Social Networks as the Best Instrument for Achieving Full, Worldwide and Truly Global e-Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

The paper is dealing with some new phenomena on Internet caused by the fact that there has been growing interest and popularity of the social networks where the users provide very often also their personal and other sensitive data that under other conditions and circumstances are objects of various degrees of personal data protection, security and privacy. The CONSENT project has been a reaction of the EU and the EC towards these new development processes on Internet as a typical and modern component of the modern information society and has been searching for adequate solutions. In the following parts of this paper we are presenting some of the main preliminary results as achieved under the CONSENT project especially in the conditions of the Slovak Republic as one of the participating countries and the main object of our research at the above faculty and university. As the methodology of our research has been concerned it's mainly based on the analyses of various SN/UGC, interview, questionnaires with the services providers as well as SN/UGC users, etc. .

Keywords: SN - Social Network, UGC – User Generated Content, Security on Internet, EU/SSH/7FP CONSENT Project on Social Networks, personal data,.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the Lisbon strategy on e-Europe in year 2000 on the future EU as a (originally the most advanced and later on being this dropped out)) knowledge based economy and information society with the Internet to be serving as the main backbone of the entire strategy it has been clear that one of the main tasks in this respect in addition to various other equally important ones has been also the task on e-Inclusion i.e. how to bring Internet to the real and direct utilization by the people in order they could use it for their own needs in the daily life.

In support of these objectives have been prepared and launched various strategic and supporting initiatives like a cheap Internet, fast Internet based on broadband communication, mobile Internet, wireless Internet and so on and so forth. All of them have brought Internet closer to the people and to more frequent utilization but there was still missing something that would have made Internet really and truly the part of the daily life for people. Although through the years since the adoption of the Lisbon strategy there has been still and ever growing offer of various services that have been making the utilization of |Internet more and more attractive for its users there still has been missing something what would have really been corresponding to the real interest of its users.

And finally as in many times before in history of the modern information and communication technologies, the real breakthrough in this respect has come up not as result of any official strategy or initiative of international or national official institutions or globally recognized MNC – multinational corporations and/or TNC – transnational corporations. But again as with the PC - personal computers, Microsoft software, Word wide web, etc.. and many other similar revolutionary inventions in ICT it has come up from the inventions of young entrepreneurs, in this case from a young American student M. Zuckerberg who come up with the idea of the so-called social network in the form of his Facebook. It is a social network service and website launched in February 2004 and has been since its foundation   privately owned and operated by Facebook, Inc..

In less than eight years since its start of operations it has become enormously and extremely popular not only in the country of its origination i.e. in the USA but also in all the world and has really very soon become the most popular computer and web application on Internet worldwide beating all various records regarding not only numbers of users, number of hours being spent on Facebook daily, number of messages to be sent, discussions forums, etc. As of January 2011, Facebook has more than 600 million active users. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common interest user groups, organized by workplace, school, or college, or other characteristics. A January 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the most used social network service by worldwide monthly active users, followed by MySpace etc. [1]

It is clear that such a phenomenal success could not be left alone and so very soon many more social network have followed the success story of the Facebook and so already now there are at disposal tens and hundreds of the clones of the Facebook in the form of various other social networks and/or as it used to be called also the UGC - user generated content. Equally understandable is also the fact that also the official institutions could not be left intact from this new phenomena on Internet and so the content of the Facebook and all various other social network has become a world wide platform also for presentation of all various institutions, personalities, business entities, etc. Hence on the Facebook one could nowadays find not only millions of pages of ordinary people but also pages of the British royal family and H.M. the Queen, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, the Saudi Arabian King, Swedish King, Belgian royal family, Jordanian Queen, etc.

It is quite logical that on the social networks nowadays one could find not only above coroneted and other heads of states and various other internationally recognized celebrities and also so-called „celebrities|" in the positive or negative sense of that word but also all various most prestigious and important international organizations, institutions, entities etc. like:

the United Nations at the //www.facebook.com/pages/United-Nations

the EU Institutions on Twitter and Facebook at //www.eeas.europa.eu/twitter

the EU also at //europa.eu/take-part/social-media as a Gateway to the EU on social networks

the NATO at //www.facebook.com/pages/NATO-Parliamentray-Assembly

the Council of Europe at www.facebook.com/pages/Council-of-Europe

and many more of various other similar international organizations, etc.

