Assessment of Nigerian Teenagers' Privacy Preservation Awareness on Social Media Space

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Abstract:

This study focused on the way teens in Nigeria are securing their privacy in the social media space. It considered the ease of third parties' access to users' information, what can be done, and what teens are doing to protect such information. The study was anchored on Protection Motivation Theory and used an in-depth interview instrument to gather data from 30 participants taken from teens from different parts of Nigeria but residents in Abuja. Results showed that some teenagers were concerned that their personal information could be used inappropriately by people outside of their known contacts for such activities as cyberbullying, stalking, and identity theft. Some of the respondents did not have that awareness. Among the respondents who had such privacy concerns, some did not know how to follow the privacy settings on their social media applications while some of them did not care to apply those settings. The popular applications among the teenagers in the study include WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube among others. The study concluded that there is a need to create awareness among teenagers in Nigeria on the dangers of privacy breaches, and steps should be taken to secure their privacy online.

Keywords: cyberbullying, privacy, preservation, awareness, identity theft, social media, teens

Introduction

Social media usage as a means of communication has increasingly become popular across the globe since its inception in 1997. Social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on, have provided channels for gathering information, sharing ideas and interests, and socializing across social, regional, or national boundaries (Jha, 2016). All that is required is to sign up on a social media platform to create a profile by filling out the required personal information fields, registering, and navigating through the different features. According to Hiatt and Choi (2016), the snag is that personal information provided by online users is stored in a central server that can be hacked. The information could be sold by social network providers to third parties or shared by friends to other unintended users. Madden, et al. (2013) postulate that teens share "a wide range of information about themselves" and are indeed encouraged by social network providers to do so. For example, a platform like Facebook owned by Meta, would usually ask at the top of the opening page, "What's on your mind?" and would encourage users to "Add location", "Add feeling or activity", or add "photo", and "Tag friends". Such promptings encourage users to share their personal information online, and such information may be open to the public and "non-friends", according to Hiatt and Choi, (2016). Information shared online could be used for negative purposes like cyberbullying, identity theft, and fraud, among others. The sites usually require and encourage the users to share a large amount of information and offer various levels of privacy options to the users as part of their policy. This is because, as stated by Hiatt and Choi, (2016), "a great majority of social networking deals with privacy". The implication is that social media application providers might feel obligated to provide their patrons with the ability to regulate access to their information. However, some teenagers may not be motivated to safeguard their private information due to the lack of awareness that third parties could steal their data for inappropriate reasons. Yet some teenagers are aware of the possibility of strangers gleaning their personal information, and so take steps to secure such data. Breach of privacy may expose teenagers to risks such as cyberbullying and other psychological challenges.

Several research has examined the issue of teens and privacy on social media, especially in America, Europe, and Asia (Gangopadhyay, 2014; Jha, 2016; Beye, Jeckmans, Erkin, P., Lagendijk, & Tang, 2010; Madden, et al., 2013). Areas covered by such research include teens managing online privacy; teens' attitudes, practices, and strategies; benefits and risks of teens using social media; children's data and privacy online, and other cognate research areas. However, the issue of teens and their privacy in Nigerian cyberspace has not been thoroughly examined and researched. Areas so far explored include the impact of social media on teenagers in the Nigerian context (Ismail, 2021), the impact of social networking sites on teenagers in Nigeria (Ajike & Nwakoby, 2016), parents' awareness and monitoring of teenage children's use of social media (Adomi, Oyovwe, & Igwela, 2020) among others. This study intends to provide insight into the awareness of teens in the Nigerian context about their privacy in the social media space. It is expected that this study will reflect the reality of teens in rural and urban settings such as Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria is a blend of both scenarios

Research Questions
1. What is the level of awareness of privacy issues by teenagers using social media platforms in the Nigerian social media space?
2. What measures have been taken by teenagers in Nigeria to secure the private information of personal accounts on social media?

