Understanding South African Mobile Users’ Perceptions of Privacy and Current Behaviors on Facebook and WhatsApp
Motivation

Social media usage and device ownership rising in emerging markets [Poushter, 2018]

Most studies on user privacy conducted in resource-rich nations, on student populations [Belanger, 2011]

Few studies in resource-poor settings + most focus on Facebook only [Romanosky and Chetty, 2018] [Wyche et al, 2013] [Vashistha et al, 2018] [Nyoni and Velempini, 2015]
Goals

1. Understand how low-income mobile users perceive and manage privacy on social media platforms in a resource-constrained setting

2. Make recommendations for design of privacy settings and controls on social media platforms for resource-constrained users
Study Design + Recruiting

- Online targeted advertisements, Twitter, and locally, via research assistant in Cape Town, South Africa

- Demographic + social media usage survey
Research Setting
Research Setting (cont.)
Interview Format

• 1 Hour, on-site interviews with 52 participants
  o Conducted in English and Xhosa
  o Example questions:
    - Is there anything you avoid doing on social media? What? Why?
    - Have you thought about who can see what you’re sharing on social media?
    - Are you aware of privacy settings in any of the social media apps you use?
  o Compensation was gift card to Takealot.com
  o Analysis: Interviews were translated if needed, transcribed + underwent two rounds of qualitative data coding
Participant Demographics

Source: Momentum Unisa Financial Wellness Index
Findings

1. Mostly concerned about who could see their info

2. Major lack of awareness of privacy settings

3. Physical safety influences social media privacy
Findings: Who can see what?

• Not a single mention of privacy from provider (i.e. ads)

• Privacy viewed as ‘information control’
  o Participant 35: A new girlfriend looking at pictures on Facebook of him with an ex-girlfriend was described as a “breach of privacy”

• Major privacy violations stemming from device sharing
  o Participant 3: “My girlfriend changed my password, accessed my Facebook, and read my messages”

• Presentation of self to community
  o Participant 18: “I have too much respect for my elders and I do not want them to see pictures of me and my boyfriend all over social media”
Findings: Privacy settings

- 58% either don’t know of or how to use privacy settings
- Heavy reliance on “block” feature
- Data costs limited the ability to change settings
Findings: Physical safety influence

Social media as data storage

“"I ensure that I upload the pictures I would like to have even after my phone has gone missing”
- Participant 45

Concerns for physical safety

“I’ve heard of people luring [people I know] with fake job opportunities and kidnapping or raping them”
- Participant 25
Recommendations

● Who can see info: Add simple privacy settings
  ○ Implement post-level audience settings (Instagram & WhatsApp)

● Lack of Knowledge: Make settings more accessible
  ○ “Quickly review some important settings”

● Connectivity: Challenge “always-online” assumptions
  ○ Bring settings forward
  ○ Configurable offline settings
Recommendations (cont.)

● **Device sharing:** Improve data compartmentalization on devices

● **Physical safety:** Accommodate usage in high-crime areas
  - Alternative to “real-time” posting
  - Alerts if identifying information is about to be posted
Summary

• Findings
  o Users’ concern → Who can see what?
  o Unaware of existing controls + cannot access them (data costs)
  o Physical safety factors into privacy models

• Recommendations
  o Make settings more accessible, both online and offline
  o Improve data compartmentalization for phone sharing
  o Accommodate for areas of high crime
Questions?

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