Snapchat for user privacy and emotional communication phenomenon

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Abstract. The article describes Snapchat as an example of a social software that violates user privacy and protects user privacy, which can be reflected from it. The article collates some of Snapchat's feature innovations and unique features (compared to other social software) and explains why it has been successful in a short period of time. Most of the papers on Snapchat have focused on Snapchat's marketing strategy, rather than the software itself and its impact on users. Therefore, the author of this paper considers from the perspective of users to supplement Snapchat's use and protection of user privacy. In addition, this paper discusses Snapchat's protection of user privacy and the innovation of its functions, and compares it with Chinese social media, which puts forward more possibilities for the development of social media.

Keywords: Snapchat, social media, user privacy, teenager.

1. Introduction

With 186 million daily active users according to Snap Inc's information in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Snap Inc., 2018), Snapchat is one of the most popular messenger services in the world.[1] Snapchat and Instagram are image-based social media platforms, and the popularity of image-based platforms is on the rise. According to Perrin and Anderson (2019), Snapchat and Instagram are especially popular among the young generation, aged 18 to 24 [2]. Snapchat has gone from a niche chat app founded by two college students in the United States to a huge public company and Internet giant. It is popular among teenagers in many countries, including the United States. Snapchat's success is not only due to its marketing strategy, but also because of its powerful features and the right protection of user privacy. This privacy protection not only helps Snapchat users avoid exposing too much personal information about themselves, but also improves the user experience. Most people who use social media don't realize it, but in fact, social media can mobilize users' emotions, such as communication between friends or lovers. In many social media used by people, including WeChat, Instagram and Twitter, the collection of user information not only covers the personal information entered by users, but also involves users' preferences and content they like to watch. Users unknowingly reveal everything about themselves to social media companies, which then feed users more "content they think users like" based on that data. The users are locked in the information cocoon, though they are offered a good user experience. However, this private information can be used at any time to mobilize the users' views and emotions about news events. The developers of Snapchat do a great job of this. It doesn't have overly complicated features and doesn't take up too much space on the phone. What's more, it integrates various social

media functions such as short video, chat, and posting stories in a perfect way. When using it, users don't have to worry about the appropriateness of their speech, because the information here will disappear after being read. When people want to take screenshots of the chat interface and repost it, they need to seek permission from the message publisher first, as these actions are recorded in the chat screen. With regard to Snapchat, Waddell (2016) indicated that Snapchat's recordability affordance feature provides gratification of maintaining privacy while the modality affordance feature offers users better opportunities for self-expression than text-based communication technologies. The photographs were also found to afford users capacity to establish and maintain connections with family members, friends, or significant others regardless of the geographical distance [3].

When users post their photos or comments on other social media, they may worry about whether their comments will be slammed and questioned, while on Snapchat, they no longer need to worry about that. Further, Snapchat users have noted the application is a "more personal" form of communication that allows users to share small, intimate pieces of their daily lives [4]. Therefore, Snapchat protects users' emotions by safeguarding their privacy. It may not be suitable for people to publish important news and articles, but it is a very good software for individuals to keep in touch with their friends.

The rapid uptake of Snapchat indicates that it may have the potential to act as a powerful communication tool. This paper focuses on how the developers of Snapchat can integrate many social media functions, and meanwhile improve the users' interactive experience and emotional needs through user privacy protection. This paper will draw conclusions based on users' emotional communication and privacy information collection on Snapchat, as well as some relevant literature and authors' collection of users' etiquette performance on Snapchat.

2. Literature Review

This paper focuses on Snapchat's protection of user privacy and its impact on user emotional communication. The references for this article come from university online library, Google Scholar, Zhihu and Baidu. The university's online library and Zhihu have a high reputation for Snapchat's privacy protection. In other words, almost all the literature has praised Snapchat's privacy protection function, but few people have studied how Snapchat protected users' privacy. Most of the literature focuses on Snapchat's business model, many of which mention Snapchat's privacy protection, but most scholars use it as an argument, because no one has made a specific demonstration of Snapchat's privacy protection. A reasonable verification method mentioned in the article is to interview users of Snapchat. The interview questions are about the effect of Snapchat on the protection of users' privacy and the value it brings to the dissemination of users' emotions. Detailed questions are as follows:

1. How long do you use Snapchat?
2. What do you use Snapchat for? (e.g., chatting with friends or dating)
3. Do you feel some of Snapchat's features violate your privacy?
Please talk about the details.
4. Does Snapchat's use of your personal information improve your experience?
5. What features of Snapchat do you find most appealing?
6. What do you think Snapchat can do to better protect user privacy?

