

# Social Media Platform Safety - Concerns of Users, Obligations and Ethical Requirements of Users and Providers

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***Abstract- There are growing concerns on the security of the data of individuals on social media. As users are oblivious of the consequence, even those who are aware have little to do when to protect themselves. Although governments are working on policies to protect individuals, there is a joint responsibility of platform providers and users to achieve the needed goal. This paper seeks to look at the obligations and ethical requirements for both users and providers.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

This document will look at the obligations of social media providers in protecting users. Do they have any obligations? What concerns do users have and what are providers doing in resolving them? Finally we will look at the obligations of users in making social media platforms safe. Do users have any role in making the platforms safe?

In the digital age, social media platforms have become indispensable tools for communication, entertainment, and information exchange. These platforms now serve as hubs for personal interaction, professional networking, and global advocacy. With billions of users worldwide, social media has revolutionized the way individuals and communities connect, shaping societal norms, influencing political landscapes, and fostering a sense of global connectivity. From grassroots movements to multinational campaigns, social media's reach and impact are unparalleled.

However, the rapid evolution of these platforms has introduced a host of challenges and risks, particularly concerning platform safety. Issues such as data privacy breaches, cyber-bullying, and the proliferation of harmful or misleading content have prompted widespread concern among users, policymakers, and technology providers alike. The interplay between users' expectations, providers' obligations, and ethical

responsibilities underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of social media safety. This paper aims to explore these dimensions, addressing the complexities and critical considerations involved in ensuring secure, ethical, and inclusive digital environments.

By examining the multifaceted nature of social media safety—spanning user vulnerabilities, provider responsibilities, and regulatory landscapes—this paper provides insights into the strategies and frameworks necessary for creating a balanced and secure digital ecosystem. It highlights the importance of collective accountability and innovative solutions in mitigating risks while preserving the core values of connectivity and expression.

### 1. The Importance of Social Media Platform Safety

Social media platform safety is a multidimensional concern that touches upon numerous critical aspects, including privacy protection, content moderation, cyber security, and mental health. Each of these elements plays a vital role in shaping the overall experience of users and maintaining the integrity of digital spaces.

One of the most pressing concerns is the vulnerability of users to data breaches. The massive collection of personal information by social media platforms, coupled with sophisticated cyber threats, has made user data a prime target for malicious actors. High-profile incidents such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal have underscored the far-reaching consequences of inadequate data security practices, both for individuals and society at large (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Equally significant is the issue of content moderation. Social media platforms must navigate the delicate balance between ensuring user safety and upholding

principles of free speech. The rise of cyber bullying, hate speech, and the spread of harmful content poses significant threats to individual well-being and societal harmony. Ineffective or inconsistent content moderation policies can exacerbate these risks, undermining user trust and platform credibility.

Cyber security is another critical component of platform safety. From phishing attacks to the exploitation of platform vulnerabilities, users are exposed to a range of digital threats that can compromise their personal and financial security. Providers must continually innovate and adapt their security measures to keep pace with evolving threats, ensuring robust defences against potential breaches.

The mental health implications of social media use further emphasize the need for platform safety. Excessive exposure to negative or unrealistic content can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues, particularly among younger users. Features such as algorithms that amplify certain types of content can inadvertently exacerbate these effects, raising ethical questions about the role of technology providers in safeguarding user well-being. Ethical concerns, such as algorithmic biases and the spread of misinformation, add another layer of complexity to social media safety. Algorithms that prioritize engagement over accuracy can inadvertently promote divisive or false information, impacting public discourse and trust in institutions. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that considers both technological and societal dimensions (Gorwa, 2019).

In light of these multifaceted concerns, it is evident that ensuring social media platform safety is not merely a technical or operational challenge but a societal imperative. It demands collaboration among users, providers, regulators, and other stakeholders to create environments that are not only safe but also equitable and empowering.

## II. USER CONCERNS REGARDING PLATFORM SAFETY

Users' safety concerns typically revolve around three key areas that significantly impact their experiences on social media platforms: privacy and data security,

mental health implications, and the prevalence of misinformation and harmful content.

