

Data Privacy

A Movement of Deleting Popular Social Media Accounts

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Abstract—This paper discusses the causes for deleting social media accounts due to privacy concern. It is important to learn from the failure of personal data protection and the biggest crisis in handling personal data, Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal. Public has become privacy-conscious on online media and this watershed has triggered a great fall in Facebook's stock price and ePrivacy regulation are tightened in terms of how companies collect, analyse and leveraging personal data as online users browse the internet. The objective of the study is to investigate the reasons of deleting Facebook from how the social media users feel and react to it. A web-based content analysis was performed to have an in-depth study on the most recent movement of #deletefacebook on Twitter. A thematic analysis was performed to code and analyse the data systematically. The study found that the main reasons that fuel users of Facebook to terminating their accounts could be categorised into three (3) meaningful emerged themes: (i) inappropriate management; (ii) improved users' well-being; and (iii) regulatory loopholes. This study reflects the overall downward trend of social media and its impacts on the industry in future are also highlighted.

Keywords—Data Breaches; Personal Data Privacy; Big Data Security; Privacy-conscious; #deletefacebook

I. INTRODUCTION

ePrivacy invasion is on the rise nowadays. More stricter regulations were imposed especially by EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and US Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Facebook data privacy scandal was a wake up call for all social media users to be more privacy-conscious. Social media users are very concern about how much information has been shared across many online platforms. In order to regain their privacy in life, many American young adults have already removing their Facebook accounts. There is a need to study on self-withdrawal from social media account and learn the reason why Facebook users deleted their accounts based on the #DeleteFacebook

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movement(Lee, Mohd. Shukran, & Ahmad, 2019).The purpose of the study is to explore the reasons of deleting Facebook from how the social media users feel and react to it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Privacy calculus theory proposes that users to decide on disclosing their private information by weighing the privacy risks and anticipated benefits. The movement of #DeleteFacebook holds that the theory is correct. From the lesson of Facebook data privacy scandal, its users has learnt that the data loss is eventually much greater than the benefits and convenience gained from Facebook.

Privacy self-efficacy refers to enacting behaviors to safeguard privacy by acquiring knowledge on configuration of multitude privacy settings in the context of Social Network Service (SNS)(Marwick, 2010). A study discovered that privacy self-efficacy is a determinant of self-withdrawal, which users need to have enough control(Westin, 1967)over their private data in order to control their privacy effectively(Dienlin & Metzger, 2016).The movement of #DeleteFacebook also holds that the theory is correct as its followers want to regain sense of control over their own personal data and withdraw themselves from Facebook platform.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data used for this study were collected by downloading the most recent Twitter tweets and external links with #DeleteFacebook hashtag. There were 3060 recent tweets from 13 to 31 July 2019 were collected. There were 56 online articles and document links from those tweets were identified and examined. The data was familiarized, coded, categorised, thematically organised and reviewed. The final emerging themes are presented as thematic map to outline and explain the reasons of #DeleteFacebook movement.

IV. FINDINGS

Data of the study has been analysed thematically and organised into THREE main themes: (i) inappropriate data management; (ii) improved users' well-being; and (iii) regulatory loopholes. Figure 1 depicts the connection between all themes and it represent a summary of the causes of deletion of Facebook account together with other associated social media accounts such as Instagram, WhatsApp and FriendsFeed.

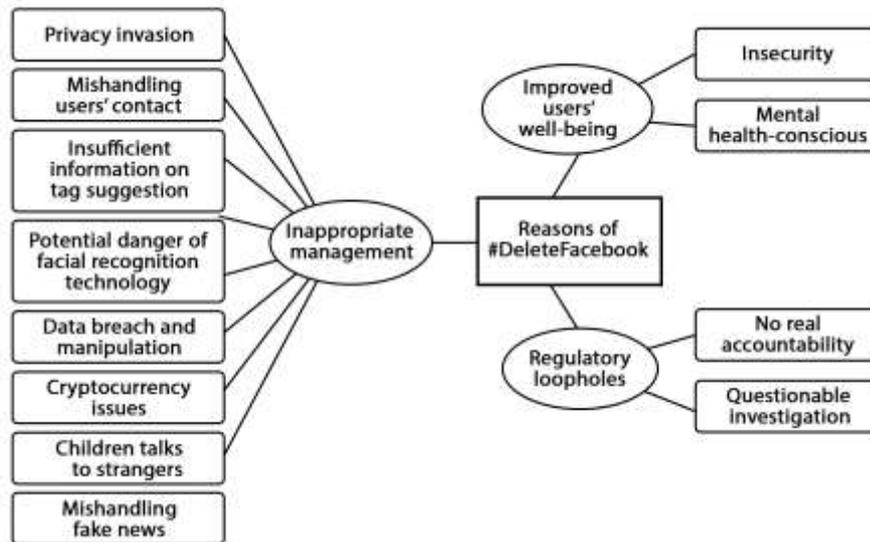


Fig. 1. Thematic map for reasons of #DeleteFacebook

Theme 1: Inappropriate data management

The #DeleteFacebook movement started since the Cambridge Analytical Scandal that Facebook failed to protect the privacy of its users while letting Cambridge Analytica to collect their data that is used to profile United States voters. The company failed to create a reasonable privacy program that safeguarded the privacy, confidentiality, and integrity of user data as required under the 2012 agreement (Birnbaum, 2019).