The questions used in the interview include users' time and habits on Snapchat and their views on Snapchat's privacy protection. This is very reasonable for studying the actual protection of user privacy on Snapchat. The interviewees are from Minnesota, Wisconsin and California in the United States, who are very familiar with Snapchat, and the researcher has been using Snapchat for half a year and is familiar with most of its functions. Since researchers have not used Snapchat for a long time, they have not formed stereotypes and assumptions about Snapchat, which is more conducive to objective judgment. "Snapchat is more personal". An exploratory study on Snapchat behaviours and young adult interpersonal relationships mentions that close friendships and romantic relationships [5] are two of the most common types of relationships for young people, which is very specific on Snapchat. It is not hard to find that Snapchat's users are mainly young people, and that users rarely use it to communicate with their relatives or superiors. Instead, they tend to keep in touch with their peers and close friends through

Snapchat. Therefore, Snapchat itself plays an extremely important role in the dissemination of young people's emotions. Snapchat users are more likely to vent their feelings to friends than to use written language in emails intended for bosses and employers, and because Snapchat messages are ephemeral, most people don't have to think twice before sending them. Therefore, this article mainly studies Snapchat's protection of user privacy and the value it brings to user emotional communication.

3. Methodology

In this research, the method of qualitative research was adopted. Questionnaires were distributed and interviews were conducted among some friends and classmates of the researcher. 18 - to 21-year-olds and 22 - to 24-year-olds with different status or occupations were selected to be involved in these questionnaires and interviews, some of whom are students, some of whom have already entered the workplace. The home environments of the interviewees are also different. People who have experienced in different social groups must have diverse ways of communicating emotions, and thus they must have a variety of views on Snapchat's protection of their privacy. A more profound argument can be made based on the evidence.

In the study, questions about Snapchat's privacy protection and related emotional communication were collected through questionnaires from people living in the United States. Most of them are students and their friends. They are all young people. These studies don't apply to all age groups, as Snapchat's users are mostly either students from high school and college or young adults just starting out in the workforce.

The study was conducted from July to September 2023, mainly during the summer. It's summer vacation. During this period, researchers and interviewees had more time to participate in the research, which helps to provide more sufficient evidence. The study took place in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. There are many college students who can participate in the research, and the research sample size is large, with higher accuracy. However, it should be noted that this study has some limitations, and it represents the views of American young people on the protection of privacy and emotional communication of Snapchat. Due to the widespread popularity of Snapchat upon its launch, it is now a global app. Users in other countries may have different feelings and opinions about Snapchat due to local policy and cultural differences.

The tools used in this study were Snapchat (the app itself), Wenjuanxing (the questionnaire), and NVivo (the information retrieval and collection tool). In the later part of the study, the researchers will return to the United States to conduct field research and interviews using video recording equipment. The main process of the study is presented below.

The main direction of this study is about how Snapchat reasonably protects user privacy to enhance interactive experience, so as to better enhance user emotional communication experience. After determining this direction, the researcher conducted a questionnaire survey on the relevant people in Snapchat, including their concern about the performance of Snapchat's privacy protection and how they think Snapchat improves the user experience by protecting people's privacy. In anticipation, the researcher expected that these respondents would also describe how Snapchat used user information to enhance their emotional communication experience. Then, the researcher uses NVivo to search the keywords mentioned by the respondents, so that the information of the respondents can be more effectively obtained and summarized. Finally, it is supplemented by interviews.

Through the above methods, there is a high degree of agreement between the research results and the actual situation. When looking for research subjects on Snapchat, the researcher can accurately find Snapchat users without spending a lot of time looking for users in the society. Undoubtedly, this saves a lot of research costs and time, and makes the research time span smaller and more timeliness is guaranteed. Relevant data can be obtained more clearly through questionnaires and interviews. Considering that the questionnaire is distributed to the respondents in a written form, they may feel nervous due to this form and be reluctant to disclose their true thoughts too much. Therefore, the researcher also adopted the form of interview to obtain more real feelings of users through easy communication, reducing the errors caused by the survey form. Finally, the researcher used software to

integrate them, and the data obtained was reliable and reasonable. To sum up, this research method has a high degree of agreement with the actual situation.

