Toxic Tagging: Be Careful What You Post About Your Friends

How to avoid dangerous disclosures around the virtual water cooler.

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As you sit at your computer, an email slides into the side of your screen, announcing that you have been tagged in a photo on Facebook. You are immediately distracted from whatever you are doing, and experience a twinge of anxiety as you wonder what kind of photo it is, where you were, with whom, and possibly even your state of sobriety. After all, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, it might have been taken decades ago. With nervous trepidation, you immediately abandon whatever project you were working on, and reluctantly click open the link.

If you have experienced this type of discomfort, you are in good company. We only have so much control over what ends up on social media, because anyone has the capacity to share our information – regardless of whether we use social media ourselves, or even own a computer.

As a practical matter, in terms of social media netiquette, consider the privacy implications of the information you share about others.

With Frenemies Like These

We all remember at least one despicable peer we grew up with, sometimes vividly. From the playground bully to the locker room prankster, to the school gossip who spread that vicious rumor about who you were "going" with in the 7th grade.

Sure, those negative memories are from a long time ago. But I know people who would not want a childhood enemy coming within 100 miles of them or their family, much less viewing the intimate material they are sharing with their Facebook friends.

Yet this loathsome ex-classmate may in fact already be connected to you on Facebook, viewing your posts. Certainly not because you accepted their friend request. You didn´t have to, they have easy access through mutual connections.

This begs the question – how much information should you share about your friends? Research indicates that different types of social media users answer this question differently.

Online, Users Do Not Share and Share Alike

From PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

Koohikamali et al. in "Beyond self-disclosure: Disclosure of information about others in social network sites" (2017) discovered that we consider the privacy of others in a different way that we consider our own privacy.[i] The researchers found that concern for the privacy of others is explained by factors including extraversion, agreeableness, identity, and prior privacy invasions, and that intention to disclose information about others is not influenced by social norms.

Regarding gender differences, they found that **men showed more concern for the privacy of others than women – even though on social networking sites, women place a high value on their own privacy.**

Research also demonstrates that online privacy concerns differ depending on which social media platform is being used.

Privacy Concerns on Facebook v. Twitter

Research by Jeong and Kim (2017) examined privacy concerns on Facebook and Twitter with respect to posting and tweeting behavior.[ii] They discovered that young Facebook users are more concerned with other people posting on their timeline, and young Twitter users are more concerned about their own tweets than the retweets they inspire with their content. The researchers speculate the difference may be due in part to the public nature of Twitter, as compared to Facebook, where users have some control over who can see their information.

The varying levels of trust in social media platforms is confirmed by a 2017 study by Chang et al. entitled "User trust in social networking services: A comparison of Facebook and LinkedIn."[iii] They found that unlike Facebook, a site where relationships consist primarily of acquaintances and close friends, LinkedIn relationships are usually weaker. Accordingly, they found that when faced with a loss of trust and risks of privacy breaches, users were more likely to leave LinkedIn rather than Facebook.

Share With Sense and Sensibility

Be sensible about the information you share about others, and sensitive to the type of material you post. Consider the privacy concerns of those about whom you disclose information, and consider who else might be affected by the content you share.

References

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[ii] Yongick Jeong and Yeuseung Kim, "Privacy concerns on social networking sites: Interplay among posting types, content, and audiences," Computers in Human Behavior 69 (2017): 302-310.

[iii] Shuchih Ernest Chang, Anne Yenching Liu, Wei Cheng Shen, "User trust in social networking services: A comparison of Facebook and LinkedIn," Computers in Human Behavior 69, (2017): 207-217