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Robert Tagoe

robert.tagoe@st.gimpa.edu.gh

Raphael Amponsah

Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, raamponsah@st.gimpa.edu.gh

Emmanuel Awuni Kolog

eakolog@ug.edu.gh

Eric Afful-Dadzie

eafful-dadzie@ug.edu.gh

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Social Media & Privacy: Understanding Privacy in The Age of Content Creator Culture

Research Paper

Robert Nii Armah Tagoe
robert.tagoe@st.gimpa.edu.gh

Raphael Amponsah
raamponsah@gimpa.edu.gh

Eric Afful-Dadzie
eafful-dadzie@ug.edu.gh

Emmanuel Awuni Kolog
eakolog@ug.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, content creators are gaining public attention and becoming highly influential. With that increased influence, it is important to acknowledge the privacy concerns within this culture. This interpretive research study seeks to identify and understand the dynamics of privacy within the content creator culture. This research will leverage information from interviews with content creators from various social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Using theories to understand the phenomena, theories of privacy calculus, privacy paradox and self-disclosure, will be used to view how content creators define and navigate privacy, strategies employed to control personal information sharing, and measures set in place to address privacy concerns. The findings of this research will fill a gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of privacy dynamics within the content creator culture. This knowledge will not only contribute to academic discussions but also inform the development of practical guidelines and recommendations for content creators, social media platforms, and policymakers to ensure a balance between content sharing and privacy protection.

Keywords

Content creator culture, privacy, personal information sharing, privacy calculus, self-disclosure, privacy paradox

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Social media

Social media can be defined as "web-based platforms or applications that enable users to create, share, or exchange user-generated content or participate in social networking" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social

media allows individuals and organizations to connect, communicate, and collaborate with others across different geographic and cultural boundaries (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Privacy

Privacy can be defined as "the ability of an individual or group to seclude themselves, or information about themselves, and thereby express themselves selectively" (Solove, 2006). Privacy concerning social media involves individuals protecting certain vital information about themselves from other users on social media (Beigi & Liu, 2020). But with some features of social media, it is difficult to safeguard vital information. Information like location, birthdays, tagging friends and family a whole range of features.

Content Creator

One keyword that may require clarification is "content creator." A content creator is a person or group of people who create and distribute digital content such as videos, images, articles, podcasts, or social media posts (Kopf, 2020). With the rise of social media platforms and the decentralized nature of internet publishing tools, content creation has grown in popularity in recent years.

Content creator culture

Content creator culture refers to the shared values, norms, practices, and behaviors exhibited by individuals who actively engage in content creation across various platforms (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). It encompasses the community and ecosystem built around content creation, including social media influencers, vloggers, bloggers, YouTubers, podcasters, and other digital content creators. Content creator culture is characterized by the production and dissemination of creative and original content, self-expression, audience engagement, and the pursuit of monetization and online success.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media platforms and content creation culture have transformed how people connect with the world. Through the accessibility of digital content creation, millions of ordinary people are becoming content creators, popularly known as influencers or online celebrities (Coppersmith et al., 2018).

While this has allowed people to share their creative ideas, opinions, and stories with a worldwide audience, it has also posed serious questions about digital privacy. In this thesis, we will explore the impact of content creation culture on digital privacy, the different strategies employed by content creators to manage their privacy, and the motivations behind content creation.

Content creation culture has given content creators unprecedented control over how their content is received by their audience, allowing them to decide how much of their personal information is shared. This has created tensions between those who seek to maintain the privacy of their online activities and those who wish to maximize the potential reach and impact of their content.

Content creators often engage in self-disclosure, volunteering personal information in the hope of connecting with their audience and gaining visibility (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). These efforts may help to secure a large audience, showcasing their ideas and stories to millions of viewers. However, self-disclosure may come at the expense of privacy, as it involves exposing sensitive personal information online.

The growth of content creation culture in recent years, largely due to the development of social media platforms, has undoubtedly changed how people interact and express themselves on digital platforms.