Literature Review
Social media are platforms using web-based technologies, that provide an avenue for users to generate, modify, share, and copy content (Jha, 2016). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is anchored on Web 2.0, which allows users to create and share content. Web 2.0 are second-generation websites that rely on participation by a large group of users who are not centrally controlled, gather and mix contents from varied sources, and more intensely, network users and content together (O'Reilly, 2007). Some of the applications that operate on Web 2.0 include Hosted services (Google Maps), Web applications (Google Docs, Flickr), Video sharing sites (YouTube), Wikis (MediaWiki), blogs (WordPress), social networking (Facebook), folksonomies (Delicious), Microblogging (Twitter), podcasting (Podcast Alley), and content hosting services and many more (Lipka, 2016). These sites provide avenues for information sharing and entertainment, therefore they have become popular across all demographics and social statuses. In recent years, an increasing number of teenagers have signed onto use social media.

As with the general population, there are benefits to the use of social media by teenagers. As stated by Jha (2016), social media eliminates time and space limitations, impersonalizes identities, and demolishes social class. Their speed of sharing information is an attraction for users because they can instantly share audiovisual materials as well as pass messages of an emotional nature to whomever they choose. Teenage is the period where children build social relationships and share information, and are transiting into adulthood. The use of social media at this stage coincides with when they start to explore friendships, romance, and social acceptance, therefore, social media provides a virtual environment to improve the social and emotional aspects of their lives (Tartari, 2015). Social media can also enhance access to health information for teens, enhance learning opportunities, provide a source of entertainment, and encourage social responsibility.

But there are also dangers inherent in teens using social media. Some of the challenges that the use of social media poses include identity theft, hacking, and comment controversies (Gangopadhyay, 2014). Other dangers include cyberbullying, stalking, blackmail, and internet fraud. Social media, by definition and functions, demand that users share their personal information on the sites. These bits of information are available to site moderators, friends of the user, and others who may not be in the social circle of the user. Teens as well as other users are often required by social media application providers to fill out their names, gender, locations, e-mail addresses, profile photographs, and other personal information at the point of registering. While using the platforms, teens voluntarily provide such personal data as their pictures, locations, schools, religious affiliations, moods, relationships, and more. Teenagers have been observed to "use these sites for sharing news or any information rather than sharing (them) personally" (Gangopadhyay, 2014) no matter the proximity of these circles of contacts. Teens may sometimes feel untethered enough to share personal information like drinking or drugs or sexual habits. A study at Carnegie Mellon University asserted that social media users reveal their birthdays, phone numbers, current residences, dating preferences (male or female), current relationship statuses (single, married, or in a relationship), political views, various interests (music, books, movies), etc. (Gross, 2005).

The personal information supplied by teen users is available to the site managers as well as the circle of "friends". Some of these friends may not be people known directly by the users, but contacts from other "friends" who may have asked to be admitted into the circle of "friends" of other users. This ever-expanding circle of "friends" may increase the tendency for total strangers to have access to the users' information. Gangopadhyay (2014) asserts that "the apparent openness of users of the social networking sites calls for unnecessary attention from strangers quite possibly leading to online victimization". Social media sites make it easy for anyone to join, but they easily fall victim to the wiles of online predators like hackers (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on the Protection Motivation Theory developed by Rogers in 1975 to explain changes in behaviour related to fear appeals, that is, information that conveys the adverse consequences of a particular course of action. According to Nicaise (2020), the initial intention of Rogers for developing PMT was to understand observed health-related changes observed when people, like smokers, are exposed to fear appeal. Rogers and Maddux later reviewed the model to factor in self-efficiency as a variable in producing the observed changes. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship between different components of PMT resulting in a coping response, which is, avoiding the threat. In 1983, Rogers and Maddux revised the model to include self-efficacy as an influencing factor." Conner and Norman (2021) explain that various external (fear appeal) and internal (personality variables) sources of information "can initiate two appraisal processes" leading to an adaptive behaviour (desired change) or maladaptive behaviour (refusal to change), like in the case of smoking or stopping smoking.

