

Social Media and the Crisis of Privacy: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Social media is an online platform where we can share our own views, information, photos and videos, etc. Social networks have become an integral part of human life in today's digital age. While social media platforms offer unprecedented connectivity and democratic participation, they also pose significant threats to privacy. This paper tries to explore the privacy crisis within broader socio-technical contexts. It examines both individual and structural dimensions of privacy risk: from personal over sharing to systemic data extraction practices. By synthesizing empirical evidence, theoretical insights, and policy analysis, the paper offers a comprehensive understanding of privacy challenges and potential solutions. It also reviews regulatory frameworks, including Press Council of India (PCI henceforth) guidelines on privacy and public interest, assessing their effectiveness and limitations. The paper also considers emerging legal frameworks and digital literacy initiatives aimed at safeguarding privacy rights. Ultimately, it argues that addressing the crisis of privacy requires not only regulatory intervention but also a critical rethinking of how users engage with social media in an increasingly data-driven society. The paper concludes by proposing policy recommendations and design principles aimed at restoring privacy, promoting digital literacy.

Keywords: Privacy, AI, Public interest, Algorithm, Digital Landscape, Digital Literacy.

1. Introduction:

The arrival of social media marks one of the most significant shifts in communication history. Social media is a branch of media ethics. Media ethics deal with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media, social media and the internet. Media, being the fourth pillar of democracy, has a major role in maintaining acceptable practices in society. There is no doubt that the Media has power and authority in the modern society. Television, radio, electronic media and the

newspaper are different types of media. The word '**media**' is derived from the word '**medium**' meaning **middle ground or intermediate**. Media is intended to reach and address a large target group or audience.

Social media influences so many people's behavior nowadays. Information can be spread at the click of a button, whether it is true, false, speculation or gossip. This can affect relationships in various ways, be it between celebrities and ordinary people or among celebrities themselves and their loved ones. Social media can manipulate, influence, persuade and pressurize society, along with even controlling the world at times in both positive and negative ways, mentally, physically and emotionally. In today's world, media becomes as essential as our daily needs. Media today is plays an outstanding role in creating and shaping public opinion and strengthening society.

As the fourth pillar of democracy along with judiciary, executive and legislature, media of today has an all embracing role to act against the injustice, oppression, misdeeds and partiality in our society.

The use of social media is growing at a swift pace and the twenty-first century could be described as the "boom" period for social networking. Media has some ethical characteristics like, truth-telling, fairness and biaslessness, accountability, sensibility, providing accurate and complete news, privacy and objectivity. "Privacy" is the key ethical characteristic of media. The higher judiciary of India has recognized the right to privacy as a right implicit in the right to life and liberty guaranteed to the citizens of India by Article 21. So maintaining privacy in social media is an important one.

The rapid expansion of social media has passed the development of legal, ethical, and technological protections for personal privacy. This paper explores how social media platforms contribute to the weakening of privacy, examines the consequences of this loss, and analyzes the regulatory and technological efforts aimed at addressing these challenges.

2. Social Media:

Social media touches on variety of technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among their users. The largest social media platform is Facebook, Instagram Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube, LinkedIn and more than 4.7 billion people use social media, equal to roughly 61.4% of the world's population. In 2023, 94.8% of users accessed chat and messaging apps and websites, according to The Global Media Landscape. Social media nowadays is a very popular networking tool for communication. Media is the platform for public debates. "Media is acting as a watchdog. An eye has to be kept on people in power who often tend to misuse it in the absence of checks."¹ Digital media plays a powerful role in shaping contemporary culture. Social media is a digital technology for sharing of different ideas and information, including text and videos through network to the communities.

“The use of social media has changed the communication landscape resulting in changes in ethical norms and behavior. The unprecedented level of growth in usage has resulted in the reduction in the use of other media and changes in areas including civic and political engagement, privacy and safety.”² Social media is a window to explore and exchange of people’s choice and opinion. This media sites can be described as online services that allow users to create profile which is public, semi-public or both. Social media is acutely changing the way by which people communicate and buildup relationships. It has gained a great deal of popularity in recent years.

In the various social media platforms, people share large amount of information some of which is very personal. This personal data attracts other viewers outside of their trusted circle of relatives and friends. Another important thing in social media is algorithms. Social media algorithms are designed to promote for user engagement.