Anyone with access to the internet can become a content creator and share their unique perspectives, talents, and experiences with a global audience (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017).

The widespread use of such platforms has enabled people from different parts of the world to exchange information and interact with each other, thereby increasing the reach of these platforms beyond geographical boundaries (Oswald et al., 2016).

While content creation culture has given people unprecedented opportunities to express themselves, it has also given rise to some serious concerns about privacy in the digital age (Kopf, 2020). As content creators strive to build their online persona and engage their audience, many of them end up sharing personal information that could lead to privacy issues if it is not adequately controlled.

Furthermore, the audience too is implicated in this dilemma as their engagement with the content creator results in the circulation of such personal information. To address the issue of privacy in the content creation culture, it is important to understand the behaviour of people regarding their privacy settings on social media platforms. Through research conducted by Page et al. (2022), it has been shown that a significant percentage of teens are actively managing their privacy settings. 30% of the sample had checked their privacy settings within the last seven days, 31% had checked it in the last month, 17% in the last year, 6% checked when they created their profile and 5% said they have never checked their privacy settings.

The results of this research indicate that many individuals are aware of the importance of privacy and actively take measures to protect it. Ultimately, while content creation culture has enabled people to share their talents and experiences with the world, it is also important to be mindful of personal information that might be shared unintentionally due to a lack of appropriate security measures. To ensure the safety of both content creators and their audiences, as well as to protect their privacy, regular checks of privacy settings and guidelines issued by the platforms should be followed to safeguard both parties involved in content creation.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the varied definitions of privacy among content creators within the age of content creation culture.
2. To identify the strategies utilized by content creators to manage the sharing of personal information on their content.
3. To examine the measures implemented by content creators to address and mitigate privacy concerns for themselves and their audience.

QUESTIONS

1. How do content creators define privacy in the context of content creation culture, and how does this definition influence their online behaviour and content creation?
2. What strategies do content creators employ to balance sharing personal information and protecting their privacy, both in terms of their personal information and the privacy of others?
3. What are the privacy concerns faced by content creators and their audience, and how do content creators address or mitigate these concerns?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The following theoretical frameworks were used in this article;

Privacy calculus theory

Privacy calculus theory is a theoretical framework that examines how individuals make decisions about sharing personal information by weighing the potential benefits against perceived threats to their privacy (Gutierrez et al., 2019). In other words, it provides a structured approach to understanding the trade-off individuals make between the advantages they expect to gain from disclosing personal information and the risks they perceive in terms of privacy violations.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the trade-off between the benefits of storing and sharing historical moments and the possible loss of privacy when individuals have limited control over the data saved on social media sites (Ma et al., 2021). This is consistent with the thesis' investigation of the issues and implications of information exposure on social media and the necessity of understanding and managing privacy concerns in this context.

By combining privacy calculus theory, which provides an adequate structure for understanding the factors that influence content creators' decisions about self-disclosure. It considers the complicated mix of privacy issues, authenticity, entrepreneurial spirit, and the numerous aspects of self-disclosure. This method improves our understanding of the incentives and factors that drive self-disclosure behaviours in the context of social media and content creation.

Privacy paradox theory

The privacy paradox theory proposes that individuals value their privacy and are concerned about the potential risks of sharing personal information online, yet they continue to use social media and share personal information. Studies have shown that content creators are particularly prone to the privacy paradox, as they often use social media as a tool for self-promotion and building their brand (Alić & Sopić, 2023). This theory suggests that content creators may be willing to sacrifice some aspects of their privacy in exchange for the benefits of social media use.

Content creators, like other social media users, value their privacy and are concerned about the implications of sharing personal information online. They do, however, understand the benefits of social media use, such as more exposure, audience interaction, and monetization opportunities (McKee et al., 2023).

