

Mitigating privacy concerns associated with the misuse of social media user data

Background

Over the past two decades, the reliance on social media platforms has become a powerful tool for connecting, communicating, interrelations and disarraying information. The use of social media networks including Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and more have engulfed the lives of over 4.59 billion people worldwide.

The growth of these media platforms have additionally opened a vast amount of access and influence into the lives of users. Sensitive data is collected from platforms to gain insight about individuals' activities, interests, purchasing habits, and online behaviors. Known as surveillance advertising, networks collect personal data to fuel media engagement, but are seen as deeply harmful and invasive to privacy.

While social media is embraced and cherished by many, some acknowledge the privacy concerns associated with user data from social media. Concerns include but are not limited to unauthorized access to information and data breaches, data mining and profiling, microtargeting, location tracking, lack of transparency and consent, and identity theft. Such hacks can result in stolen information that redirect followers to malware.

Cybersecurity managements, professionals, or organizations are important assets to protecting user data privacy. The Organization for Social Media Safety has prioritized the restoration of privacy by educating the dangers of the media and informing safety precautions anyone can take, advocating governments to adopt policies that enhance social media safety, and developing technology to provide protection against any and all social media dangers. Cyber attackers are often disseminated via bot accounts, used to collect data in order to target specific audiences.

Growing privacy concerns and skeptics have influenced social media platforms to tighten regulations and add additional methods of proving one's identity. Additionally, placing companies responsible for safeguarding personal data under greater scrutiny.

UN involvement

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has worked closely on privacy in the digital age, publishing reports designed to inform challenges in the face of human rights.

In 2022, the OHCHR published the report “The right to privacy in the digital age”, which discusses recent trends and concerns about the right to privacy, focusing on the growing platform of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Additionally, this report stresses the urgency of prohibition on the sale and use of AI systems.

The Human Rights Council adopted resolution 47/23 in 2021, requesting the OHCHR to discuss the relationship between human rights and technology standards for emerging networks. Additionally asking the OHCHR to submit a report to follow up for the next Human Rights Council committee to stay up-to-date.

The United Nations Development Group has released the 2030 agenda, including “Data Privacy, Ethics, and Protection”. This 19 page report outlines common principles for obtaining, retaining, and use of data from private sectors. Additionally, this goal is included in the UN Sustainable Goals, making it a top priority of the UN.

Useful links

UN Development Group Goals: Data privacy

https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG_BigData_final_web.pdf

OHCHR report on privacy in the digital age

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/privacy-in-the-digital-age>

UN News on Global Privacy concerns

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1007402>

OHCHR Consultation on new ideas to protect privacy

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/events/2023/ohchr-consultation-human-rights-and-technical-standard-setting>

Questions to consider

1. How is social media being promoted in my country? How does my nation feel about social media and privacy concerns
2. Are there measures being taken by the nation's government to combat cybersecurity?
3. Has privacy concerns increased in the last decade in my specific country?
4. What can be done to further measures of privacy protection? Other than increasing public awareness?

Sources

Social Media Privacy:

<https://epic.org/issues/consumer-privacy/social-media-privacy>

Social Media Privacy Issues in 2020:

<https://sopa.tulane.edu/blog/key-social-media-privacy-issues-2020#:~:text=Social%20media%20users'%20concerns%20about,security%20of%20their%20personal%20information.>

Number of social media users worldwide:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>

OHCHR Privacy in the Digital Age:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/privacy-in-the-digital-age>

Press conference on privacy conducted by OHCHR:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/privacy-in-the-digital-age>

Workshops on privacy protections conducted by OHCHR:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/privacy-in-the-digital-age/expert-workshop-right-privacy-digital-age-19-20-february-2018>