Algorithm is a complex set of rules and calculations used by social media platforms to prioritize the content that users see in their feeds. Social media algorithms determine which type of content will make it to your feed based on your behavior. An algorithm is a sequence of instruction which is preprogrammed to deliver content based on your past behavior and activities on social media platform. Cyber criminals could also have an interest in your personal information. So your privacy is your hand.

3. Privacy:

Privacy is defined as the right to be left alone. Privacy is the right to control access to personal information. “...private information about a person would be that to which there can be no right of public access. The right of privacy is deeply connected with a person’s self-respect, with invasions of privacy being connected with shame and indignity.”³

Privacy is important because it safeguards personal dignity, independent thought, and individual autonomy. When the media intrudes into private life—through invasive reporting, constant surveillance, or sensationalized narratives—it disturbs the delicate balance between the public’s right to know and an individual’s right to personal space. In the media sphere, privacy is therefore central to both civil life and research work. Privacy lies at the heart of research ethics. It protects the integrity, validity, and reliability of research findings. When privacy is ignored, research risks turn into an extractive and potentially harmful practice, undermining its credibility and distancing it from its fundamental goal—the pursuit of truth.

The concept of privacy has a deep bearing on media ethics. Privacy is a key characteristic of media ethics. Privacy, as a concept, is not new. It is a democratic right of a person. Privacy is a right, leads to peace of mind and can provide an environment of remoteness. This remoteness can allow people to breathe freely in a space that is free from interference.

According to Indian Constitution, the right to privacy is recognized in both common law and constitutional law. The Indian Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression in Article 19(1) (a). In accordance with Article 19(2), this right can be restricted by the law only in the 'interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence'. As per Article 21 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court of India has concluded that the right to privacy derives from the right to life.

(a) PCI Guidelines on Privacy and Public Interest:

PCI's guidelines provide us various dimension of privacy. It is very important to know PCI guidelines nowadays of social media. Because, public interest an excuse for wrongdoing with privacy rights. According to PCI, the privacy policy has been written to describe the privacy-related terms and conditions under which PCI Security Standards Council makes its web sites, web pages, domains, portals, mobile apps, online resources available to all people.⁴

The media persons have to very careful in view of sharing personal data to social media or any kind of media. "Personal Data" is the information that is associated with your personal identity and may include your name or other personal information that can be used to uniquely identify you as an individual. As per PCI's guidelines, in general, we use personal data to better understand your needs and interests and to provide you better service.

The PCI has laid down certain guidelines regarding the right to privacy: "The press shall not intrude or invade the privacy of an individual, unless outweighed by genuine overriding public interest, not being a prurient or morbid curiosity.....however,.....once a matter becomes a matter of public record, the right to privacy no longer subsists and it become a legitimate subject for comment by the press and the media, among others."⁵ The PCI guidelines again explain that "things concerning a person's home, family, religion, health, sexuality, person life, and private affairs are covered by the concept of privacy excepting where any of these impinges upon the public or public interest."⁶

(b) Public and Private: Press duty

The degree of privacy differs from person to person and also from situation to situation. "Right to Privacy is an inviolable human right. However, the degree of privacy differs from person to person and from situation to situation. The public person who functions under public gaze as an emissary/representative of the public cannot expect to be afforded the same degree of privacy as a private person. His acts and conduct as are of public interest ('public interest' being distinct and separate from 'of interest to public') even if conducted in private may be brought to public knowledge through the medium of the press. The press has however, a corresponding duty to ensure that the information about such acts and conduct of public interest of the public person is obtained through fair means, is properly

verified and then reported accurately. For obtaining information in respect of acts done or conducted away from public gaze, the press is not expected to use surveillance devices. For obtaining information about private talks and discussion while the press is expected not to badger the public persons, the public persons are also expected to bring more openness in their functioning and co-operate with the press in its duty of informing the public about the acts of their representatives.”⁷

Interviews, comments, pertaining to public persons who participate in events that are supposed to be public knowledge, if reported accurately, cannot be termed as intrusion into private life. There is a very slim dividing line between public and private life and public persons should not be too thick-skinned when it comes to comments of their actions or views by journalists. The mass media are allowed certain latitude in criticizing persons who are in chair of power because their conduct constitutes public interest, provided their criticism is not merely motivated to gratify private spite of opponents of a particular public figure.