Self-disclosure theory

According to self-disclosure theory, people use social media platforms to share personal data and content to develop and maintain social interactions (Tsay-Vogel et al., 2018). This notion is important for those who create content that relies on self-disclosure to build their brand and engage with their audience. However, because personal data and content shared on social media can be seen by a wide range of people, this activity poses potential privacy risks. As a result, content creators have to proceed cautiously between self-disclosure and privacy protection.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Snowball sampling was chosen as the sampling strategy for this study. This strategy is appropriate for small and hard-to-reach populations, such as content creators, as it involves utilizing networks of existing contacts to identify participants with the desired characteristics. After an initial pool of participants who

met certain criteria was identified, these participants were requested to refer other content producers who met the same criteria. This process was repeated until a sample of adequate size was obtained.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the chosen content creators. A semi-structured interview offers the flexibility to explore topics in more depth while also having established questions to ensure data consistency. Audio recordings were made of the interviews with the participants' permission to ensure accurate data capture.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This method involves coding text responses from interviews to create themes, which can then be analyzed to extract significant insights. The analysis process followed repetitive steps: data familiarization, coding, theme creation, and interpretation.

In conclusion, the sampling strategy used in this research study was snowball sampling to identify content creators who met certain criteria for participation. Data collection was affected through semi-structured interviews with the participants, which were audio-recorded with their permission. Thematic analysis was used to conduct a qualitative assessment of the data collected, extracting significant insights.

DATA GATHERING

In this research, five content creators were finalized to be interviewed that met the criteria - active during the month of the interview with content creation over a year with over a hundred subscribed followers on their platforms and posting content frequently on at least one of the platforms like, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok or YouTube.

The interviews were conducted in a span of 40 minutes to an hour and each of them was recorded and then transcribed to suit the analysis of this particular chapter. The interviews enabled us to gain valuable insight into how content creators manage their time and creatively produce content and how they perceive success.

Furthermore, it was important in understanding how content creators use their platforms to reach and engage with their audiences. The interviews also allowed the content creators to explain their approaches to developing new content, and how they use analytics, audience feedback and various other strategies to improve their content and grow their platforms.

The interview session also enabled us to collect first-hand information that helped to provide a deeper understanding of the content creators and their passions, aspirations and the stories behind the creation of each of their pieces of work. It was also important to understand the rewards and challenges they faced in their respective roles and the various ways that they sought to expand their respective platforms. The interviews offered a lot of insight into how content creators use their platforms and allow them to interact with their audience. In conclusion, the data gathered through this process allowed us to gain a better understanding of the content creators' processes and strategies in using their respective platforms.

FINDINGS

Case 1

In today's digital age, the rise of social media has paved the way for content creators such as CC1 to share their ideas and creative works with audiences across the globe. CC1, who holds a degree in photography

and has been posting content for over 8 years with 9,500 followers on Instagram, has worked with some noted celebrities from the music industry and posts content of events like parties, weddings and graduation ceremonies across Instagram and Facebook.

Content created by CC1 falls under the categories of beauty, fashion and entertainment and this interview explores the concept of privacy in the context of content creation culture. Throughout the conversation, CC1 explained that privacy involves engaging in content creation that is in line with one's morals and integrity and is willing to share with the world. In this regard, he spoke about the need for content creators to limit their personal information as much as possible when posting content on social media.

Furthermore, CC1 acknowledged that social media platforms provide certain features such as the option of making pages public or private, however, these options are entirely in the hands of the content creator to control the visibility of their content. He reiterated the importance of protecting privacy, as it is in the hands of the social media user and content creator to do so.

In conclusion, this interview provided insight into the notions of privacy and the role it has in content creation culture. As content creators share content over various social media platforms, privacy measures should be taken into consideration to protect the privacy of the user and those of the people part of, or involved in the content shared. This reiterates the notion that it is in the hands of the user to maintain and protect the privacy of their content and that of others while engaging in content creation on social media.

Case 2

Content creator 2 is known as “oneman1000” on his various social media platforms. He has 10,400 followers on Instagram and he has 488 posts on the same platform. He does video content, editing, and music and uses platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn for corporate purposes. He defines privacy as remaining comfortable with the whole world knowing this about him.

