



澳門特別行政區政府
Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau
個人資料保護辦公室
Gabinete para a Protecção de Dados Pessoais

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Survey Report of “Social Media and Privacy” Online Survey

The Office for Personal Data Protection
October 2011

1. Introduction

Enabled by the advancement and popularization of information technologies, the use of social media is becoming a commonplace in more and more citizens' life. With social media comes the need for citizens to be informed of the risks involved in its use in every country and region, besides the need for strengthening legal supervision in this regard. To develop its users' awareness, a set of parallel online surveys titled “Social Media and Privacy” was conducted as one of the awareness-promotion activities during Privacy Awareness Week 2011 by Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities (APPA). As an observer institution of the APPA, the Office for Personal Data Protection (hereinafter referred to as this Office) likewise carried out a corresponding survey in Macao to echo the effect of the APPA activity.

The main intent of the survey was to find out about citizens' use of and experience with online social networking sites, and at the same time help them enhance their awareness of the various data security risks involved therein.

In view of the fact that the situations facing member institutions of the APPA vary from country to country, it was agreed that the surveys should serve as awareness-promotion activities rather than scientific studies. With this in mind, member institutions chose online survey instead of a formal scientific approach as the means to the end for the activity. They also made use of various publicity means to invite local citizens to respond to their online surveys, without using random sampling or other statistical methods of sampling.

Given this background, readers of this report should avoid treating this survey's results as that of a scientific study. Where necessary, readers are advised to refer to and compare with similar studies done in Macao or its neighboring regions to arrive at a better understanding of this survey's findings.

Nonetheless, surveys like this and their results may well provide the general public as well as data protection agencies with food for thought, which may lead to better data protection planning in the future. The surveys may as well point out problem areas which future promotion activities should address. These are the points of conducting the surveys.



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2. Survey profile

The survey was posted on the website of this Office in the form of a trilingual questionnaire in Chinese, Portuguese and English, with largely the same questions as that of the questionnaire devised and agreed by the APPA member institutions.

The survey was open between 29 April 2011 and 29 May 2011 for 31 days to people who were 12 years of age and over. As an incentive for respondents as well as for publicity purposes, a computer-run prize-draw was held on 15 June 2011 on the premises of this Office, witnessed by the staff of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau. The names of the prize winners were announced in the lobby as well as on the website of the Office on 20 June 2011, and phone calls and emails were made or sent asking them to collect their prizes at the Office on 31 July 2011. Besides, the Office also advertised this survey on some local newspapers.

Statistics indicate that a total of 1418 respondents completed their inputs on the online questionnaire. Of those, 1409 responded in Chinese, 4 in Portuguese and 5 in English. 605 of the respondents were male and 813 were female, accounting for 42.67% and 57.33% respectively.

Table 1: Language demographics of respondents

Languages	Number	% of total
Chinese	1409	99.37
Portuguese	4	0.28
English	5	0.35
Total:	1418	100.00

Table 2: Gender demographics of respondents

Genders	Number	% of total
Male	605	42.67
Female	813	57.33
Total:	1418	100.00

Table 3: Age demographics of respondents

Age ranges	Number	% of total
12 to 17	80	5.64
18 to 29	489	34.49
30 to 44	434	30.61
45 to 59	279	19.68
60 and over	136	9.59
Total:	1418	100.00



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3. Data analysis

Let us look at the ways in which the respondents used social networking websites, and the user habit of those who viewed themselves as users of social media, as well as the extent to which they were aware of and concerned about the issues of personal data protection.

3.1 Use of social networking websites

3.1.1 Popularity of social networking websites

A total of 1028 respondents said they were users of social networking websites, accounting for 72.50% of the total. Their age and gender demographics are as follows:

Table 4: Age demographics of the respondents who “used social networking websites”

Age ranges	Number	% of total
12 to 17	67	6.52
18 to 29	459	44.65
30 to 44	356	34.63
45 to 59	129	12.55
60 and over	17	1.65
Total	1028	100.00

Table 5: Age demographics of the respondents who “did not use social networking websites”

Age ranges	Number	% of total
12 to 17	13	3.33
18 to 29	30	7.69
30 to 44	78	20.00
45 to 59	150	38.46
60 and over	119	30.51
Total	390	100.00

Table 6: Age demographics of respondents who viewed themselves as users or non-users of social networking websites

Age ranges	Users		Non-users		Total	
	Number	% of group	Number	% of group	Number	% of total
12 to 17	67	83.75	13	16.25	80	100.00
18 to 29	459	93.87	30	6.13	489	100.00
30 to 44	356	82.03	78	17.97	434	100.00
45 to 59	129	46.24	150	53.76	279	100.00
60 and over	17	12.50	119	87.50	136	100.00



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Table 7: Gender demographics of user and non-user respondents

Genders	Users		Non-users		Total	
	Number	% of group	Number	% of group	Number	% of total
Male	425	70.25	180	29.75	605	100.00
Female	603	74.17	210	25.83	813	100.00

The above data show that it is rather common for people of 12 to 44 years of age to be social media users. Of those, more than 90% of the respondents of 18 to 29 years of age indicated themselves as users.