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) reported that Facebook data management failed to authorize the developers building products on Facebook, did not thoroughly examine new products and features and failed to implement appropriate the handle incidents regarding to privacy (Birnbaum, 2019).

Sub theme 1a: Privacy invasion

Edin Jusupovic, a certified specialist in cybersecurity and a law student (LLB) at UNE, observed a structural abnormality on the hex dump of image file from unidentified source and after he examined and learned that it was an IPTC meta data with special instructions that was automatically added over the image while the image was being uploaded onto Facebook. He shared this shocking tracking on his Twitter account on the 10 July 2019 (Jusupovic, 2019). He elaborated his point, by having the injected metadata inside the images, Facebook could track those images outside its own platform. It is another form of mass surveillance by Facebook. In relation to that, some advanced data injection techniques such as steganography which enables the metadata to be hidden inside the image would be unlikely to be forensically detected (Doffman, 2019; Jusupovic, 2019). Worst till, if the technology is used, such image tracking may not be easily traced back to serve as an evidence of a cybercrime.

The followers of #DeleteFacebook has reacted shockingly with disgust and anger against the image tracking by Facebook.

“Shocking tracking data from Facebook photos you upload. Another reason to #DeleteFacebook!”

“Facebook is installing spyware tracking in every photo you download from their site. Who do they really work for?”

“Time to revive #deleteFacebook? Facebook Embeds 'Hidden Codes' To Track Who Sees and Shares Your Photos, Report”

After the Cambridge Analytica’s scandal, American users has been changing their relationship with Facebook: (i) readjust their privacy settings; (ii) reduce frequency and activities on Facebook; (iii) take a long break from Facebook or not login for a long period and (iv) get rid of the account for good. Nevertheless, none of the aforementioned ways the best way to prevent them from Facebook tracking. Facebook has extended their tracking across the internet service beyond its platform. Facebook company’s “social graph” has already analysed abundant information about online users that it can pervasively track each individual even when they have already logged out or have deleted their Facebook accounts (Sonnad, 2018). In addition, deleting a Facebook account does not mean the user could avoid being tracked as Facebook could continue to track the user through its associated social media such as Instagram, WhatsApp and FriendsFeed. It can track you when individuals browse any site that have a component of Facebook (Alfred, 2019; Sulleyman, 2018). It could even monitor non-users’ browsing habits while they click on the “Share” button via Facebook third-party plugins or tools (Miley, 2019). In order to have a clean cut ties with Facebook, deleting the account permanently is not enough, users need to identify all URLs which are linked with Facebook and block them for good (Sonnad, 2018).

Sub theme 1b: Mishandling users’ contact

FTC plans to charge Facebook with user deception regarding mishandling of their mobile numbers that was part of a numerous complaint that accompanies a settlement ending the government’s privacy investigation (Romm, 2019). It is an unreleased allegation which is made against Facebook on the issues of its implementation of two-factor authentication as an additional layer of security to the login authentication process. In the process of login to the Facebook account, users are required to key in a one-time password that is sent via text message. Although it strengthens the authentication security, some advertisers succeed to access users’ mobile number without the users’ knowledge.

Sub theme 1c: Insufficient information on tag suggestion

Another planned allegation by FTC is made against Facebook on the issue of lacking of information to users —ability to disable a tool that perform face recognition and offer tag suggestions for photos (Romm, 2019).

Sub theme 1d: Potential danger of facial recognition technology

It is considered a form of mass surveillancesince Flickr, Instagram, Facebook, Google and others social media platforms, the internet has been accumulating billions of pictures of online user faces into gigantic image datasets. The potential danger of such technology destroy privacy and violate human right. It was reported that the Metropolitan police force’s use the facial recognition technology inappropriately as it was found that people were wrongly stopped for investigation (Sample, 2019).

Sub theme 1e: Data breach and manipulation

Initial #DeleteFacebook movement is pushed by angry users that Facebook failed to protect their personal information and their data was used for purposes without their consents. More than 50 million user data was collected by Cambridge Analytica's without the user consent. It was then used for "psychographic modeling," which analyse each personality and manipulate their voting behaviours in Brexit campaign and Donald Trump's presidential run (Hauser & Moran, 2019).