For Snapchat, other scholars have related research. Therefore, the research results of some other scholars on Snapchat are quoted in this study. Interpersonal relationship research of Snapchat is included, and why Snapchat has achieved great success in business. For example, "Snapchat is more personal". An exploratory study on Snapchat behaviors and young adult interpersonal relationships, by Vaterlaus, J. Mitchell; Barnett, Kathryn; Roche, Cesia; Young, Jimmy A [6]. They have obtained convincing research results on Snapchat and young people's interpersonal relationships, which is of great relevance to this study.

4. Results

After the Snapchat users of different ages were studied, it is revealed that their understanding of the definition of Snapchat user privacy protection, coupled with different life experiences, has led to different views on Snapchat's use and protection of user privacy. Some college seniors, who have been using Snapchat for a long time, have found some privacy violations, but on the other hand, it has also helped improve the experience of using the app in general. Younger users do not feel that their privacy is being violated, instead, they are willing to expose some of their private information to their Snapchat friends, believing that it will enhance their relationship with their friends. In general, Snapchat provides reasonable privacy protection for users and is of great help to users' emotional communication.

Table 1. Information of interviewed Snapchat users

Participants	Age	Gender	Using Duration	Location
P1	20	Female	1.5 years	Wisconsin
P2	20	Male	6 years	Minnesota
P3	21	Female	11 years	Wisconsin
P4	19	Male	8 years	California

P1: I use Snapchat for communication between my friends and classmates. I think Snapchat's privacy protection for users is generally good, but there are some shortcomings. Because Snapchat snaps can only be viewed once, someone will use it to send nude or indecent photos to others. Not only did they violate user privacy, but they were also suspected of sexual harassment. I think the most attractive thing about Snapchat is that when chatting, the other person takes a screenshot or saves a photo, it will be recorded, which is a good place for Snapchat to protect privacy. And Snapchat provides cute avatars for everyone. I think Snapchat can only be used for chatting at the moment, and its features can be more diversified, like Instagram.

P2: I have had my Snapchat account since I was 11 years old.

Snapchat is the main app that I use for communication. I use it to chat with friends, my partner, family, and for entertainment purposes as well. There are plenty of media outlets with public Snap Stories.

As an avid Snapchat user, I think that there are plenty of customizable ways to make sure that Snapchat's features do not violate user privacy. For example, instead of giving Snapchat access to an entire camera roll, users have the option to select certain photos from the camera roll and give Snapchat access to only the pre-approved photos.

One Snapchat feature that I think is a potential violation of privacy is the Snap Map. The Snap Map shows the location of Snapchat users. However, this is customizable to users as well. Users can turn off their Bitmoji from the map and have the option to give certain Snapchat friends access to their location.

In regard to advertising preferences, Snapchat states that users' data is used to "show you ads that we think will be relevant to your interests." It is not uncommon that people are surrounded by plenty of

TV show and streaming service-related ads each day. Some of the TV shows advertised to them have captured their interest. Most people think that this feature makes advertisements more tolerable.

The features of Snapchat that youngsters find most appealing are about chatting. They use the chat feature with everyone outside of a professional setting. The Bitmoji feature which includes a user's avatar makes chatting personable and fun.

The best thing that any application can do to protect user privacy is to be open about data usage and sharing. These terms can often be long and mundane to read. Snapchat has a simplified version of their privacy policy on their website, making this more accessible to users.

P3: I started my Snapchat account about 6 years ago and I think it's a great social app. It can protect my privacy to the greatest extent, especially when chatting. If the person wants to take a screenshot of the chat page, they have to ask me first. So I can express my feelings better when I chat on Snapchat. If it's anything to go by, I think having some porn accounts would disgust me. I think they can block these porn accounts by changing the way Snapchat works.

P4: I started using Snapchat in high school and have been using it for five years now. Snapchat has made a number of changes during this time, mainly to protect users' privacy and security. I think my favorite feature of Snapchat is that my friends can see what I'm doing at any time. Sometimes I'm driving, and my Bitmoji shows me driving. That's when my friends understand why I can't text them back. Snapchat also released a new user privacy policy. So we can have a better understanding of Snapchat's user privacy policy from inside. And Snapchat has added a lot of new features, such as short videos and stories.

