

Granddaughter Beware! An Intergenerational Case Study of Managing Trust Issues in the Use of Facebook

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Abstract. We offer a qualitative analysis of on-line safety practices and expectations in a community setting to look at trust practices that contribute to the complexity of information behaviors in the use of social media. Staging an encounter between local families by bringing together grandmothers and granddaughters at a workshop, we interrogate resulting discussions to understand how information practices are deployed to perform and interpret social identity. The analysis reveals the importance of trust practices and in particular, shows the tension between inward-looking and outward-looking behavior and how different perspectives on trust influence the manner in which communities work to protect members and police alternative uses of Facebook. In doing so, we add to knowledge about on-line safety and trust practices and the roles that families and tools play in supporting, enforcing and augmenting these practices.

Keywords: identity, norms, Facebook, social media, privacy, trust practices.

1 Introduction

The workshop discussed below forms part of the VOME research project, which uses qualitative social research to ground the development of tools to support informational privacy and consent decision-making [5]. The workshop was set up to explore how a community of internet users regards social media as part of their identity and how this influences their actions with respect to trust, safety and privacy online.

The workshop ran in northern England in July 2011 and brought together grandmothers and granddaughters through a community center that sits at the heart of activity in an area classified as economically deprived. Barnard-Wills and Ashenden [1] had shown there are tensions between generational perspectives on identity which come to the fore in institutional settings, including the family. Previous work on the project had also influenced the research: some of the user experience evaluations of on-line registration had found grandmothers influencing granddaughters in their internet use, in particular over personal information disclosure practices and social networking.

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During these studies, stories emerged of grandmothers using social networking sites together with granddaughters as a social activity and supporting granddaughters in relationship problems that cropped up in using social networking. (The same pattern, however, did not emerge with other intergenerational pairings.) In designing the next stage of the research, the team sought room for differing views and interpretations of technology to emerge and gave a chance for these family members to show each other - and reflect upon - how they mediate their relationships using technology.

1.1 Related Work

Information practices are situated phenomena, shaped by their contexts. Nissenbaum [14] highlights the need for the consideration of privacy contexts in privacy-enhancing technology design. Dourish and Anderson [6] and Stutzman and Kramer-Duffield [19] have written on 'contextual information practice' [19], following Dourish and Anderson's insights that security and privacy practices, which contribute to the creation and maintenance of social identities, are culturally informed, performative and collectively achieved (see also [7]). Further, the ways that identity is performed and interpreted (and our beliefs about the way that identity is constituted) have become significant in the design of digital tools as we design more tools that directly impact on identity and our sense of self [11]. This is not to say that issues of social identity were not relevant to design before (e.g. Reeves and Nass [17]), but new trends are bringing complex identity issues to the fore, which go beyond technical data protection and which require an understanding of the complex range of information practices [5, 13, 16,] that are deployed to perform and interpret our identities.

Digital technology is moving into intimate spaces of domestic life and mediates many of our relationships as well as providing means to represent our lives and organize our personal business: Odom, Zimmerman, and Forlizzi [15] describe how digital objects in family homes help children of divorcees achieve a sense of belonging; Hodkinson and Lincoln [8] discuss young people's individually owned and controlled territory online, equating it with the privacy of the bedroom; Miller [12] shows a diversifying use of Facebook, noting how Facebook can work to make up for a restricted social life. This takes us beyond the notion of identity as a credential for controlling access to data and links it to an emotional and representative side that can inform discussions of trust and safety more fully. In this paper, we examine one social system for what it can tell us about trust and safety perceptions and practices in a tight-knit community with sharply demarcated uses of social media such as Facebook.

2 Details of the Identity Workshop

This paper draws on analysis of experiences of a workshop set up to explore dynamics between granddaughters and grandmothers using social media in a tight community setting.

The workshop involved six granddaughters (GDs) and six grandmothers (GMs). It was staged in a northern English town where local granddaughter/grandmother pairs were recruited through a community center. Preliminary work had already identified

that there were close family pairings and internet active family members. Participants self-selected on criteria given to the center leaders, with a stress on relations not individual characteristics. Given the personal nature of perceptions of identity and the practices that are used to perform and interpret identity, it was important that the group was small enough for participants to feel comfortable to speak about sensitive issues. To support this aspect, the workshop was run at the community center, which was familiar to all participants.

As it turned out, the participants were all known to each other from daily life in the community, coming from a small area where social mobility is low. For instance, all the GDs had been to the same school. Each pair was part of what would be classed as a “close” family unit; while the GDs defined themselves as very fond of their GMs and identified as part of the community. All the GDs (16-24) used social networking sites; they were immersed internet users.