Sub theme 1f: Cryptocurrency issues

Facebook increase fears in people after it has announced the launch of its Libra cryptocurrency. Several parties expressed their worries over the digital currency. The Treasury Department has raised serious national security issue that it could be opportunities for money launderers and terrorist financiers (Bloomberg Opinion, 2019; Kharif, 2019). Libra cryptocurrency was claimed as the most intrusive and threatening form of surveillance in the history as it allows Facebook to access more and more personal data which is not limited to the details of the transactions, it gains access straight to each individual's wealth and capital, said Phil Chen, a cryptocurrency expert (Technoidhub, 2019). Besides, The Washington Post detected cryptocurrency scams as it has uncovered a dozen accounts, pages, and groups across Facebook and Instagram that deceptively claim to be authorised hubs for Libra cryptocurrency (Porter, 2019).

Sub theme 1g: Children talks to strangers

Messenger Kids was launched in 2017 which ensures young children between 6 and 12 years old to have a private chat with family members and it allows their parents to vet through and approve any chat invitation from friends. Unfortunately, there is a technical design flaw in Messenger Kids that exposed as much as thousands of these young children communicating with unauthorized strangers (Palmer, 2019). It has defeated the purpose of creating a protected and safe chat environment for kids and it diminishes trust in Facebook.

Sub theme 1h: Mishandling fake news

A fake altered video was viral on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in May 2019. It was US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's video clip; her speech had been deliberately slowed down to create the effects which she seems repeatedly stumbled over her own words. Facebook did not quickly remove the video and it took them a while for the third-party fact-checker to verify and rate it as false information as the video was made by AI software, deepfakes. It also took them a while to remove the misinformation from the social media. The altered video has been shared and viewed over 2 million times and it was criticised that it was too time consuming for fact-checker to detect the clip as false, it was suggest that probably panel of experts could do the job better (BBC News, 2019).

Theme 2: Improved users' well-being

Users has left Facebook due to public awareness on the negative impacts of social media on mental and social well-being.

Sub theme 2a: Insecurity

The culture of deleting Facebook has recently been elevated since Netflix's "The Great Hack" documentary was released in July 24, 2019 (Netflix, 2019). It is a shocking and intense documentary that educates viewers about how Cambridge Analytica, a data mining firm collect Facebook users' data and sell it to its clients from the political party, governments and businesses who want to market their products on Facebook. After watching "The Great Hack", audience has developed a privacy-consciousness especially regarding data used in the political agenda for Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Users feel insecure, threatened and realised that their personal data has been sold to partisan. It is very ominous as data was used for personality profiling and later it has been used to create personalised messages that eventually could sway voters' decision in the favor of the partisan. The film is infuriating, angry audiences despise Facebook more and encourage other #DeleteFacebook followers to learn more from the documentary and join the culture of deleting social media accounts that are owned by Facebook company. By doing so, they could mitigate the risks of invasion into their lives and they are no longer feeling insecure. The followers give reviews on "The Great Hack" documentary that is self-explanatory:

"#TheGreatHack a must watch on Netflix. Incredible abuse of power by Facebook with no sense of accountability. Weapons grade data stoking fear & hate."

"#The Great Hack, Facebook is killing democracy... Playing on instincts: fear & anger in particular. Created tools for companies to exploit these emotions with individual level targeting...it's relatively easy to manipulate them."

"If you're not angry enough about how Facebook has screwed the world. Watch the doc "The Great Hack" on Netflix. This is very well done and in my mind implicates Facebook for criminal behavior with Trump and Brexit elections. Please watch this doc. Then #DeleteFacebook"

Sub theme 2b: Mental health-conscious

A recent research discovered that the users who deactivated Facebook account in the experiment yielded significant improvement on users' well-being in terms of higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness as well as lower levels of depression and anxiety. The result shows that there is approximately 25-40 percent significant increase in subjective well-being that can be considered as much as a typical intervention of psychotherapy (Allcott, Braghieri, Eichmeyer, & Gentzkow, 2019; Smith, 2019). Followers of #DeleteFacebook give positive feedback after deleted or deactivated their Facebook accounts.

*"I said #DeleteFacebook a year ago and *did it* and I have not missed it. I forget people's birthdays now and then, but other than that...I'm happy to not contribute to Zuckerberg's fortune at my expense."*

"I am happy I did a #DeleteFacebook you should too. Your social life will improve."

"I personally think that life without #Facebook is the best thing to do... The decision to #DeleteFacebook was an easy one because I was unhappy on it, and it causes envy, depression, and stress. I hate Facebook."

Theme 3: Regulatory loopholes

FTC carries out its roles to investigate two big data breach cases, namely Equifax hack and Facebook's Cambridge Analytica scandal. In the case of Equifax, personal data of 147 million American consumers were stolen by unknown hackers. Equifax took two months to discover the data breach incident, and another one month to disclose this incident to the public. (Hauser & Moran, 2019). There are loopholes in the investigation and settlement in the cases.