Of course the Facebook and other social network have attracted the attention also of many important private, public, state and various other agencies, institutions, companies, etc. from business, public services, social affairs, culture, media, etc. The recent revolutionary activities in the Arab World like in Tunisia and Egypt have been to the large extent positively effected by social networks and as such finally they led to the overthrowing of their dictatorial governments, etc. They have been so successful also thanks to the widespread popularity and utilization of the social networks as the most of communications between and among demonstrators have been carried out also through most popular social networks on Internet in addition to another important phenomenon of the current Information society i.e. mobile phones. The communication within the particular countries as well as transmission of the „experience" from one such revolution in one country has been immediately directly communicated to other countries in the same region. Hence the spread of the ongoing revolution in the Arab World that started by a simple demonstration of a young student has led not only to the overthrowing of the government in Tunisia but has further effected and successfully completed its mission already in Egypt and has been actively effecting further development already in numerous other countries of that region. From Tunisia it has spread to Egypt then to Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and has effected already situation also in Jordan and Kuwait and it is still not clear how it will be moving further. To the large extent it is a direct effect of the popularity and strength of social networks as the main communication tool in this first ever „information" based peoples' revolutions. One of the most important aspects in this respect and the basis of its success has been first of all also the fact that all those enormously strong communication tools and means through social networks are as the popular slogan says: „It is for free and it will be and/or remain so for ever!" That is the main advantage of this new communication media in comparison with any other popular media like mobile phones, etc. This facts only confirms again how popular but also strong the social networks have become and that all in a very short time period of only seven years since their invention by that American student M. Zuckerberg and his fellow students.

In conclusion we could only state that the social networks have become an integral part of the global social and public communication and a practical example how to bring people closer and/or directly into the very heart of the ongoing globalization on Internet. At the same time They have become also not only an integral part of the information society that has been so precisely formulated among others also by the EU Lisbon strategy on e-Europe and its information society. But only now thanks to totally independent social networks it has become practically implemented and functioning. also in its one of the most important and key strategic objectives i.e. in achieving e-Inclusion for all parts and strata's of the society. After all, more than current 700 million and still growing number of users just in case of Facebook has been the best proof on the efficiency of their role in the wide scale and truly global e-Inclusion into the contemporary information society. .

2. THE EU/7FP/SSH/CONSENT PROJECT AS A RESPONSE OF THÉ EU/EC TO THÉ CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

As mentioned above, the EU reaction to this new phenomena on Internet has been quite and in this specific case relatively very swift and adequate in all respects. In addition to its own presence at several social networks as we have presented it at least very briefly among the above some examples of the international organizations being on social networks, the EU has allocated also some funding within its 7Framework Program to the research in this new phenomena on Internet. Among them has been also this specific three year project funded by the EU within the so-called SSH – Social Science and Humanities in the years 2010-13 i.e. the CONSENT project i.e. Consumer Sentiment Regarding Privacy on User Generated Content (UGC) Services in the Digital Economy. The main objectives of this very up-to-date and in view of the above popularity of social network also very important project have been according to the particular Project document as follows [2]:

One of the key changes in societal trends and lifestyles witnessed over past few years has been the move on-line of many consumers and the way how they have become increasingly sophisticated in their media consumption habits. Have these recent changes to consumer and commercial practices developed in such a way that consumers are (in) voluntarily signing away their fundamental right to privacy? This project CONSENT seeks to examine how consumers behavior and commercial practices are changing the role of consent in the processing of personal data. While consumer consent is a fundamental value on which the European Market economy (i.e. the Internal market of the EU) is based, the way consumer consent is obtained is questionable in popular user-generated (UGC) online services (including sites like MySpace, You Tube and Facebook), whose commercial access depends to the large extent on the disclosure by their users of substantial amounts of personal data. There is an urgent need to study and analyze the changes in consumption behavior and consumer culture arising from the emergence of UGC online services and how contractual, commercial and technical practices and other factors affect consumer choice and attitudes towards personal privacy in the digital economy. CONSENT's multidisciplinary team intends to carry out a status quo analysis of commercial practices, legal position and consumer attitudes, identifying criteria for fairness and best practices and then create a toolkit for policy makers and corporate counsel which will enable them to address problem identified in the analysis. CONSENT will advance the knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of policies and corporate procedures in the area of privacy and consumer protection with a view to informing policy-making in the European Union and to contribute to the development of European research communities in these areas."

