMALINK

Share 48   Tweet 296   +1 3   Share 14   Pin it

Danielle Citron looks at Facebook Rooms and sees a nice middle ground in the battle over anonymity on the internet.

Released last week, the new Facebook app is a place where you can chat with other like-minded people about most anything, from the World Series to 18th century playwrights, and because you needn't use your real name when joining one of its chat rooms, you have a freedom to express yourself that you wouldn't have on, say, the main

A room dedicated to the ancient Japanese skill toy, the Kendama.

MOST RECENT WIRED POSTS

The Red Effect, in People and Monkeys

Will Breaches and Privacy Concerns Lead to the Rise of the Personal Cloud?

A Head-Up Display for Your Car That Lets You Race Yourself

The Future of Anonymity on the Internet Is

Summarily, discursive (not visual) anonymity was positively associated with self-disclosure.

Would this result of Qian and Scott hold true on newer social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat?

Class Activity 1

Understanding Social Media Disclosures of Sexual Abuse Through the Lenses of Support Seeking and Anonymity

Summary

- Sexual abuse disclosures are often difficult and delayed, causing additional emotional distress.

- Sometimes survivors never disclose their sexual abuse, or disclose it years later and when they do disclose, the response that some survivors endure often make them more reluctant to further disclose.

- Non-disclosure of abuse has negative health outcomes, while disclosure and support seeking has good psychological effects.

Summary

- RQ1. What do people disclose in abuse-related subreddits?

- RQ2. What factors are significantly associated with a post being from a throwaway rather than an identified account?

- RQ3. What factors are significantly associated with support seeking? How do these factors differ between direct and indirect support seeking?

- RQ4. What post-related factors are significantly associated with first-time disclosures (i.e., disclosures happening for the very first time offline and online)?

Summary

- There is considerable deep and detailed storytelling, emotional disclosure, and direct as well as indirect support seeking

- Significant differences exist between posts from identified accounts and throwaway accounts

- Posts including support seeking, references to attitudes toward disclosure, and posts by men are more likely to be posted using throwaway accounts

- Analysis of first-time disclosures suggests that survivors whose needs have not been met in other contexts seek tangible pragmatic support on Reddit

Linguistic Markers Indicating Therapeutic Outcomes of Social Media Disclosures of Schizophrenia

SINDHU KIRANMAI ERNALA, Georgia Institute of Technology
ASRA F. RIZVI, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Psychiatry Research
MICHAEL L. BIRNBAUM, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Psychiatry Research
JOHN M. KANE, Zucker Hillside Hospital, Psychiatry Research
MUNMUN DE CHOUDHURY, Georgia Institute of Technology

Self-disclosure of stigmatized conditions is known to yield therapeutic benefits. Social media sites are emerging as promising platforms enabling disclosure around a variety of stigmatized concerns, including mental illness. What kind of behavioral changes precede and follow such disclosures? Do the therapeutic benefits of "opening up" manifest in these changes? In this paper, we address these questions by focusing on disclosures of schizophrenia diagnoses made on Twitter. We adopt a clinically grounded quantitative approach to first identify temporal phases around disclosure during which symptoms of schizophrenia are likely to be significant. Then, to quantify behaviors before and after disclosures, we define linguistic measures drawing from literature on psycholinguistics and the socio-cognitive model of schizophrenia. Along with significant linguistic differences before and after disclosures, we find indications of therapeutic outcomes following disclosures, including improved readability and coherence in language, future orientation, lower self preoccupation, and reduced discussion of symptoms and stigma perceptions. We discuss the implications of social media as a new therapeutic tool in supporting disclosures of stigmatized conditions.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing**; **Computer supported cooperative work**; **Social media**; • **Applied computing** → *Psychology*;

Changes in Social Media Affect, Disclosure, and Sociality
for a Sample of Transgender Americans in 2016's Political Climate

Oliver L. Haimson and **Gillian R. Hayes**

Department of Informatics, University of California, Irvine
ohaimson@uci.edu; gillianrh@ics.uci.edu

