Internet Risk Awareness as a Mediator for the Relationship between Age and Privacy Settings on Facebook

Anna Scott
Dr. Melissa Layman-Guadalupe

Introduction

- There has been a vast amount of research regarding the implications of internet privacy, of special interest to college students who are vulnerable to consequences in pursuing post-grad careers.
- Facebook is used by 80% of students nationwide and can be an aid in maintaining a reputation, building social capital, and planning a future.
- Birthdate, gender, and place of residence can be used to derive your social security number.
- Social networks can be tools for data mining, harassment, gossip, and unintentional data supply.
- Age found to be a predictor variable for standard, sensitive personal, and stigmatizing information.
- Assessment of why disclosure is high can help educate and prepare students in the future.

Hypothesis

- Risk-taking behavior is a factor that plays a mediating role in the relationship between age and the amount of information that college students disclose on Facebook.

Methods

- 66 undergraduate students distributed across all four years
- Birthdate Information
- Privacy Settings Information Checklist
  Rating from 1 to 8 (Public → Private)
  Ex: Hometown, employer, college, e-mail address, phone number, etc.
- Internet Risk Awareness Scale
  Ex: “I am concerned that the information I submit online could be misused.”

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Aspect</th>
<th>Public of Friends</th>
<th>Friend &amp; Designated List</th>
<th>Friends Only</th>
<th>Friends Except Designated List</th>
<th>Only Me</th>
<th>Internet Risk</th>
<th>Privacy Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Risk Awareness</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy Settings</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Significant correlation was found between the amount of time spent online and age: -.274
- Internet risk awareness:
  - Means comparable but consistently lower for perceived vulnerability, perceived abuse, and information finding.
  - Means were all higher for ability to control.

Discussion

- Why didn’t we see a correlation?
- Original study covered 8 networks, 4 of which were community and 4 university. Age ranged from 19-47 years.
- Students seem relatively conscious across the board. Level of disclosure depended on particular item, not on the profile as a whole.

References