In summary we could state that CONSENT project has been dealing with the UGC and/or social networks as an area that is bringing new issues and problems to the utilization of Internet by its various categories of users who in connection with their active participation in particular social network are becoming very liberal in dealing with their personal data and/or other data that otherwise are subjects of various rules and regulations for protection, confidentiality and privacy of the particular categories of data and/or information. Especially it is a consequence of that phenomenal success and popularity of the social networks that their users in their interest to become a part of that and so to be „IN" are to the large extent ignoring and/or

overlooking any potential dangers related to their personal and other related sensitive data placed on the particular social network and thus also on Internet.

3. SOME SO FAR ACHIEVED PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM THÉ INITIAL SURVEYS AND ANALYSES OF SN/UGC UNDER THÉ CONSENT PROJECT

As the project has been still only in its first year of practical implementation it is quite clear that also the so far achieved results have been corresponding to this early stage of its operations. In spite of that, the project has already achieved a lot of various important and significant results especially regarding the identification of this phenomenal new part of the Internet based systems of communications and utilization. The so far achieved results [3] could be at least briefly characterized as follows:

- The project has been analyzing the social network (SN) and/or UGCs in all countries of the particular project consortium i.e. altogether in 13 member states of the EU according to the same criteria as adopted by the project.

- The number of countries participating in the project consortium represents almost a half of all EU members and includes as so-called old member states so also NMS., Among them the big as well as small and smallest member states so in this respect we could consider so far achieved results as sufficiently representative for the future needs of the EU institutions as it has been defined also in the above cited part of the project objectives

- The consortium in view of the above consists of the following countries: the UK, Malta, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland, Spain, Italy, France, Slovakia and Bulgaria

- In all these countries an inventory of the most popular and utilized UGCs and/or SNs has been carried out as one of the first work packages and/or stages of the project work plan. In total it has been identified altogether 107 such UGCs and/or SN that have been further analyzed and evaluated according to some generally adopted criteria and characteristics

- As for the types of the particular SNs and/or UGCs there are several categories of them. The first one has been represented by the universal and/or globally used ones such as Facebook, Twitter,, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia, Xing, Classmates, Gays, Parsnip, Flickr, You Tube, Last.fm, Trip advisor, Yelp, My heritage, Second life, World of War craft, etc. Altogether 17 of them have been identified in practically all countries being included into our analysis.

- The other category has been represented by such SN that are used in more than one country what is typical especially for countries with the same or similar languages like e.g. is the case of Slovakia and the Czech republic or Germany and Austria, and also in case of Belgium and France and/or the Netherlands, etc. For example in Czech and Slovakia it has been the case of „Spoluziaci" (School mates) used in both countries although in national languages, etc.

- The rest of identified and analyzed SNs and UGCs have been represented by various more or less national SNs and/or UGCs that in difference to the first category of the International ones have been available only in the national languages and/or some other selected language like e.g. English

- As for some quantification, the survey has covered and/or identified according to the particular criteria the following numbers of such „national" SNs and/or UGCs in the participating countries: Austria 8, Bulgaria 10, Czech 10, Denmark 8, France 7, Germany 13, Italy 10, Malta 1, the Netherlands 8, Poland 6, Romania 9, Slovakia 12, Spain 10, UK 5:

- As for the categorization by the general orientation and/or focus, there again have been identified various categories regarding e.g. friendship, partnership according various common interests, etc. But also dating, professional and/or business orientation, chatting, information and/or learning, jobs/employment seeking, music, movies and other cultural interests, hobbies and free time activities, but also sexual orientation, second life contacts, medically oriented, etc..