3.1.2 Respondents who thought of themselves as non-users of social networking websites

A total of 390 respondents claimed that they were non-users of social networking websites, accounting for 27.5% of the total.

Of those non-users, 46.91% said they were unaware of social networking websites.

Table 8: Percentage of non-users who knew the following social networking websites (inputs were given in multiple choices)

Social networking websites	%
Facebook	33.90
Twitter	8.10
Renren	4.69
Hi5	2.56
Myspace	1.92
Friendster	1.28
Other websites	0.64

The main reasons for their not using social networking websites are firstly “unaware of them”, secondly “no need” and thirdly “no time”.

Table 9: Reasons for not using social networking websites (inputs were given in multiple choices)

Reasons	Number	%
Being unaware of the sites	219	45.25
Having no need for it	130	26.86
Having no time for it	84	17.36
Having no confidence in the sites	45	9.30
Other reasons	6	1.24



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3.2 Social media user habits

Here we will look at the user habits of the 1028 social media users, i.e., certain aspects of their use of social networking websites. Of those social media users, 96.11% (988 respondents) viewed themselves as current users, while 3.89% (40 respondents) did not think of themselves as current users.

Table 10: Statistics of users grouped by their status as current or non-current users of social networking websites

User groups	Number	%
Current users	988	96.11
Non-current users	40	3.89

With regard to frequency of use, 67.51% (694 respondents) of the users said they used social media once a day, while 17.90% of them (184 respondents) said they used the media once a week.

Table 11: Statistics of users grouped by their frequency of using social media

Frequency of use	Number	%
Once a day	694	67.51
Once a week	184	17.90
Once a month	40	3.89
Rarely	110	10.70

According to users, they used social media mainly “to talk with friends” and secondly to “keep in touch with family”. Obviously, keeping in contact with friends and family remains the main function of social networking websites. While respondents who sought “to know new friends” do not account for as much, they still account for 7.90%.

Table 12: Purposes for using social networking websites (inputs were given in multiple choices)

Purposes	%
Chat with friends	34.72
Keep in touch with family	15.28
Talk about things with people who share my interest	12.72
Upload pictures	12.72
Keep in contact with colleagues	12.48
Getting to know new friends	7.90
Personal business promotion	1.86
Other	2.33



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3.3 The extent to which respondents knew and were concerned about personal data protection

Let us look at the extent to which those 1028 users knew and were concerned about personal data protection.

3.3.1 Privacy settings

Of those users, 684 (66.54%) knew how to use privacy settings of their social networking websites; 155 (15.08%) did not know how to use those settings; and 189 (18.39%) had no idea whether there were privacy settings on the social networking websites they used.

Table 13: Statistics of users grouped by whether they knew “how to use privacy settings of social networking websites”

Users grouped by whether they knew how to use privacy settings	Number	%
Users who did know	684	66.54
Users who did not know	155	15.08
Users with no idea as to whether there were privacy settings	189	18.39

Of those users, 683 persons (66.44%) changed their privacy settings on the social networking websites, while 345 persons (33.56%) did not.

Table 14: Statistics of users grouped by whether they “changed their privacy settings on the social networking websites”

Users grouped by whether they changed their privacy settings	Number	%
Users who did	683	66.44
Users who did not	345	33.56

These statistics are quite meaningful. As tables 13 and 14 indicate, of the 684 users who knew “how to use privacy settings on social networking websites”, almost all (683 users) changed their “privacy settings on social networking websites”. In other words, as long as the users are informed of how to make use of privacy settings of social networking websites, they are almost sure to do it. On one hand, this means that the default privacy settings of social networking websites are not what users would like them to be. Therefore, the users will change those settings as soon as they learn how to do so. On the other hand, for personal data protection agencies, helping users know and guiding them in the use of the privacy settings on social networking websites become all the more important, because as long as users learn how to use the privacy settings on those sites, they will wish to do so to better protect their own



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personal data.

To the question “who would you allow to browse your personal data on the social networking website”, 742 of the users (72.18%) said they would allow “only the people I know well” to do so, while 122 of the users (11.87%) indicated that they would allow anyone to do so.