On the one hand is the threat appraisal, which includes perceived vulnerability (the tendency to suffer ill), the perceived severity (of the ill), intrinsic reward (internal gains from avoiding the threat (well-being), and extrinsic reward (like saved expenditures among others); and on the other hand is the coping appraisal, which includes response costs, response efficacy (the positive effects of avoiding threat), and self-efficacy (the ability to reduce or avoid the danger). When there is a positive

differential in the threat appraisal against coping appraisal, then there will be a protective response to the message, i.e., avoiding smoking in the case of smokers.

The theory was developed for use in the health sector, but it has been adapted for use by different researchers in the field of information security (Nicaise, 2020). In the replication study of user information security study, Yang, Singh, and Johnson (2020) discovered that PMT-embedded appeals did not always elicit the expected results unless in combination with other approaches, like the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) or a combination of both PMT and SDT. They explained that SDT anchors on accountability to self, coworkers, and their organizations while PMT depends on fear appeals. Though Nicaise suggested that there might be some lapses in adapting this model for cyber security studies, for specific phenomena like phishing, Conner, and Norman (2021) believe that protection motivation is capable of arousing a positive behavioural change. Nicaise summarized the different variables and their effects in *the figure below:*

Figure 1: Protection Motivation Theory – variables and effects.
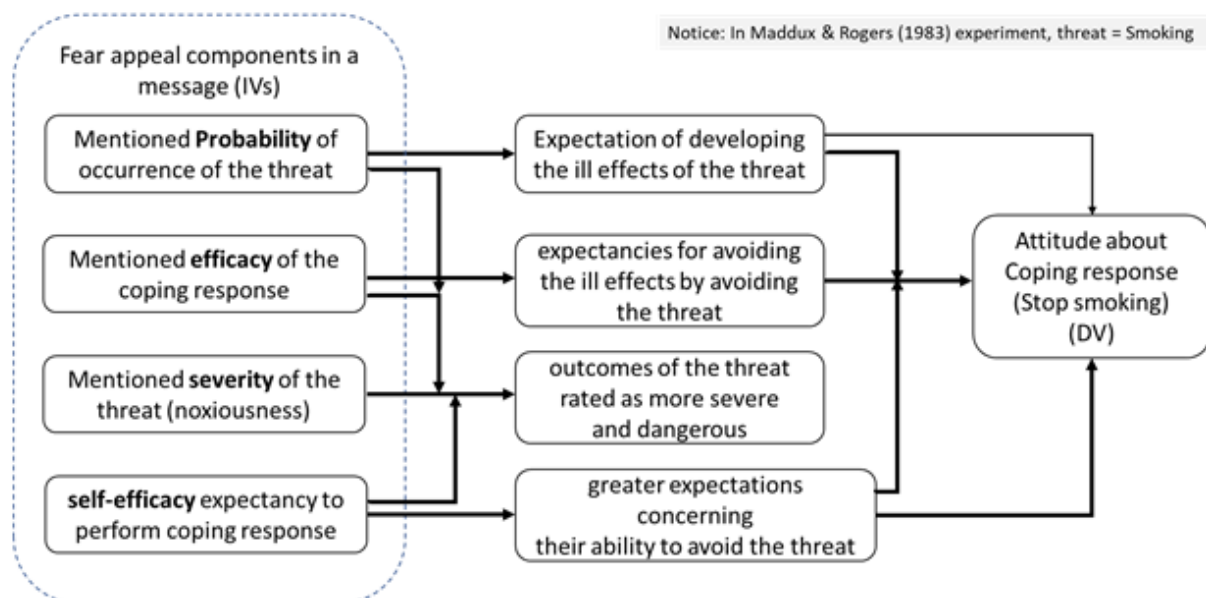
Source: Maddux and Rogers (1983)

Applying this theory to this study has helped elucidate the attitude of teens toward privacy issues on social media in Nigerian cyberspace.

