Online Social Networks in a Post-Soviet State: How Hungarians Protect and Share on Facebook

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How (and why) do culture, socio-political history, and region-specific influences affect social networking privacy behaviors?
Related Work

• There is a cultural element to the Internet [Miller/Slater01]

• Cultures differ in their privacy concerns [Bellman04, Cho09, Kumaraguru05]

• Different cultures have different social networking privacy concerns [Krasnova10, Wang11]

• Limited work employing interviews [Chapman08]
Background - Hungary

- Population of ~10 million
Background- Hungary

• Occupied by Nazis (1944-1945) and Soviets (1945-1991)
• Communism till 1989
• Joined E.U. in 2004
• Political protests in 2006, 2011-2012
Background - Hungarian SNS

- **iWiW** - Launched in 2002
- Monolingual
- Invitation only
- Limited privacy controls
Background- Hungarian SNS

• Facebook’s Hungarian translation- 2008

• iWiW traffic has fallen
Typical Class Photo
2011 Class Photo
Why Do We Care About Hungary?

• SNS research heavily focused on North America and Western Europe
• Case study for Post-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe
• Transition from a localized social network to Facebook
Methodology

• 19 semi-structured interviews in Spring 2011
• Debrecen, a city of ~200,000 people
• Interviewer lived there for 9 months
Methodology

• Recruitment: citywide email lists, Facebook groups, snowball sampling

• Interviews audio recorded
  • Detailed notes, transcription → Themes

• Participants chose Hungarian or English
  • Majority chose Hungarian
  • Interviewer- Native English, Fluent Hungarian
Demographics

• 9 female, 10 male
• Ages 18 – 43
  • Six were age 30+
• 9 in workforce
• 10 were students
Research Questions

• How do Hungary’s history and culture affect social networking privacy behaviors?
• What’s too personal to share?
• What caused iWiW’s fall and Facebook’s rise?
• Does a shared “cultural identity” encourage Hungarians to share more freely with other Hungarians?
Research Questions

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Participants’ SN Usage

- 17/19 use Facebook daily

- Histogram of Facebook account age:

  - 17/19 have used iWiW
    - 1 uses iWiW more than FB; 4 have deleted iWiW
“Younger generation” shares openly, uses privacy settings

• 18/19 - “Younger generation” shares more

• 18/19 - Familiar with privacy controls
  • “Friends only” setting

• Similar to Americans [boyd/Marwick 2011]
There is a generational divide of not sharing information

(19,M)- “My father never posts really personal pictures about himself or personal information. He actually never posts anything.... He only uses it for chat and to see pictures about his friends and send friend requests and stuff.”
Why?

(43,F)- “[Older people] are perhaps frightened about information about themselves. [Interviewer: Why?] It's possible that they feel the impact of the old era more strongly.”
Norm against documentation

(43,F)- “There were Úttörők and Kisdobosok, there was one party in the country... So as we grew up, you couldn't say what you thought. We had to think about who we were talking in front of, and what we were saying... [Today’s youth] put their opinions regarding politics, child-rearing, and school in public on Facebook... In what country did they grow up?”
The past is a major influence

(30, M)- “In Hungary, it’s common not to share very much... It has been always part of Hungarian culture, maybe because of the history that when the Russians were here and the communism... Your neighbor could write a note about yourself and you could end up in the prison, so I think this comes from [our] parents’ mind.”
Older users consider photos particularly private

• The purpose of photos is to **uniquely identify** the account holder to his or her friends.

(31, M) - People share “at most one photo, from which their friends or acquaintances can recognize them... Previously I didn't have any photos up on Facebook, but now I uploaded one. **But just one, not a lot.**”
Older users expect their friends to ask before tagging

(35,M) - “I have two pictures on Facebook so that people can know it's me.... If someone [tagged me] without asking me, I'd be disgusted. This would violate my rights.”
Political views are sensitive

(20,F)- “I was on [a right-wing political blog] where I either commented or ‘liked’ a picture I found pretty. I later realized that searching Google for me would reveal my comment, that I visited that site... which I regretted a bit since [the site] is fairly radical and nationalist, which would be seen negatively.”
iWiW is amateur

• Interviewees switched to Facebook because of speed, features, and layout

• Facebook enjoys a great deal of trust
  • Participants felt that Facebook had not violated their privacy
Take-aways for the “older generation” (>30)

• Older users are reluctant to document life
  • Comes from socio-political history

• Photos are used for identification and should be posted by the user, not tagged
Take-aways regarding politics

• **Political** posts are sensitive for **everyone**

• Younger generation - regrets
Future Directions

• Expand to a large-scale survey, potentially across Eastern Europe.
• Interviews globally ➔ global survey
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