The GMs were aged 55+ and four of the six GMs were great-grandmothers. They included a mix of active social networkers and those without accounts for any social networks. One GM used social networking to keep contact with relatives in Australia. Two of the others used the Internet for email and on-line shopping. Those who did not use Facebook directly had experience of family who uses social networks. Each was interested in interaction with their GDs and her friends. The relationships with their granddaughters varied, although all took an active role in their GDs’ lives and could report acting as a “safety valve” when GD relations with her mother became tense.

2.1 Planned Interactions

Only a small amount of formal intervention was planned into the workshop so that emphasis would be on emergent discussion and reflection. The event was facilitated by a community leader and a VOME researcher. The workshop began with an introduction to VOME research and the process for the day. This explained that VOME’s work is on personal information control, but didn’t develop the theme. Events were videoed by someone from the community group who was known to the majority of the participants. Before lunch, individuals and pairs from the group showed each other how they used social networking; after lunch they worked in pairs.

A few specific structuring elements were included, to focus the work and initiate discussion. During the morning’s “show and tell” sessions, while someone used the big screen in the room to show their activities, the group was encouraged to discuss issues that arose and write down thoughts and reflections. Then a summary session was run before lunch and objectives were set for the afternoon. In the afternoon, the GD/GM pairs were mixed up. Each GD was tasked with showing their “new” GM what they did on-line and also to show GMs how to search on the internet, find information and look at websites of interest. During all these activities, there was little direction given from the facilitation team. However, the facilitators did pick up on issues, press participants to develop points and widen the discussion to hear others’ voices on a topic. In other words, with some focusing, the topics spoken about and the way that discussion developed emerged from the activities of sharing and showing.

2.2 Designing the Methodology

Drawing on traditions of emergent investigation (e.g. [2],[10]), an open-ended process was used in the workshop to allow identity to be performed. We sought to encourage participants to express themselves in their own language and allow themes to come and go. But, further, room for sensitive and controversial issues to arise was built in (and made ‘safe’ as possible by the presence of a familiar community worker, a familiar space and so on). Indeed, the device of putting members of close families together for so long with so much freedom of topic in a reflective mode was to stimulate encounters – with ideas and with each other. Tensions that arose were explored reflectively: neither cultivated, nor ignored.

The form contrasts with most design research workshops, where a purpose is explicit, more activity is scheduled and relations between participants are less important than focus on an outcome. Instead, here, the motive was to explore issues the group found important *when together*. The approach did not seek to simulate the situatedness of ethnography, yet it is situated in existing relations. In one respect, it is naturally occurring: the event took place in the lives of six families in a center they use; they showed each other normal activities; normal relations were lived out. In another, it is contrived: a staging that fueled reflection and encouraged debate [3]. In other words, the research team deliberately under-determined the process, and, in *assembling a carefully chosen set of social roles* (though not selecting the people stepping into them), issues of identity and relations played out, while shared activity and community processes joined the topic of media use for contemplation.

The team took the recorded video of the day and watched it repeatedly, as advocated by Knoblauch et al [9]. We looked particularly for tensions – in our expectations, in the use of tools, in group relations, in family pairs – and how they were managed. Were they new or well worn? Was there friction, working around the issue, or acceptance? How did actions and attitudes bear on what was happening with the tools?

This search for friction points is distinct from looking for problems to solve or design opportunities, but it may be a precursor. We put emphasis on this earlier phase as it is the point where we formed an analysis of identity issues that challenged traditional thinking about trust, privacy and online safety practices and attitudes.

In the next sections, we give a flavor of the insights that emerged, though, for the sake of clarity and brevity, we only share our most relevant findings.

3 Emergent Interactions

Facebook (FB) dominated: in the morning, one GD/GM pair showed how they used it and then further GDs showed their presence on it. Later, one GM who did not use it was set up with an account and ‘friend’ requests were sent. In general, the GMs were less digitally literate, but more socially skilled and led commentary and questioning of social media uses by the GDs. Two striking behaviors will be raised here.

1) The interaction between GMs and GDs suggests that using FB may be a communal activity *offline* as well as across cyberspace. One GD/GM pair showed how they play online games, using FB together in the same physical space, often sharing

the computer. Interestingly, the GD has access to and uses the GM's username and password for both FB and email. However, this is not reciprocal; the GM has chosen to give control to the GD. The GM informed the group that she shares her details with her GD, not out of ignorance but out of feelings of intimacy; her GD, however, does not share her log-on details because of feelings of identity and autonomy. This is counter to expected use but cannot be linked to simple lack of understanding or digital literacy as the GM displays both. Instead, we observed a social space where GM and GD play together with their own rules of access and where co-use and users who are traditionally classified as "non-users" influence trust, privacy and safety practices.