**2.1 Privacy and Data Security** The collection, storage, and utilization of personal data by social media platforms have sparked widespread apprehension. Users are increasingly concerned about how their information is handled and whether it is adequately protected from breaches or unauthorized use. High-profile data breaches, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, have highlighted significant vulnerabilities in platform security and the potential misuse of personal data. These incidents underscore the need for more stringent data protection measures and transparent policies that empower users to control their own information (Isaak & Hanna, 2018).

**2.2 Mental Health Implications** Social media's impact on mental health has been the subject of extensive research, revealing both positive and negative outcomes. While these platforms can foster community and support, excessive use has been linked to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The effects are particularly pronounced among adolescents, who may be more vulnerable to cyber bullying and the pressure to conform to idealized portrayals of life presented online. Such portrayals can create unrealistic expectations and foster feelings of inadequacy, highlighting the need for supportive features and responsible design practices to mitigate these challenges (Primack et al., 2017).

**2.3 Misinformation and Harmful Content** The proliferation of fake news, hate speech, and extremist content represents one of the most pressing challenges for social media platforms. These issues pose significant risks not only to individual users but also to societal stability and trust in institutions. The rapid spread of misinformation often amplified by algorithms designed to prioritize engagement can contribute to public confusion and exacerbate divisions. Similarly, the prevalence of harmful content, including hate speech and graphic material, underscores the need for robust mechanisms to identify and counteract these issues. Importantly, these mechanisms must strike a careful balance to ensure they do not infringe on freedom of expression,

maintaining an open yet safe digital environment (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

By addressing these core concerns, social media platforms can foster greater trust among users and create environments that promote positive interactions while minimizing risks.

Concerns Social Media Providers Such as Instagram, Tiktok and Snapchat Needs to Address in Order to Protect Users

The concerns that other social media providers such as Instagram, Tiktok, and SnapChat has to address learning from the Facebook case<sup>2</sup>. In August 2019, data of 530 million users was lifted in breach but Facebook did not notify users. Lessons from the case made me propose concerns that social media players need to address to make users safe.

1. They should refrain from collecting data of users that could easily be used to identify them, Examples are phone numbers, address, and date of birth.
  2. Data of user should not be stored on the servers of social media platforms; it should be on the devices of each user and when one wants to access I, then it is called. The advantages of this includes users having control over their data, it may be difficult for hackers to have access to large data at the same time. Companies are developing applications to manage this. Examples are TensorFlow Federated developed by Google and differential privacy on iOS<sup>1</sup>.
- If platforms will collect large data, then they should have robust security in place to protect these data. They must abide by the data collections policies of countries they operate in. They must seek consent of users before data is sold.
  - Finally, I am of the view that users should have control over what data they want to make available and what has been made available. Users should be able to wipe out their data completely from those platforms. There could be encryptions of certain data that no one else could use except user or with user permission.

Obligations of Providers of Social Media to Users

The social media providers owe duty of care to its users. "A duty of care, applying to both a person and

to companies, has been defined as a requirement to take care in relation to a particular activity as it affects particular people or things. If that person does not take care, and someone comes to a harm identified in the relevant regime as a result, there are legal consequences, primarily through a regulatory scheme but also with the option of personal legal redress "(Legal Dictionary).

Therefore if social media platforms become vulnerable and data of users gets into wrong hands, users will have to be compensated. Secondly, social media platforms owe the obligation on provision of appropriate content. They have to make sure appropriate content gets to its users.

My Whether a platform is paid or free, platforms providers still owe duty of care to users on a paid platform, and I am of the view that the protection should even be robust on a paid platform and compensation should be greater when there is a breach on a paid platform. Policies of governments will have to outline these fines.

Obligations of Users to Social Media Providers

Social media users have obligations to provide accurate personal data to avoid falsification. They have obligations to post appropriate content, go by the policies of the platform, remain ethical and honest, respect the views of others, and have the duty to report violations. In summary, the users have a duty of care as well.