Theme 3a: No real accountability

After numerous out-of-court settlements, it was reported that Equifax will pay the fine as much as \$575 million whereas Facebook will pay \$5 billion fine. However, there are many critics on the settlement was deemed insufficient. Even though, it was an unprecedented biggest fine imposed in the history, it is still considered small amount as to compare with Facebook's revenue. Ironically, Facebook's market value went up by more than the fine amount, \$5 billion (Brody & McLaughlin, 2019) after the settlement was made within the first 15 minutes (Ahmad, 2019; Patel, 2019). The fine did not hit the bottom line of the business. Evidently, the fines are not effective to punish force these business corporations to change their business practices that undermine the privacy of its users as it does not prevent them to be reckless with personal data again (Finance Twitter, 2019; Hauser & Moran, 2019). Facebook continues to make money by selling user data as long as public continues to use Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, are progressively used, despite the increasing wrongdoings and bad behaviours of large companies in terms of protecting personal data (Nicodemo & Russo, 2019). It changes nothing, and endorses Facebook's continued to add new ways of mass surveillance and monetize user data (Chopra, 2019).

Theme 3b: Questionable investigation

The investigation by the FTC was claimed too rushed and incomplete. Facebook has been ignoring the government-ordered restrictions for years, absurdly meriting an investigation on a similar scale and the investigators concluded the case too quickly (Coldewe, 2019).

A commissioner who voted against the settlement of \$5 billion FTC fine was Rohit Chopra, he wrote and published his statement, "The Commissioners supporting this outcome do not cite a single deposition of Zuckerberg or any other Facebook officer or director." (Chopra, 2019); the investigators did not interrogated executives of Facebook.

Furthermore, there are ample proofs such as public statements and precedent to support a charge against Mark Zuckerberg for violating the 2012 order; however, there are no charges or consequences for the company and the CEO (Chopra, 2019).

Besides these, Chopra (2019) has also highlighted the point that the Facebook gets immunity for undisclosed violations. He also found out that there is no Commission order that is against a repeat offender – that contains a release as broad as this one. In other words, such broad immunity for unknown claims effectively rewards Facebook for not proactively disclosing its failures and not admitting those failures.

V. DISCUSSION

The study aims to examine the reasons of deleting Facebook from how the social media users feel and react to it on their tweets of @DeleteFacebook hashtag. The findings of this study still uphold the theory of privacy calculus, privacy self-efficacy and self-withdrawal as followers of #DeleteFacebook have continue taken their action to leave and unlinked themselves from Facebook permanently and regain control on their privacy. The findings of this study clearly show that the root causes depends on three (3) main stakeholders as reflected in the three (3) emerged themes: (i) facebook management; (ii) users; and (iii) e-privacy regulators. Facebook users are angry about Facebook inappropriate management of private data; lack of information to turn off its tag suggestion tool; mass surveillance by facial recognition; data breach and political profiling; cryptocurrency issues; technical bugs that exposed young kids to talk to strangers and mishandling of fake news. Therefore, facebook must relook into the way they conduct business and privacy data handling to regain trust in Facebook.

Another root cause of removing Facebook account permanently because users feel that they are more happy, less depression and anxiety which directly increase the level of life satisfaction. Hence, Facebook has to prioritise the needs of its users, create a positive social platform to improve the well-being of its user.

Another reason that pushed users to deactivating Facebook cause of removing Facebook account permanently because the \$5 billion FTC fine does not prevent Facebook to change his business model. The entire movement of #DeleteFacebook is to stop Facebook from tracking the online users; however, deleting Facebook could not prevent it as they are still being monitored through unrelated sites that uses plugins or components of Facebook. This study implies that #DeleteFacebook is just a form of fight back or a slap on Facebook for private data loss. Gotten rid of Facebook does not mean that e-Privacy of online users are protected as there are many other giant technology companies such as Alphabet, Apple and Twitter has been doing same thing too. It is not reasonable to delete all online accounts that contains personal data or totally exit from online activities. Instead of boycotting Facebook and stop using its services, online users should exercise their rights to ask the service providers on what type of information and how much the information is accessed by other stakeholders as privacy is about informed consent, value and transparency as stated by Raj Samani, a McAfee's Chief Scientist (Sulleyman, 2018).

VI. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was limited by its size of tweets coverage. Earlier tweets since the beginning of the movement of #DeleteFacebook could be used to expand the breadth and depth of this study in future. This study on Facebook serves as an important precedent privacy invasion as FTC imposed \$5 billion penalty against Facebook that is the largest ever imposed to companies for privacy violation. Marketers, businesses and other technology companies should learn from Facebook data privacy scandal. More follow-up studies on Facebook practices to deal with privacy issues and public opinions should be done in future to combat the proliferation of ePrivacy invasion.

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