Risks of Using Social Media

One of the risks teenagers run by using social media is cyberbullying and online harassment. Mason (2008), as quoted by Tartari (2015), defines cyberbullying as "wilfully using information and communication involving electronic technologies to facilitate deliberate and repeated harassment or threat to another individual or group by sending or posting cruel text and/or graphics using technological means".

Another downside to using social media among teens is sexting. (Manning, 2020) defines sexting as sending sexually explicit images, texts, emoticons, and emojis to someone through cell phones and other handheld electronic devices that can use the internet. Teen users may also be exposed to

pornography, sexual exploitation, and exposure to harmful content (Palfrey, 2010), and may be encouraged to go into sexual experimentation by third parties with access to their personal information. If these dangers lurk in the usage of social media, are teens aware of such dangers, and do they care about protecting their privacy? Regarding privacy, Beyen, et al. (2010) say that Online Social Network (OSN) users

> "have a scope in mind when they upload information. Privacy involves keeping the information in its intended scope. Such a scope is defined by the size of the audience (breadth), the extent of usage allowed (depth), and the duration (lifetime). When information is moved beyond its intended scope (be it accidentally or maliciously), privacy is breached. A breach can occur when information is shared with a party for whom it was not intended (disclosure). It can also happen when information is abused for a different purpose than was intended, or when information is accessed after its intended lifetime".

Madden, et al. (2013) report that some teens are aware of the threat to their privacy on social media, and a significant number take steps to keep their data private. They also reported that other teen social media users "do not express a high level of concern about third-party access to their data; just 9% (of their sample) say they are "very" concerned". However, teens on social media who are "privacy-aware" have steps like giving false information (fake names, age, or location), to keep their privacy. Some have deleted posts, deleted comments, removed their names from photos, deleted or deactivated an entire profile or account, and some have made posts that they later regretted sharing. On the other hand, Beyen, et al. (2010) point out that most social network providers present users with privacy settings for their profiles, but that most users do not bother to adjust these settings to protect their privacy, but "implicitly trust social network providers to handle user data fairly and conscientiously". This study assessed the awareness of teens in Nigeria about privacy issues, and how they navigate cyberspace with these concerns in mind.

Methodology
The study used a qualitative research methodology, sourcing data from 30 participants (17 males and 13 females) through a 17-point in-depth interview. Participants were purposively drawn from students in the Federal Capital territory. The in-depth interview was done over two days, at various locations. The teens participated in discussions based on the prepared questions, and their responses gave insights into the awareness and the attitude of teenagers to privacy issues in the social media space. In the study, the names of the participants were substituted with tags (from T1 to T30), and they were from ages 11 to 19. The information collected was analyzed for discussion.

Findings of the study
The responses from the participants were collated, analysed, and presented below.

Sex distribution of participants
The 30 participants were asked to identify their genders. 17 were male, and 13 were female.

Age distribution of participants
Participants were asked to identify their ages. The ages of the participants ranged from 11 years to 19 years. This indicates that the use of social media starts even before the teenage years, making the

purpose of this study, and the results, very significant to the issue of privacy protection of children and teens in the social media space in Nigeria.

Social media usage

Participants were required to indicate if they used social media applications (like Facebook, Twitter, and others) or not. 20 participants indicated that they used social media while 10 said they did not use social media. This implies that many teenagers in Nigeria use social media but there are still some teens who are not yet exposed so the usage of social media.

Favorite social media platforms

Asked about the social media platforms that they used, the participants said that their favorite social media platforms were WhatsApp – 11, Facebook – 9, TikTok – 9, Instagram – 7, Snapchat – 7, YouTube – 6, Likee – 1, Twitter – 1, Telegram – 1. This infers that the teenagers were not confined to a particular application and were exposed to whatever privacy concerns there on these platforms.