Abstract

In the wake of 2016's divisive political climate in the US, media reports indicated that vulnerable people, such as the transgender population, may be experiencing lower than normal rates of emotional wellbeing. To test these claims, we analyzed social media linguistic markers of affect, disclosure, and sociality in late 2016 as compared to the same month a year prior in a sample of US Tumblr blogs documenting people's gender transitions. We find that negative affect, and words related to anger in particular, increased for trans people in 2016. At the same time, social words used to describe family decreased, indicating that trans people may have interacted less with family and friends in late 2016. Self-disclosure decreased for trans women in 2016, potentially indicating increased political language vs. personal content, or self-censorship in response to a hostile political environment. Results highlight ways large-scale external political events may impact how people communicate and disclose on social media. Additionally, our results indicate that social media data could be used to identify those most in need of mental wellbeing resources in response to a hostile political climate.

Introduction

In recent years, transgender[1] Americans have celebrated both increased visibility (David 2017) and gains in rights protections (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Yet, at the same time, trans Americans continue to face substantial discrimination and harassment, and

and genders (Landsbaum 2016; Newmark 2016). 2016 involved substantial increased attention to trans people, often in hostile ways.

To test how these factors were associated with trans participation and content on social media, we applied computational linguistic methods to a sample of 199 Tumblr "transition blogs," a genre of blog through which trans people document their gender transitions. We compared word use in a one-month period in late 2016 to the same month in 2015. We found significant differences in linguistic characteristics between the two time periods. Trans people's language showed increases in negative affect and angry words. At the same time, social words related to family decreased, implying that people may be interacting less with family and in late 2016, or at least reflecting on and documenting those interactions less. While trans men's levels of self-disclosure increased, for trans women we found a significant decrease in self-disclosure. This leaves open questions about how people communicated their emotions while potentially self-censoring content, replacing personal content with political content, or vice versa.

We show how large external political factors may have significantly impacted a group of marginalized Americans, as portrayed via their personal lives and wellbeing on social media. Social media content can be used to infer people's mental wellbeing (De Choudhury et al. 2013). Thus, we ex-

What are the differences between the two papers? Methodologically? Conceptually?

To Seek Help or Not to Seek Help: The Risks of Self-Disclosure

David L. Vogel
Iowa State University

Stephen R. Wester
University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee

Investigations into the reasons why people seek counseling have, for the most part, focused on approach factors, those variables that are associated with a potential client's increased likelihood of seeking psychological services. The purpose of this research, however, is to explore the role of avoidance factors, those factors that are associated with a potential client's decreased likelihood of seeking services. Across 2 studies of primarily Caucasian college students (ns = 209 and 268, respectively), the results of simultaneous multiple regression analyses demonstrated that avoidance factors predict negative attitudes toward counseling as well as decreased intentions to seek counseling. Overall, results demonstrate that avoidance factors account for at least as much help-seeking variance as traditionally studied approach factors.

What leads people to seek counseling? Indeed, this is a serious question given that only about one third of the people who could likely benefit from psychological treatment are recipients of such services (Andrews, Hall, Teesson, & Henderson, 1999). In addition, people often see counseling as a last resort, one to consider only after other options of support have been exhausted (Hinson & Swanson, 1993; Lin, 2002; Maniar, Curry, Sommers-Flanagan, & Walsh, 2001). Perhaps a better understanding of the reasons underlying people's decisions to seek or not to seek counseling could allow the profession to reach out to those who need services (Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000). Unfortunately, although at-

that distress, are those that increase the likelihood one would seek out psychological services. For example, individuals are more likely to seek counseling when they perceive their problems as more severe than the problems of others (Goodman, Sewell, & Jampol, 1984). *Avoidance factors*, conversely, are those that decrease the chances an individual will seek out services and therefore lead them to avoid counseling. Although not always reporting their work as such, researchers have begun to examine variables that could be considered avoidance factors. These studies include research on the impact of a client's fear of treatment (Deane & Chamberlain, 1994; Deane & Todd, 1996), desire to conceal

RISKS

Loss of Privacy

Social Judgement

Context Collapse

TO DISCLOSE OR NOT TO DISCLOSE

Benefits — Risks

— *Bazarova & Choi (2014)*

Class Activity 2

Are users of social computing platforms likely to face a tension between desire for impression management through self-presentation and desire to self-disclosure?

How do you currently navigate this tension?