When it comes to managing his privacy, he has a support system of close friends who screen his content before it goes out and he also portrays his Christian beliefs in his content. In terms of protecting himself, he deletes posts if he contains sensitive information that he doesn't want the whole world to know and he also blocks and put offensive users on mute.

When it comes to the influence of content creation on privacy, CC2 believes that the issue is underrated in Ghana. He believes that more awareness needs to be created around protecting personal privacy online and content creators can be the ones to bridge this gap by educating their audience. Finally, he suggested that social media platforms should enforce stricter verification processes for content creators with a certain level of following and stature to keep their privacy secure.

Overall, this was an insightful interview about online privacy and the role of content creators in promoting it. Through his experience, CC2 highlighted the importance of authenticity and transparency in the content creator culture while still maintaining personal boundaries. He also emphasized the need for greater awareness around the issue of online privacy and the critical role that content creators can play in educating and protecting their followers.

Case 3

The content creator (CC3) discussed various aspects of his content creation experience, focusing on effective strategies to manage and maintain privacy while creating content on social media. CC3 prefers

to maintain an online persona rather than linking his content directly to him to balance the benefits of his recognition as a creator with personal safety and privacy.

Strategies to protect privacy include blurring faces on pictures and videos and cropping out sensitive content while approaching individual post topics carefully to limit the reach and impact of the content. CC3 also highlighted the risk of personal attacks and privacy invasion by social media users. He emphasized the importance of familiarizing yourself with the platform's community guidelines to protect not only yourself but the audience as well.

Moreover, he points out that content creators need to respect the privacy of others when choosing and sharing content, for example asking celebrities for permission before sharing pictures or videos taken of them. When it comes to managing digital privacy for oneself, CC3 stresses the importance of building trust with the audience by selectively sharing content with close friends and private accounts. This way, content creators can ensure authenticity and transparency, while still preserving the privacy of their content. He also encourages social media platforms to prioritize user privacy and protect sensitive information. Through the interview, CC3 emphasizes that when creating content, content creators should think deeply about the implications of making their content public and the impact it could have on both themselves and their audience. It's important to remember to balance the need for recognition and visibility with the right to privacy, as well as respect for the privacy of others.

Case 4

Privacy holds diverse meanings for content creators, influencing their online behaviour and content production. CC4, an Instagram content creator with over ten thousand followers, engages their audience through live videos and vlogs showcasing its daily routines and special occasions.

Starting small, CC4 leveraged its school's popularity to expand its online presence. In the context of content creation culture, privacy is defined as the control individuals have over sharing personal information on social media platforms and managing content visibility. Platforms like Instagram and Snapchat offer customizable privacy settings, allowing users to determine who can view their posts, stories, and comments. Content creators must strike a balance between sharing personal information and safeguarding their privacy, considering potential risks such as hacking, identity theft, and online harassment. They should also respect their audience's privacy, refraining from sharing sensitive information without consent.

The culture of content creation can blur boundaries between private and public life, driven by the influence of social media platforms and the desire for attention. Content creators play an active role in promoting privacy by being mindful of shared information and educating their followers on privacy settings. Social media platforms should enhance privacy features, transparency, and security measures to protect users' personal information. Collaboration between content creators and platforms is crucial to create a safer digital environment that respects privacy while fostering content sharing. By navigating the complexities of privacy, content creators and platforms can ensure personal data protection and audience privacy in the age of content creation culture.

Case 5

Content creator CC5 finds comedy a great way to express herself. She mostly uses TikTok to post comedic content, including reaction videos and then shares these videos on WhatsApp and Facebook. She values her privacy highly, so her postings never contain anything overly personal about herself or anyone else.

In addition, CC5 is careful about not showing anything that could display a lifestyle or holiday destination that may make others feel jealous.

CC5 emphasizes the need to be mindful of what you post online – don't share more than you are comfortable with revealing. She also believes content creators could help protect their followers by being aware of the implications of online privacy. Trust and transparency when sharing information or experiences are imperative and CC5 recommends asking for permission to share anything.