It is to some extent worth noting that only 82 users (7.98%) said they did not know who could browse their data, far fewer than those who did not “know how to use privacy settings on social networking websites” or had “no idea whether there were privacy settings” (155 and 189 users respectively). Those who said they allowed “only the people I know well” to access their data on the social networking website (724 users) are more than those (684 users) who knew how to use privacy settings on those sites. From the differences between the figures, we have reasons to think that there are two possibilities: one, that a certain number of people know and accept the default privacy settings of the websites; and two, that a certain number of people take it for granted that the default privacy settings on social networking websites are in their interest by default, and thought that the settings are what they would like. Therefore, as far as personal data protection agencies are concerned, making users aware of social websites’ default privacy settings and providing guidance in this regard seem to be a work that should be given certain priority.

Table 15: Statistics of users grouped by their allowing others to browse their personal data on social networking websites

User groups	Number	%
Users who said only the people they knew well were allowed to browse their data	742	72.18
Users who said anyone was allowed to browse their data	122	11.87
Users who said they chose specific people from various groups to share data	82	7.98
Users who did not know who could or did browse their data	82	7.98

3.3.2 The sense of self-protection

Of those users, as many as 598 users (58.17%) never read social networking websites’ Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions.



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Table 16: Statistics of users grouped by whether they read social networking websites' Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions

User groups	Number	%
Users who read social networking websites' Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions	430	41.83%
Users who did not	598	58.17%

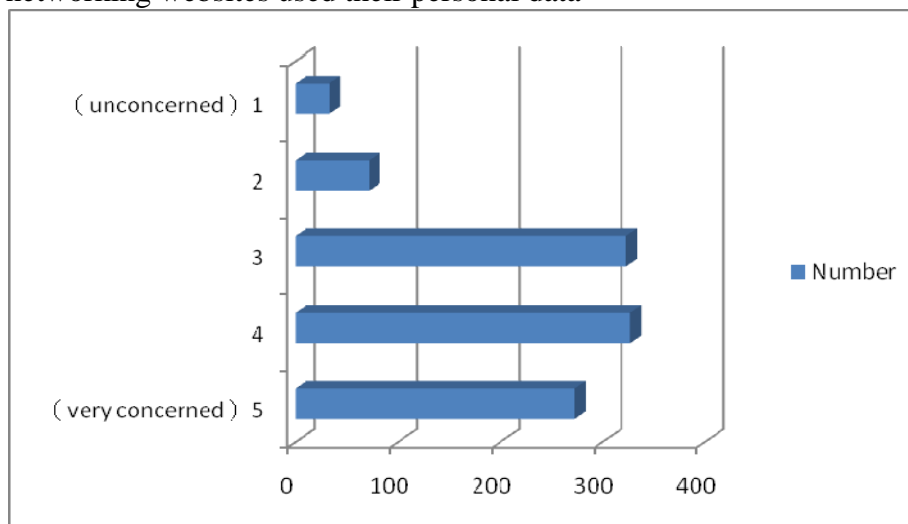
To the supposition that a social networking website used its users' personal data for purposes other than what its users expected, 474 respondents (46.11%) said they would stop using the website, and 489 (47.57%) would consider using the website no longer, while only 6.32% of the respondents indicated that they would continue to use the site.

Table 17: Statistics of users grouped by their attitude towards social networking websites misusing their personal data

User groups	Number	%
Users who would stop using such sites	474	46.11
Users who would consider stopping using such sites	489	47.57
Users who would continue to use such sites	65	6.32

As to how concerned the users were about how social networking websites used their data, the respondents indicated the following degrees of concern using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not concerned at all and 5 very concerned (see figure 1). According to the figure, the users were rather concerned in this regard.

Figure 1: Statistics of users grouped by their degrees of concern about how social networking websites used their personal data



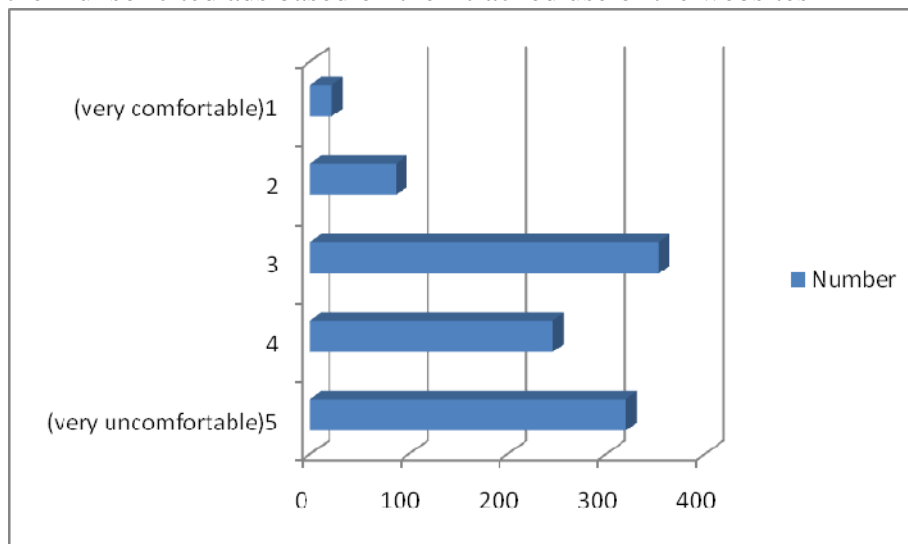


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When asked to indicate their opinion on the fact that social networking websites tend to track users' use of their website and send them unsolicited ads based on their track record, users expressed their opinions as seen in figure 2, using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning very comfortable and 5 very uncomfortable. Obviously, users tended to feel such behaviors as uncomfortable.