5. Discussion

From the interview above, it can be learned that Snapchat's privacy protection is indeed better than that of other social software, but it also has shortcomings. One of the key features of Snapchat is that pictures and messages are usually only available for a short time before they become inaccessible to their recipients – unless they are saved to Memories [7. For advantages, messages are automatically deleted a day after they are read to ensure user privacy. The rise of ephemeral communication platforms such as Snapchat was primarily driven by a desire to avoid public embarrassment or shaming associated with unwanted disclosures of personal data [8]. Users can see the location of their friends through Snap Map, so that their friends know what the user is doing. Each person has a unique Bitmoji avatar to make communication more intimate. Of course, there are also some shortcomings. Public Snapchat image sharing is an intrinsically more private than Facebook, Instagram and Twitter because of the automatic disappearance of images [9]. The account is too private, and a large number of users send pornographic and fraudulent information. The PEW Research Institute assessed Snapchat use for the first time in 2013 and found a prevalence of 12% of all smartphone users.3 Roesner4 surveyed 127 adult Snapchat users in the United States and found that it was mainly used for sending funny pictures, selfies, or snaps from other people. Only 1.3% used it primarily for sexting. However, 14.2% used it for sexting occasionally. Slightly more common was joke sexting, that is, sending sexual or pseudo-sexual material as a joke [10]. Snapchat's features are relatively simple, so users need additional social software to learn more. This information will be deleted one day after being read, and some important materials or documents are easily lost. When looking at Snapchat's other features, people may have more findings. Snapchat has also added ads to its short video feature in order to make money, much like TikTok. However, the advertising push of TikTok is accurately pushed to each customer based on big data analysis. In this case, the privacy of users is very easy to be leaked, because the software will collect the goods concerned by users, such as electronic products or beauty products. Snapchat does not collect this information when it sends ads to users but requires users to choose which ads they like. Snapchat's user ads are uniformly pushed to all users (information from Zhihu). Although this advertising method may not seem smart, it can maximize the balance between the company's revenue and the protection of user privacy. This fits with the theme of this article. But more importantly, Snapchat's social features have been spotted. The above advantages are collected from interviews and Internet information. In fact, the shortcomings of Snapchat's privacy protection should be discovered and paid more attention to. First, Snapchat's user

data is so overprotected that everyone feels emboldened to speak up, but not all of it is meaningful. Some people even set up accounts to post terrorist or pornographic information. Whatever their purpose, they have a bad effect on other users. Many experienced users can immediately tell if an account in a friend request list is one of these spammers because they have no profile picture, no Snap photo, and no story. However, for some new users, they are very keen to meet new friends on Snapchat, especially the younger users (10-15years old) who have just owned their own mobile phones and registered a Snapchat account. Their ability to distinguish information is weak, and they are very susceptible to the demagogy and induction of such bad information, which may undoubtedly lead to higher crime rates and social instability. Snapchat officials should consciously work together to find solutions to this problem. Without violating users' privacy, they would be better off creating an algorithm to analyze which accounts are spreading bad information and block them. If the users are juveniles, Snapchat also has the right and obligation to protect those under age. They need to block some soft porn or violent information and push them more educational information. Second, Snapchat's functionality is too simple. If you think of it as a social app, it's definitely good enough; if you think of it as a very popular trendy app, maybe it needs to add some small features so that users can use it in more situations in their lives. As Snapchat has become an increasingly popular app, with a growing number of users, criminal cases could be involved. Laws in many areas allow chat logs to be used as evidence in civil and criminal cases, but Snapchat's content is burned after being read, so it is inevitable that some important evidence may be lost when people are chatting on the platform, which is also an area that Snapchat needs to improve.

6. Conclusion

Snapchat provides people with a private and easy way to use social platform, and its user privacy protection features are excellent. At the same time, some people have tried to use Snapchat's privacy for criminal purposes. To sum up, Snapchat does have a very good privacy protection function compared with other social software. These privacy protection functions also better enhance the emotional communication experience of users, and users are more outspoken in Snapchat and dare to express their true selves. Compared with Instagram or other social platforms, Snapchat's functions are slightly unitary, but this also ensures that Snapchat users' privacy protection is strict. This is also more in line with Snapchat's product positioning, which is a truly pure and convenient and fun social software. Although Snapchat has since added revenue models such as online shopping and commercial advertising, it still retains its basic principle to the maximum: no snooping on users' private data. It is a very good idea to apply Snapchat's privacy policy to Chinese social software, as we lack a mass social platform built to protect users' privacy. For example, the automatic message deletion function and the map function are very new and worth using. China's strict censorship of information can also prevent users from engaging in criminal activities through privacy policies. But for Snapchat and American society, there is a strong correlation between information crime and online censorship.

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