Overall, CC5 has a positive outlook on content creation and values her privacy and that of her followers. She understands the power of social media and wants to ensure it is used in the right way. Finally, her advice is to think twice before sharing anything online, maintain trust and transparency and always be sure to obtain permission before publishing any content.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the interviews with content creators highlight several key issues and problems related to privacy in the context of content creation culture. These issues can be analyzed and discussed concerning the concepts of privacy calculus, privacy paradox, and self-disclosure theories.

One common theme that emerges from the interviews is the concept of privacy as a personal decision and the need for content creators to balance the sharing of personal information with the protection of their privacy. CC1 emphasizes the importance of limiting personal information while engaging in content creation, highlighting the idea of privacy calculus. According to privacy calculus theory, individuals weigh the potential benefits and risks of sharing personal information before making a decision. Content creators like CC1 are aware of the risks associated with oversharing and actively choose to limit their personal information to protect their privacy.

On the other hand, CC2 presents a different perspective, considering privacy as being comfortable with the whole world knowing about them. This view aligns with the privacy paradox, which suggests that individuals may claim to value privacy but engage in behaviors that contradict their stated preferences. CC2's willingness to share personal information indicates a reduced concern for privacy compared to other content creators. The privacy paradox highlights the complex relationship between individuals' attitudes towards privacy and their actual behaviors.

CC3 offers insights into self-disclosure theories, emphasizing the importance of selectively sharing content and building trust with the audience. By blurring faces and cropping sensitive content, CC3 demonstrates the strategic management of self-disclosure to maintain privacy. Self-disclosure theories suggest that individuals disclose personal information based on their perception of social norms, the level of trust, and the desired self-presentation. CC3's approach aligns with the notion of strategic self-disclosure, where content creators carefully choose what to share to protect their privacy while still connecting with their audience.

The interviews also raise concerns about the potential risks and negative consequences of oversharing personal information online. CC4 highlights the need for content creators to be mindful of the risks of hacking, identity theft, and online harassment. This aligns with the privacy calculus theory, as content creators weigh the potential negative outcomes of sharing personal information against the benefits of content creation and audience engagement.

The culture of content creation itself contributes to the blurring of boundaries between private and public life, as mentioned by CC4. The desire for attention and engagement can sometimes overshadow privacy

concerns, creating a challenging environment for content creators. This observation reflects the privacy paradox, where content creators may prioritize visibility and recognition over privacy.

To address these issues, content creators can play an active role in promoting privacy awareness and education among their audience, as suggested by CC2 and CC3. They can inform their followers about privacy settings, encourage responsible sharing, and respect the privacy of others. Social media platforms also have a responsibility to enhance privacy features, provide clearer information about data usage, and strengthen security measures to protect users' personal information, as emphasized by CC3 and CC4.

In conclusion, the interviews with content creators shed light on various issues and problems related to privacy in content creation culture. The concepts of privacy calculus, privacy paradox, and self-disclosure theories help analyze and understand the content creators' perspectives and behaviors. The findings highlight the importance of personal decision-making, the complexities of privacy attitudes and behaviors, and the need for strategic self-disclosure and privacy management in content creation. By addressing these issues, content creators and social media platforms can strive for a balance between sharing content and protecting privacy, creating a safer and more privacy-conscious environment for both creators and their audiences.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, this research delved into the varied definitions of privacy among content creators within the age of content creation culture. Through interviews with five content creators, it became evident that privacy holds different meanings for individuals and significantly influences their online behaviour and content production. Content creators acknowledged the importance of controlling personal information, protecting their privacy, and respecting the privacy of others. The interviews highlighted the risks of oversharing and the need for privacy awareness and education.

Moreover, the influence of social media platforms and the desire for attention can sometimes overshadow privacy concerns. Content creators must strike a balance between sharing content and safeguarding privacy, while social media platforms should prioritize user privacy and enhance privacy features. By collaborating and promoting privacy education, content creators and platforms can create a safer digital environment that respects privacy while fostering creativity and engagement. In the age of content creation culture, privacy remains a significant consideration that content creators and social media platforms must address to ensure the protection and well-being of both creators and audiences.

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