PERILS OF CLICK LIKE, SHARE OR COMMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT
Problem: What are the consequences when someone clicks *like* on a page, picture, or video on a social network? What is the effect of this transaction in terms of marketing forces and economic value, and what are consequences for security and privacy? We explored the new digital marketing perils of *like* in this research. Social networking sites are filled with behavioral data that includes consumers' positive reactions to text, pictures, or video, called *likes.* Transaction streams that result from *likes* create a chain of economic value. That value is worth studying by marketers for the economic as well as ethical reasons. Marketing analysts are looking at the potential solutions to better understand the value and risks of a like/share on social media. This study will examine how companies are sifting through the data from social networking to create economic value. As a result, the security and privacy of those who "liked" a topic, picture, or video are affected, with the "likers" receiving consequent spam. The companies responsible for that spam, known as "*like farms*," are popping up globally, concerning ethical marketers and users alike.

Key Words: Social Media Sites, Social Network, Share, Like, Comment, Internet Security, Web Marketing, Privacy

INTRODUCTION

Social Network Sites (SNS), especially Facebook (FB), have become the prevalent global cyber meeting places for individuals, consumers, marketers, religious, political, art and other groups. It is evident that FB became a hub for marketing groups since it is a place that receives major website traffic, and more than 1.2 billion people have used the platform. FB is proactive in analyzing users' behavior based on their searches and the *likes* they bestow as their approval for FB content. Anytime a user uploads pictures, text, or video, FB automatically posts the following options under their content: *like, share* or c*omment*. Users actions on these options are recorded. Almost all organizations and public figures have a Facebook page to harvest information that effortlessly is available; they use SNS to connect with their followers and receive feedback immediately.

For the purposes of this research, we have identified two types of *like* on FB; type one is initiated by a friend in response to comments from another friend. Clicking *like* on this sort of content is basically harmless. The second type of *like* is a response to content posted by businesses, organizations, or spammers. Type two *likes* are coming from marketers and hackers to harvest visitors' approval. The focus of this paper is the second type of *like*: approval that is initiated and harvested for selling individual profile information. *Like* harvesting by the general public is exactly what marketing companies have been soliciting from consumers for decades through mail, cold calls, and shopping loyalty cards. However, phone, mail, and loyalty cards have never been able to provide data anywhere nearly as precise, timely, and detailed as *like* harvesting. Like

harvesting is more direct than sifting through transactions with data-mining tools to analyze patterns in customers' shopping behavior (Markovikj, et al. 2013). FB *like* means consumer approval on the topic, which provides more than a pattern of customer purchasing habits; it is actually pointing to each user profile or their friend's profile as an opportunity for direct advertising.

For all of these reasons, utilization of social media like harvesting has been helpful for small businesses. Ray (2013) noted that the SNS power of marketing is more than just to sell the products. Ray describes how businesses can leverage likers friends' connections by applying their approval of *like* to spread the word about the business. Using SNS for advertising is technically viral, or organically shared, marketing among groups, friends, and affiliates. A young man or a woman who is a hair dresser or a tailor can easily use social media to advertise their small business and drive traffic to their page, as can major organizations. Stefanone, et al. (2012) cites the successful like campaigns launched by organ donation groups, and Hays, Page and Buhalis (2011) show the ways that tourism boards have had similar success.

On the negative perspective of unethical behavior, some opportunist may present a picture of a sick child or hurt animals in order to solicit *likes* for monetary gain. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) called this the "like economy," since the objective is to capture traffic and make money from these *likes*. The profiles of the *likers*, once harvested by these opportunist groups, are sold to others that seek email addresses based on users' profile in order to spam them or to advertise illegal products. This exploitative practice is also? being used by small businesses that need to drive traffic to their sites in order to become better known.

It may not be clear to many individuals why the items that they were searching for or viewing in Google yesterday now appear in the corner of their FB page. They may appreciate that computers recognize them and know which sites they were visiting previously. This is the mapping method that marketing companies apply to track customers' navigations on the Web. Besides cookies, which are a digital trail left by visitors to a website, the visited sites from FB now can use the visitor's email address to advertise similar products or services to them the afterwards.

PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL NETWORKS

Advertising has been pushed at consumers since it began. It has been called "push" marketing because of this practice. Push marketing has been used by advertisers for decades, but data mining tools have made the internet an unparalleled resource for new and improved push marketing techniques. Companies such as Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and Yahoo track web users navigation by installing cookies in each viewer's browser (Story & Stone, 2007).

Push marketing, such as TV commercials or banner ads, has been a popular method of attracting customers' interest and it is generally tolerated by the public. Enticing FB users to click *like* is another kind of familiar push marketing. However, as established above, sometimes the content that solicits users' *likes* may not be innocent, ethical, and legitimate marketing. It is important for consumers to identify the SNS contents and initiators of deceptive content. Posting pictures of sick or needy children, sentimental texts, or animals and selling the resulting *likes* for profit is unethical. This practice is a dominant practice in SNS. The unethical initiators' send spam e-

mails to the *likers* to sell data that have been mined from the *likers'* profile and behavior. The users profile then is aggregate sold to other commercial buyers or used for further push marketing. The concerning issue is that these *like* requests are based on the readers' sympathetic feelings toward the ad. Abusing individuals' compassion for monetary gain is called fraud. Analyzing individuals' profiles and selling the data to other sources is on the rise in SNS, and this will jeopardize the privacy, security, and enjoyment of using social media.

METHODOLOGY

The authors spent months gathering, reviewing, and analyzing FB for spurious texts and pictures, as well as performing a thorough review of the relevant literature. The method they used was first to group the types of content that were shared by friends and reflected on the researchers' personal FB pages. The first type, personal content that was created by a friend, was not considered for this research. Instead, the authors focused on the second type: content from a third party source that had been *liked* or shared by a friend. In this paper, the authors explore the privacy consequences of clicking, liking, sharing, or commenting on content from ingenious third party pages that direct the users to their site in order to capture theirs and their friends' profiles.

ANALYSIS

The motivation for this research was the authors' suspicion that a powerful data-gathering tool such as SNS *likes* could not be wholly innocent. Based on that intuition, the authors began to examine various "viral" text and pictures that portrayed a sympathetic message in an attempt to garner *likes*.

In addition to exploring this topic for ethics discussions, the pictures and posted content portrayed in this paper will also serve to alert SNS users on ways to avoid having their profile and eventually their identity captured. The share in Picture 1 came from a female with children of the same age as the children portrayed. The children are requesting *likes* and *shares* of their picture as possible, claiming that, "Daddy says that if we get One Million likes, he will take us to Disneyland!"

Picture 1- Like · Share ·

The authors followed this image all the way to the originator page, which is called Shut-Up I'm Talking and links to www.shutupimtalking.com. This site is used by members to initiate advertising on goods, services, or illicit requests. Members of this page create FB content with their website's address underneath to draw viewers' attention to their sites. This site was filled with inspirational messages. For example, one of the messages reads, "My sister may not always be at my side but she is always in my heart," and appears on an enticing pink background. This message guided the researchers to a further website called The Smilies that offers downloadable? smiley faces disguising malicious software for harvesting users' FB profiles.

In another example of this kind of data harvesting content, Picture 2 depicts an inspirational message. The text reads, "If you a have a daughter you love with all your heart, And let everyone know how much you are proud of her," and this incarnation of it had already received 4,831 *likes*, 14,552 *shares*, and 254 *comments*. The message looks attractive and presents itself as an uplifting message from mothers to their daughters, who will view the post if they are friends on FB. However, this post was not from a source that cares about the users' love for their daughters. Instead, the point is harvest information from the *likers*' profiles and unethically use spam email to offered items such as faux name brand watches, purses, or other luxury items.

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Like · 4,831· Share 14,552 people like this.

254 comments. 31 December 2013 at 09:34 via mobile · Like

Courtesy of: (facebook.com/Happysmiles)

Another popular category of fraudulent FB content is sentimental religious images . Pages that are created under various religious names have members that use the page to direct the viewers to outside pages for *like* farming. These pages utilize PHP and MySQL software programs to support user's interface and to harvest *likes* and *shares* (Jin, et al. 2011).