Social Media and other media personals have responsibility to protect privacy of others. Privacy is a term that is hard to characterize. Privacy or the right to enjoy freedom from unauthorized intrusion is the negative right of all human being. “The concept of right, whether legal or moral, entitles us to do something. Whenever we have a right, other persons have no right to prevent us from doing it. Thus, if you have a right to express an opinion, then I have no right to obstruct you from doing so. Rights confers a certain status on our conduct, both in private and public.”⁸

Social Media and Privacy:

Social media is the online platforms where we can share own views, information, photos and videos etc. social networks have become an integral part of human life in today’s digital age. There are so many social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, etc. we are using them to communicate and transmit our information locally as well as globally. Social media has both advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages: The main benefit of social media is that we can share our thoughts and ideas with other people across the world. Now even a layman can express his opinion on any national and international issues. Another benefit of social media is that people can show their talent, potentiality, creativity on these various digital platforms. It also helps people to earn money by sharing their various talents. People also sell a lot of things like books, clothes, electronic items, kitchen accessories, car accessories and home decors, etc. through social media. It also helps to create awareness amongst people with good knowledge of health, education, politics, economic status of the country, employment status of the country. We can access social media as an e-learning resource.

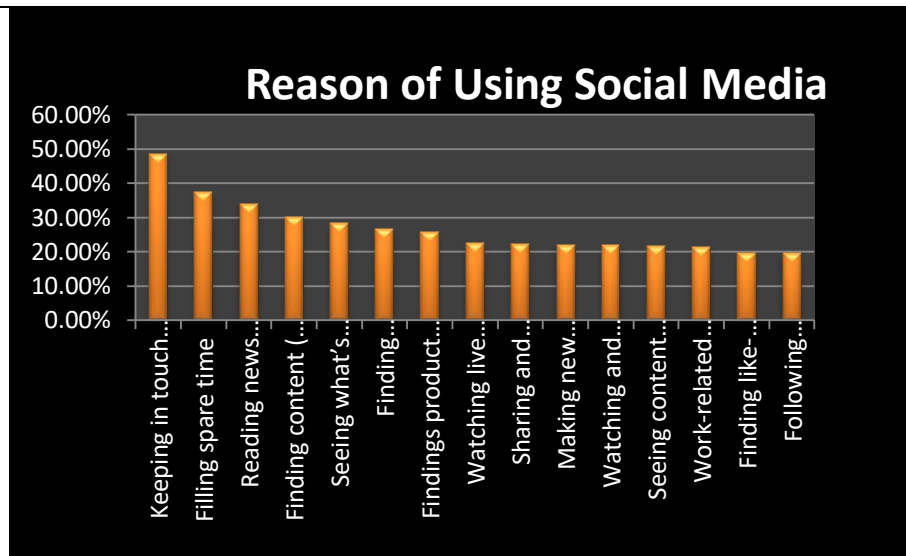
Disadvantages: Social media has some drawback also. People have got used to checking their social media accounts every now and then. People spend a lot of their valuable time in checking various spots on social media. As a result of spending much time on social media it brings a lot of unhealthy disorder like stress,

anxiety, and sleeplessness. Another downside of social media is that we cannot trust all the information available in this platform. Some information may be true, while some can be false or fake. In this platform some fake news spread like forest fire. Not only that our personal information becomes easily available to many people on the social network. Apart from this cyber bullying is another important side of social media. Some people post negative comments on others accounts to harass them. We should always be aware of hackers. We know so many incidence of bank account hacking. Hacking is the act of identifying and then exploiting digitally weak people in a computer system or network usually to gain unauthorized access to others account for personal or organizational data. But surprisingly maximum people engage in today’s various digital platforms.

The social network popularity is still growing throughout the world. 61.4% of the world population uses social media. But different people use different platforms for different needs. The chart below offers some great insight into the reason why people use social media today.