2) From the "show and tell" sessions, it was evident that five of the six GDs populated their FB 'friends' primarily with family and people they knew from the immediate community. This pattern was replicated when setting up a FB account for one of the GMs: all the 'friend' requests (22) that popped up during the day came from members of the family or from families connected to the family in the near locality. When undertaking paired activities later, further examples emerged of how social media acts as entertainment for co-located and/or hardly separated friends. As one GD said: "It means I can keep in touch with my mates without going out" and another: "I am really shy, but using social networking gives me the chance to be able to talk to anyone.... I don't know what else we would do if we didn't have the internet." (However, by 'anyone' she meant people she already knows in the neighborhood.) FB was seen as something to do, offering a range of pastime activities. Key to use was socializing with 'friends' on FB who were also friends in the locality, i.e. already part of the community in which the GDs lived. It was clear that the networks they used on-line reproduced the social network around them, remained fairly homogenous and reflected a lifestyle centered on home and surrounding area, where trust relationships are primarily built off-line and those relationships are mirrored on-line.

However, for one GD, the patterns of engagement were very different. For her, going online and using FB was a means to meet people outside the community. This woman is classed as a 'vulnerable' young adult and whilst holding down a job and being an active member of the community, she is not part of the set who socialize as the other five do. In fact, she sees FB as her chance to engage with people from outside the tight networks in which she lives and in which her status as different is played back to her. This very different use led to conflicting views.

We will describe this encounter in detail since it illustrates well the relationship between design, identity, trust, social relations and peer pressure. (For ease of description in the following narrative, we call this GD 'Lisa'.)

3.1 An Open and Shut Case

During Lisa's description of her social practices, a tension emerged regarding the interpretation of her privacy settings. FB provides the means to set choices of who can see your profile and your postings: it can be 'friends', 'friends of friends', chosen networks or 'everyone'. (Between the workshop and writing this paper, FB changed the label for "Everyone" to "Public"). For those who regarded FB as entertainment within the community in which they lived, setting the privacy to 'friends' or other

selected groups was regarded as a sensible safety measure. With this inward-looking behavior, trust is a prerequisite for disclosing personal information. They might not all follow this policy, but they nevertheless viewed it as reasonable and wise. Everyone they talked to on FB was known to them and knew more about them than they ever posted on FB, so FB privacy was seen as irrelevant locally. But strangers were unwelcome and ‘everyone’ represented strangers. For Lisa, who used FB as a means to reach beyond the community in which she lived, the ‘everyone’ setting was necessary and Lisa’s outward-looking behavior demonstrates that trust is not a prerequisite for disclosing personal information. Her day routinely involved checking to see if she had been ‘friended’ by anyone new and her ‘friends’ were not known to her before such an approach. She saw the ‘everyone’ setting as entirely reasonable.

When people heard her privacy settings, the social pressure on Lisa to change them was evident and she was lectured by another GD. Even though not all the other FB users in the group had restricted access to their FB postings, it was an expectation that the privacy settings would be understood in a particular way (i.e. a local norm). It was the insistence by Lisa that, for her purposes, the ‘everyone’ setting was most desirable, which caused the tension. This tension was illuminating as an example of how Lisa resists norms in the group and puts herself outside what is deemed acceptable behavior, possibly motivating her search for company who accepts different values.

It also offers an example of how a group may operate with expected stances in social networking, even if they do not always act on them, and how this carries through into their information practices - trust and safety management can be situated offline as well as in the online interactions this offline network supports. By working with such a closed circle, the researchers were able to see this play out as a dominant subset of connections. In a more heterogeneous set of ‘friends’, such stances would be less apparent and have less purchase (as Stutzman and Kramer-Duffield [19] note about reach and expectation).

And, more particularly of interest here, it points to the different understandings of trust and the varying privacy and security-related needs among the young women.

The five GDs were primarily using FB to connect with people in their community and as a social and entertainment outlet. It could be argued that their needs and values put them at less risk socially because the *lack of* privacy at community level – both on and off FB – works to keep them accounted for. Everyone in the community knows their business; no one outside it cares to know it – trust is a local phenomenon that does not reach into a wider world. Nonetheless, aspects of privacy do emerge: the GD who does not reciprocally share log-in details with her GM (behavior which is customarily about security and protection of ID data) refuses to share as a matter of autonomy, not because she distrusts her GM.

It is concern for safety that comes up as the principal drawback with Lisa’s behavior. This throws the focus back on the technology, rather than social mechanisms, largely because Lisa’s position in the group has already violated the protective norms that operate within it and so people do not know her business. This is apparent - they are dismayed at her use of FB as well as her privacy settings, though the two revelations emerge together and are related. Lisa, the isolated granddaughter, uses FB as her route out of the community; the need for privacy is different; the support from the

community, more fragile. In her case, using FB is about hiding certain aspects of her identity and accentuating others, which cannot be performed within her geographical community. Using the ‘everyone’ setting and exposing information to others is part of interacting online and she wants strangers to see her news updates and other postings. If there is risk in this disclosure, she is unmoved, explaining it as a trade-off for greater virtual mobility, and if there is a risk to her person, which is the far more severe threat that the rest of the group has begun to consider, then it only becomes real if she contemplates meeting the strangers she ‘friends’. In this way she reconciles risks - and the greatest risk for her remains that social isolation, which use of FB mitigates. This moment of conflict in the group reflects the different values in using FB:

1. as a tool within a co-located community, and
2. as a tool for an individual wanting to move beyond a co-located community.