It is amazing that content is mostly provided by users, yet the providers are held responsible for inappropriate content<sup>3</sup>. Users have to bring their own sense of ethics and principles to bear when posting content. We have to think of our community. We have children on the platforms and there are growing concerns about protecting these children but 'hey,' we provide this inappropriate content. Amazingly, the same users who provide the content are complaining that it is inappropriate. There is huge responsibility on users to make social media a sanitized place. This is the reason providers have restrictions on what could be posted, and warnings are given on certain views. Eg. User discretion required.

### Ethical Responsibilities of Users and Providers of Social Media

Ethics is of immense importance in the part of both users and providers of social media.

#### Ethical Responsibilities of Users:

1. Users will have to adhere to community guidelines. As a community we have our set rules and principles that serve as a base of our ethics. The same set should play on social media as I see it as our digital community.
2. Users of social media should be genuine and honest in disclosing their identity. Most users use fake names, date of birth and even location. This is unethical. If users have nothing to hide, why will they provide false information? I see this as highly unethical in the part of users and will create a bigger challenge for providers and law enforcement agencies as well.
3. Users will have to be responsible for the content they post. As stated earlier, we complain of the content on social media, but we post them. We have to respect age limit content and restrictions set by the providers. Users will have to avoid hate speech, cyber bullying, and harmful behaviors. Users will have to report harmful content for them to be taken down; give feedback and constructive criticism.

#### Ethical responsibilities of Providers:

1. The providers will have to be transparent about privacy of users and the use of their data. It is known that social media providers sell and use data of users without their express consent. This is unethical.
2. Providers have to be up on content moderation and regulation. They have to make sure they have the algorithm in place to ensure the right age, for example receiving the appropriate content. Adult contents are falling into the hands of children and there is a need to prevent that.
3. One of the greatest unethical issues is unethical advertising. I am of the view that platforms think of only the income because anyone who can pay can boost their page. This results in scammers having the ability to reach vulnerable users with ease. I am of the view that it is only legitimate companies that should be able to advertise. This is one area that needs to be critically regulated.

4. Providers will have to provide the needed support to members when required. Mostly, there is no one to talk to when users need support.

### CONCLUSION

The importance of social media to our generation cannot be understated. However, It is eminent that social media platforms are becoming extremely unsafe by the day. Providing false information has been a bane for experts to solve and trying to keep the platforms safe has been a challenge by providers. Theonuslies on all of us, users, and providers to make it safe.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. User Education and Awareness  
Promote Digital Literacy: Social media platforms should implement educational campaigns that teach users about identifying misinformation, understanding privacy settings, and recognizing harmful behavior.  
Transparency in Algorithms: Providers should inform users about how algorithms work, particularly regarding content curation and the spread of misinformation.
2. Stronger Community Guidelines  
Clear Policies on Misinformation: Social media platforms need to establish and enforce clear policies regarding misinformation, including consequences for sharing false information.  
Reporting Mechanisms: Users should have easy access to reporting tools for harmful content, harassment, and misinformation, with prompt responses from the platform.
3. Enhanced Privacy and Security Features  
Robust Privacy Settings: Providers must ensure that users have control over their personal data, including the ability to easily modify privacy settings and understand data usage.  
Two-Factor Authentication: Social media platforms should encourage or require two-factor authentication to enhance account security.
4. Ethical Responsibilities of Users  
Responsible Sharing: Users must take personal responsibility for verifying information before sharing it and consider the potential impact of their posts on others.

Engagement in Positive Discourse: Users should foster a culture of respectful engagement, avoiding inflammatory language and promoting constructive conversations.

#### 5. Collaborative Efforts

Partnerships with Fact-Checkers: Social media platforms should collaborate with independent fact-checking organizations to provide users with accurate information and context.

Government and Regulatory Support: There should be a dialogue between social media providers and governments to create regulations that protect users while respecting freedom of expression.

#### 6. Continuous Improvement and Feedback

User Feedback Mechanisms: Providers should implement regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to understand user concerns and improve platform safety.

Adaptation to New Threats: Social media companies need to stay ahead of emerging threats by continuously updating their safety protocols and technologies.

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