Frequency of social media usage

Participants were asked to identify how many times they used social media applications in a day. The results showed that 8 of the 20 participants who used social media said they used the platforms once a day, and 5 reported using social media 2 times a day. The other daily usages of social media reported by the participants were: 3 used the applications 3 times, 1 used them 4 times in a day, and 1 used the Social Media applications freely in a day. The weekly usage reported by the teens showed that 4 were on social media only once a day. Other weekly usages were: 2 used in 2 days, 3 used in 3 days, 1 used in 4 days of the week, 3 used in 5 days, 1 used in 6 days, while 4 used Social Media applications every day of the week. The implication here is that teens' usage of social media is not very restrictive in some cases and more so in others. That also means that the tendency for exposure to privacy breaches is high in some cases and low in others because increased frequency naturally leads to increased exposure.

Information required for registering on social media

The interviewer needed to know the kinds of information the teens were required to supply at the point of opening an account on their preferred social media platform. The teenagers relayed that they were required to register their names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, sex, age/date of birth, passwords, profile pictures, and other personal information in various combinations depending on the social media application administrators. In all cases, names, ages, passwords, and profile pictures were required. Though some of the teens did not consider this to be private information some thought these data were private but felt obligated to supply them to the administrators to enjoy the usage of the apps. The personal information supplied could potentially be accessed by people outside of the group (administrators and circle of friends) whom the users expected would have access to them.

Sharing of private information on social media platforms

The teens were asked if they had shared any private information (other than required at registration) on social media. Of the 20 teens that used social media, 12 indicated that they had shared their private information on social media, 6 said they had not, while 2 said they had not but later mentioned the kinds of personal information they shared. Their responses were classified as ambiguous for this study.

Types of personal information shared on social media platforms

Participants who indicated that they had shared personal information online were asked about the nature of such information. Results indicated that the information they shared included family activities, personal and group pictures, addresses, locations, schools, and social events. These kinds of information, if not protected, could be used for sinister purposes hence the need for online privacy protection.

Awareness of the security/privacy settings on the social media platform

Two of the participants could not continue with the interview from this point on, reducing the number of participants to 18. Of this number, 16 indicated that they were aware of the security settings on their preferred social media platforms while 2 said they were not. This shows a significant level of awareness of privacy settings on social media applications among teenagers in Nigeria.

Usage of the security/privacy features on social media platforms

The teens were asked if they had used the security/privacy settings on their preferred social media platform and from the responses, 12 of the participants reported using the security/privacy features on their preferred social media platforms, while 6 said they had never used these features. This shows that though the level of awareness was high, there was not enough motivation for some of the teenagers to secure their privacy while using social media.

Third-party inappropriate use of the information shared on social media

The interviewer wanted to know if the information shared by the teens had ever been used inappropriately. While 17 of the 18 participants said their information had never been used inappropriately, 1 said the information had been misused. T25 said,

> "I mistakenly shared my aunt's (phone) number and tried to delete it, but someone had already shared it before I could do so".

The participant reflected that the privacy breach had caused a lot of problems for him and his aunt.

Knowledge of anyone else whose personal information has been used inappropriately (like bullying, cyber stalking, and others)

In answer to the question if they had any knowledge of anyone whose personal information was used inappropriately, 6 of the participants said that they were aware of other users whose private information had been abused, while 12 said they did not know of such incidences.

Awareness of the personal information they supply on social media could be used in an inappropriate way

The participants were asked if they were aware that personal information supplied by them could be used inappropriately, 11 said they were aware that their personal information could be harvested and used inappropriately, and 7 said they were not aware.

Steps to ensure privacy on social media platforms

The participants were asked if they had taken any steps to secure their privacy online apart from using the privacy settings. While 10 of them said they had taken steps to secure their privacy on social media

platforms, 8 reported not having taken any steps. This reinforces the fact that there might not be enough motivation for some teenagers to secure their online privacy.