Using the tool within the community, there is support provided at community level for users’ wellbeing and the tools’ controls are subverted to be replaced, or augmented, by social gatekeeping practices at another point in the negotiation of appropriate behavior. This provides a set of very different priorities to those of someone who uses FB to reach out of their immediate community, where privacy, security and safety are screen-based choices, though not necessarily informed by the factors that motivated the design of the controls. For instance, Lisa does not see broadcasting to public channels in FB as related to privacy. It is the potential to make new friends that motivates her and that inevitably entails some information disclosure and exchange.

4 Learning about Social Media Use

By taking a performative view of identity [4, 11], the research team was able to conceive of a workshop in which making space for roles and identities to play out was more important than setting specific goal-directed activities and so designed an event to stress social and dynamic aspects. Room was given over for people to question themselves and others about what they do, making good use of existing social relations in the group. This ‘spaceful’ technique did not rule that tensions should occur, but gave a chance for the questioning of practices and motivations. Focusing on identity as a shared emergent phenomenon allowed us to consider the information practices and values in the group. It helped reveal that not only were understandings of privacy, security and safety different from those embedded in most privacy and security management systems, but that two different social systems were operating at odds with each other. In fact, there were signs that the presence of the tightly knit group, dealing socially with eventualities, actually made the risks greater for Lisa as she operated alone, outside the social support system and divergently from it.

4.1 Different Priorities Require Different Designs

Though the incident with Lisa was brief, it gave insight into using social media and the expectations operating in the group. In Lisa, the team was reminded of Miller’s [11] study of a person using FB to compensate for a restricted social world; thereby

troubling relations with her physically close community and invoking strong reactions in those upholding ‘normal’ behavior. However, Lisa was not trying to violate norms or navigate privacy. She was trying to perform her chosen identity with the tools available to her, clearly showing that, for her, trust was not a precursor to disclosing personal information. No amount of education about privacy, cautioning about strangers or designing out disclosure will alter her position, unless it also meets her need for friends *and* safety. Therefore, interventions to support Lisa in performing her identity require a different shape to those used to support the rest of the group.

4.2 The Challenges for Designing in Trust

As we have already indicated, identifying the principal zone of gatekeeping and information negotiation as diffused through the community, rather than at the interface to the software, destabilizes models of privacy. This opens the way to think about personal information control, not as an off-line or on-line concept but as socially negotiated¹. The practices we witnessed are not based on misconception of privacy or a cheating of the rules (such as the use of lying [7]). The concept of protecting data is clearly second to concerns about trusting strangers in other matters.

More significantly, as the group explored its priorities it revealed two quite polar contexts of use, both of which trouble conventional wisdom. In one, a tight-knit world, non-users co-manage tools and information flows. Much of the group’s thinking about FB and how to behave on it emanates from off-line grandmothers who are worldlier than their granddaughters. These women are abreast of new trends, but choose their relation to them. This is most intriguingly captured in the GM who uses FB only to play with her GD as a co-user. With the insight that experience of use does not necessarily come from using (see also Sambasivan et al [18]), it offers a new slant on digital inclusion and our understanding of older people’s use of technology. At the moment, these co-users are in the shadows and invisible to the technology, but perhaps one day they will have their own side-cars to travel in.

The other narrative considered here leads straight to matters of identity, belonging and beyond. We had played out before us the tension between privacy and expression and the way that social norms about protection and ‘right’ behavior can be oppressive for individuals who must travel virtually to find their kin. Although we analyzed this here through exploring a tension in one small group, it points to a far wider issue that most of us instinctively acknowledge. This trade-off is implicit in much usage but not so apparent in the design of the technologies we use.

5 Conclusion and Future Work

As the examples here show, designing to support social networking practices requires technologies for users with different trust perceptions and needs. Online sociality may be based on trust, but it is an interaction of trust and self-expression, problematizing existing discourses around information disclosure. A further insight is the amount of interaction taking place off-line within social groups around the tools. This points to

¹ [19] and [6] point to other aspects of the social negotiations that manage disclosure.

potential to develop technologies that support co-use and make space for the role and influence of the non-user. As governments move to a service delivery position of “digital by default”, future work will use these insights to research non- and co-use and to inform the design of spaceful software interfaces that can incorporate different on- and off-line interventions designed to support trust practices.

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