Figure 2: Statistics of users grouped by their attitude towards social media sending them unsolicited ads based on their tracked use of the websites



As more respondents changed their privacy settings on social networking websites than those who read Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions thereof, it may be safe to infer that there were users who got to know about how social networking websites operated and the rights and duties of either side from other channels than the websites.

Given the fact that social media users are concerned about how their data are used by social networking websites, plus the attitude of objection held by users towards the practice by such websites of feeding the users with unsolicited ads based on the users' track record, plus the tendency of users to stop using such websites once misuse of data by the sites becomes known to the users, it becomes obvious that most users do have some sense of self-protection. However, it is worth noting that a considerable number of users did not read privacy policies and terms and conditions, which means that most of them failed to stay alert and take substantial precautions. To agencies that promote personal data protection, this means that it is necessary to heighten people's sense of self-protection, especially to keep them informed of any preventive and practical means of self-protection.



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3.3.3 Bad experience

95 of those users (9.24%) indicated that they had their social media account hacked. As such users account for nearly 10%, which is rather high, and hacker inflicted damages are traumatic to the users and their families and friends, this kind of experience deserves more attention.

Table 18: Statistics of users grouped by whether they had their user account hacked on social networking websites

Users groups	Number	%
Users who had their user account hacked	95	9.24
Users who did not	933	90.76

23.35% of the users regretted having posted their personal data on social networking websites. 35.99% of the users had the experience of being upset about finding someone uploading their personal data or pictures to social networking websites. Both ratios are rather high.

Table 19: Statistics of users grouped by whether they regretted posting their personal data on social networking websites

User groups	Number	%
Users who regretted posting their personal data online	240	23.35
Users who did not regret posting their personal data online	788	76.65

Table 20: Statistics of users grouped by whether they had the experience of being upset about finding someone uploading their personal data or pictures onto social networking websites

User groups	Number	%
Users who had that experience	370	35.99
Users who did not	658	64.01

To personal data protection promotion agencies, those statistics show that it is necessary to urge the users to raise the security standards on managing their user account and their use of social networking websites; it is also necessary to urge the users to be careful about uploading and sharing personal data.



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4. Key findings

The “Social Media and Privacy” online survey by this Office was conducted in parallel to a set of awareness-promotion activities administered during Privacy Awareness Week 2011 by Asia Pacific Privacy Authorities. Therefore, readers of this report should note the survey’s background, and avoid treating the survey results as that of a scientific study. Nonetheless, surveys like this and their results may well provide the general public and Data Protection Agencies with food for thought, which may be conducive to better planned data protection in the future, as well as indicative of the direction future promotions should take.

From the analysis of the survey results, the Office derived the following key findings:

- a. Social networking websites are rather commonly used by people of the ages between 12 and 44, with juveniles commonly using social media in particular;
- b. The frequencies at which users use social networking websites are rather high;
- c. Social networking websites are still used mainly for communication by which the users keep in touch with their family and friends;
- d. While many social media users know and have modified their privacy settings on social networking websites, many other users are still ignorant of those settings;
- e. Users tend to share their data only with the people they know well.
- f. While a majority of the users have some sense of self-protection, a considerable percentage of the users never read their social networking websites’ Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions; and
- g. It is necessary to be concerned with the users’ data security issues and their over-sharing of personal data.

As to the work of this Office, the survey’s results obviously suggest that:

- a. The Office should continue to concern itself with the personal data security issues involved in the use of social media, especially where children and teenagers are concerned and affected;
- b. The Office should enhance its efforts on educating users about the default privacy settings of social networking websites;
- c. It is necessary to help social media users develop a better sense of self-protection by an enhanced preventive and substantiated promotion of self-protection means, including the advocacy of perusing social networking websites’ Privacy Policies and Terms and Conditions before using the sites; and
- d. The Office should provide guidance and advocate that users be wary of data security risks, and that they refrain from sharing too much of their personal data on social media.

This Office will, as ever, continue to analyze and concern itself with the



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problems affecting personal data protection in the use of social networking websites,
and continue to cooperate with other members and observers of the APPA.