Various steps are taken to ensure privacy
Those who had taken steps to secure their privacy online were further asked to enumerate what they did and their answers showed that they took the following steps to secure their privacy online: 1. Used passwords, 2. Used geometric patterns, 3. Used face recognition, 4. Used their fingerprints, 5. Turned off their location locations, 6. By hiding some information from the general view, 7. Blocked or did not answer unwanted requests (friends, job opportunities, adverts), 8. Set the account to private mode.

Reasons some participants have not taken steps to secure their privacy on social media
The teens that did not take any steps to secure their privacy indicated their reason ranging from ignorance to negligence. T5, for instance, said:
> "I do not think it is necessary to secure my privacy online"

T13 said,
> "Because I am not aware of it" (i.e. that she could secure her privacy online).

T18 said she did not take steps to secure her privacy online because
> "I don't know how to secure it".

T14 said,
> "Because it (per personal data) could not be used badly"

Discussion of the findings
This study aimed to answer two questions about the level of awareness of teens regarding their privacy on social platforms, and if these teens have been proactive in securing their privacy on social media. The study discovered that while the use of social media has increased greatly among teens, there is still a significant number that has not joined the trend. Perhaps the level of education may play a part in this as most of the non-users of social media had lower levels of education. The results also show that there is no significant difference between the sexes in teenage use of social media. The study has established that social media providers require personal information as a condition for registering on their platforms. They also provide security settings for the users to secure their privacy. The majority of the participants were aware of such security/privacy settings, confirming the assertion by Beye, et al. (2010). This also corroborates the findings of Madden, et al. (2013).

Most of the respondents had not suffered any negative effects from providing private information on social media, and some were aware of those who have suffered such abuses. The majority of those who completed the survey took steps to protect their privacy. The study has also provided a balance to the assertion by Madden, et al. (2013) that a slight majority of teens took steps to secure their privacy. The study has discovered that a slight minority of teens did not take steps to secure their privacy. The reasons for this negligence were based on ignorance of the available privacy settings, or the fact they did not feel personally threatened by the possibility of such occurrences. Though the majority said they were aware that their private information could be used inappropriately, there was still a lot of naivetés among the teens about the need to protect their privacy. For instance, T14 said his personal information "can't be used badly", he did not see any need to protect his privacy. T18 did

not take steps to secure her private information because, according to her, "I don't know how to secure it". T5 said, "I don't think it's necessary", so she would not protect her privacy on the four social media platforms she uses. Based on Protection Motivation Theory, if the teens were sufficiently informed of the possibility and dangers of privacy breaches on social media, they would very likely take steps to secure their private information.

The study has also revealed that though information received may elicit a change in attitude, the steps taken may be inadequate in protecting teens. For instance, T23 has followed the right procedure by setting his account to "private". T11 applied a password on his apps as well as blocked unsolicited requests for friendship, adverts, and job opportunities, while T17 uses "patterns, password, face unlock ad fingerprints", which may protect access to the device or apps but may not be adequate to protect the information supplied on the 4 apps he uses. It is therefore clear that though some of them are aware of the need to secure their privacy, they may be ignorant about how to do this.

Conclusions

From the current study, it is apparent that the use of social media is high among teens in the Nigeria social media space. This implies that the risks that are associated with usage are also high. Some teens have shown some initiative in securing their privacy online but there are still some who are naïve and unwary of the lurking dangers in social media usage. It is very likely that if the teens are provided with enough information or education concerning privacy issues, they would respond by actively taking steps to protect their personal information.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, the paper recommends that to help teens protect their privacy, social media providers need to make their privacy settings more easily accessible and prominent during the registration process of new users. Furthermore, there must be awareness campaigns by government and school authorities to enlighten teens in Nigeria on the benefits and dangers of social media usage, and the need to protect their privacy online. Finally, proper protocols for securing privacy on social media should also be part of the information made available to them.

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