Main Reason for Using Social Media:⁹

Reason of Using Social Media	Percentage %
Keeping in touch with others friends and family	48.7%
Filling spare time	37.5%
Reading news stories	34.1%
Finding content (e.g., Article, Videos)	30.2%
Seeing what is being talked about	28.4%
Finding inspiration for things to do and buy	26.6%
Finding products to purchase	25.9%
Watching live streams	22.7%
Sharing and discussion opinion with others	22.4%
Making new contacts	22.2%
Watching and following sports	22.0%
Seeing content from your favourite brands	21.7%
Work-related networking and research	21.3%
Finding like-minded communities and interest groups	19.7%
Following celebrities or influencers	19.6%



In the days of social media, in reality, it is hardly possible to control your social media privacy. Personal privacy refers to the sharing of information or knowledge with someone else despite the person's reluctance.

4. Critical Observations:

The function of mass media – sourcing, reporting, and dissemination of information – both arises from and targets the public. The media centre around society though people provide the news and are the recipients of the news. Mass media like news paper, magazine, radio, television etc. these are also referred to as the traditional media. On the other hand, all the social media are basically hosted by the internet. In the twenty first century, social media platforms have become vast and powerful tools for connecting, communicating, sharing content, conducting business and disseminating various news and information. The number of people who do not use social media today is very small.

The unethical use of social media has resulted in the violation of individual privacy and impact upon information security. Personal data held by social media platforms is also in danger to being accessed and misused by third parties. Actually, the large number of information that people share on social media, some of which is especially personal, attracts other viewers those are outside of their trusted circle. Social media is a vast platform for communication. So privacy in the social media domain is very difficult, because of the fact that, these media are designed for sharing information. But, Privacy measures should be follows every people those are habituated in social media.

Social Media Privacy for General People:

Social media privacy is an important consideration for everyone using these platforms. Here are some tips to help you enhance your privacy on social media:

- **Review and Adjust Privacy Settings:** Regularly check and adjust your privacy settings on each social media platform you use. Customize who can see your posts, friend requests, and personal information.
- **Limit Personal Information:** Be cautious about the amount of personal information you share, such as your address, phone number, and workplace. Avoid sharing sensitive information that could be used to compromise your identity.
- **Control Profile Visibility:** Consider using a private profile if you want to limit access to your information. This way, only approved friends or followers can see your posts and details.
- **Be Mindful of Third-Party Apps:** Review and revoke access for third-party applications that you have connected to your social media accounts. These apps might have access to your data.
- **Regularly Update Passwords:** Use strong, unique passwords for your social media accounts, and update them regularly. Enable two-factor authentication for an extra layer of security.
- **Educate Yourself about Platform Features:** Stay informed about the privacy features and settings of the social media platforms you use. Understand how each platform handles your data and adjust settings accordingly.
- **Report Suspicious Activity:** Report and block any suspicious accounts or activity on your social media platforms. Be cautious about clicking on links or downloading files from unknown sources.

Remember that privacy is an ongoing concern, and staying vigilant about your online presence is essential in an ever-evolving digital landscape. Regularly revisit and update your privacy settings as needed.

5. Conclusion:

Algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) now lie at the heart of social media strategies, shaping user experiences by continuously analyzing personal data, preferences, and behavioral patterns. While such personalization enhances convenience and engagement, it simultaneously exposes users to an unprecedented level of surveillance, data extraction, and value steering. Through algorithmic categorization and value-sensitive design, social media platforms do not merely reflect users' choices but actively influence their decisions, priorities, and social interactions. In this sense, personal data has become the primary resource through which platforms operate, raising serious concerns about autonomy, informed consent, and the erosion of individual privacy.

The crisis of privacy in social media is therefore not solely the result of individual over-sharing but a structural outcome of data-driven platform architectures embedded within broader socio-technical and political systems. Addressing this crisis demands regulatory frameworks—such as privacy and public interest

guidelines—must be strengthened through transparency, accountability, and enforceable ethical standards in platform design and governance. Equally important is the promotion of digital literacy that empowers users to understand algorithmic processes, data-sharing practices, and privacy risks.

As social media continues to evolve, the future of digital privacy will depend on a collective commitment to responsible data practices and a critical rethinking of user engagement in an algorithmically mediated environment. Balancing the benefits of connectivity with the protection of personal autonomy is essential for sustaining digital trust. Ultimately, restoring privacy is not only a legal or technological challenge but a social and ethical imperative that will determine the integrity and sustainability of social media platforms in an increasingly data-driven society. Apart from that, excessive use of social media may affect your personal, social and professional life. Make sure that you have a responsible balance between your real life and virtual life.

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