Goldberg (2013) reported that a mother posted a post-surgery picture of her 22-month old daughter, Sarafina, on her FB page. A few weeks later, Sean Murphy, the father of little girl, discovered that this same picture had been appropriated and posted by a page called Starteens, which is a *like* page, specifically to harvest profiles. The image of a sad little girl (Picture 3) in a hospital gown attracts sympathetic attention. Was this a misuse of the photo or a valid use? According to Goldberg (2013), this is an example of viral social media doing good for the overall community. Sean Murphy did not contact the page owner after this discovery. Instead, he requested that *likers* contribute to the hospital where the child received her successful surgery. In this case, he was able to direct contributions to the hospital, where a good outcome resulted.

Almost all of the pictures or texts that are shared from unknown sources from friends are created for advertising purposes and harvest of the *like* profiles. The objective of social farming sites is to bring traffic to their page and target viewers' and their friends digital and demographic profiles (Golbeck, Robles, & Turner, 2011).

Picture 3- Serafina Murphy. Huffington Post, 2013

Currently, FB supports a feature called Pixer, an online photo editor. Pixer is focused on pictures of the user of this application and the friends' pictures and albums. A "Like" slideshow navigates through every friend's album, on every picture simply and asks by X means "No" or √ means "Yes" under each photo to post or not post. Approval on posting the photo puts the pictures on all the friends pages of the viewer. The friends would see these photos may not know who they are, since the platform just posts the name of the person who sent them. Pixer is powered by Zoosk that match singles together based on their like profile. Pixer is now one of the companies that FB has added a link to each page and obviously they receive a royalty from each transaction from Zoosk, an online dating company. Zoosk notifies the users before they activate the application. What will Zoosk do for you: Zoosk receives: your public profile, friend list, email address, relationship interests, birthday, current city and likes plus the combination of all of these items of data. (Pixer, 2014). Side selling of items such as; books and music have been a norm for Amazon since its inception, but Zoosk is stepping further into data collection by using individuals online profiles to match them for love and even matrimony.

PRIVACY IMPLICATIONS

Tricking or playing with people's emotions to harvest their profile and demographic information is not ethical. The paradoxical issues are that FB or SNS allow this and we may be just scratching the surface. People should be educated on SNS when utilizing: *like*, share, and game applications. They should learn that there is a loss of privacy with each feature. It is vital that SNS users avoid adding their *like*, share or comment on a text or picture that comes from friends who last shared the content and were not the originator (Jin et al. 2011). To identify the origination of the content in FB, users can observe above the content to identify the page that is linked from. They can give attention to pasted or shared content with legitimate posts that may be relevant to the original topic, but not those that hijack the viewers to their page through links. The war of *like* farming for economic gain as Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) described is not going to disappear. It will just become more sophisticated. Viewers' alertness and attention to detail of SNS messages and origination of contents is important to avoid giving up their profile information.

FB content can be retrieved through Google and other search engines. Capturing individuals' social interests is what SNS are basically were created for. However, it is obvious that harvesting names and social interests of individuals is not difficult through FB. It is obvious that even those that use security features to guard their pictures are not excluded from Pixer, Picasa or any other media that harvests pictures from FB and Google. By capturing the social profile from SNS, and their employment background from Linkedin.com, and matching to white pages or the sites that find people for free or a small fee, it is now find their age and home address. Keeping this information on any database would provide great data mining files for finding patterns for further marketing. The problem would occur when this information is sold to illegitimate businesses for abusing one's identity.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the consequences that may result from certain types of communication tools in SNS is discussed. Using features such as; *like*, share and comment creates individuals' social

preferences in: friends, sports, music, films, books, clubs, etc. Capturing this information is a gold mine for marketing firms. However, this information is also harvested by small marketers as well as those who are called opportunists and may use this valuable information in an unethical manner. With FB culture as an open information platform, there is basically no individual privacy guarantee. Once you are on the Internet your privacy is gone. So it is imperative that individuals provide the fewest details on personal information if they want to avoid these issues in the future.

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