This is just a brief list of some key findings regarding the initial survey of the particular 107 SNs and/or UGCs as identified and included into the particular research under the CONSENT project. Even from this short list of them it is quite clear that the popularity of SN in general is not only due to their free accessibility but also for their another important feature i.e. that their content and orientation is in practice not regulated by any rules and regulations. The content and orientation is created by people and/or users themselves. In principle it is just enough to find a group of people interested in the particular subject area and the given SN and/or UGC can start its operations and start to attract new and new users of the same community, interests, orientation, etc. This is very positive aspect in comparison with other domains on Internet that are more regulatory and/or restrictive. However, again as in various other areas of the similar democratic rules and regulations and/or better a self-regulation there is also the other, opposite and thus also less positive side of this modern way of utilization of Internet and particular SNs and UGCs.

4. MAIN PROBLEMS OF SN/UGC SECURITY, PROTECTION AND PRIVACY ESPECIALLY OF PERSONAL AND OTHER SENSITIVE DATA AS STORED ON INTERNET

As mentioned in the end of the previous part it is no surprise that SNs and UGCs have become so popular that currently over 600 million people all over the globe have been users and active participants of them. And of course with a growing number practically every day so it is possible to state that at time of preparation of this paper their actual number could be by several millions more and in the time of its presentation at this conference it will be again much more again. Hence, we could state that practically already now almost every tenth person in the world has been in one or other way related to one or several of these numerous SNs and/or UGCs.

However, this popularity and positive impact of them on the development of the contemporary modern information society on the very real grassroots levels has been bringing also the whole range of negatives and/or potential negatives. Especially it is so regarding overall security, protection and privacy especially regarding protection of personal data and of course also some other categories of sensitive data. Although most of

analyzed SNs and UGCs do not require any specific confirmation and/or authorization and verification of the real identity it is clear that in many cases it is quite possible to get himself/herself into – and voluntarily - a serious breach of any even most elementary principles of the data protection, security, privacy, sensitivity, etc. As the popular slogan goes, once something has been hanged on and/or placed on Internet it cannot be taken from there at all.

If we look again into the results of our preliminary investigation and analysis of the particular 107 SNs and/or UGCs [3] we may see that people with a big enthusiasm place into them even their most sensitive or privacy data such as:

- Full names and also maiden name, nick names, etc.

- Signature but also new signature

- date of birth

- tender, my personality

- sexual orientation, popular sex position (?!), popular sex place, my private zones, intimate activities, intimacies, whom I am looking for, etc.

- full addresses, address of my employer, where I live,

- telephone, fax, mobile phone numbers

- e-mail and other addresses

- self-description, height/weight, eye color, bio description, body shape, body description, piercing and where on body, tattoo and where on body

- handicaps, addictions,

- Religion, religion beliefs

- Political, ideological orientation

- Profession, work, work experience, education, employer, position in employment

- Ethnicity, languages,

- Marriage status, family, children, partner, desired partner,

- Friends, neighborhood, where I live (flat, house, etc.), groups I am member of, affiliated persons

- Happy when, scared of

- Honors, awards

- Owner of car, house, flat, garden, etc.

- Hobbies and favorites of food, what kind of food, exotic food, books, videos, movies, singers, actors, sport, car, teacher, software, etc.

- Who are my friends,

- Photos, photo albums, videos, family members photos, etc.

Even this relatively short list of characteristics that are expected to be filled in and/or responded by a member of the particular SNs or UGCs it is quite understandable that in case that users are really giving this kind of information in the good belief that it will help them to find a job or a life partner, a true friend, etc. then we could say that people are willing to share with the relative unknown community of strange people in many cases the most intimate information. The most intimate information regarding their sexual life, their desires, their mental status or body features, their handicaps, etc. In many cases it could be assumed that if somebody would have submitted them such a

questionnaire to be filled in even for the specific purpose, they would have rejected that as inappropriate or to invasion, etc. But in case of Internet as a main medium in general and SNs and UGCs in particular they are loosing any restrictions in this respect and are willing to share such the most private and sensitive data with at that moment totally unknown recipients of such information. Although every SN and UGC contains also a statement and instruction that some data could only be made visible to nobody and not to anybody and some other have to be hidden, but… As we have already stated above, Internet is a medium where in many cases is not so easy to control its content in full and/or to protect against any unauthorized access or misuse.

It is then really no surprise that in addition to many positives that SNs and UGCs are bringing for the progress in the development of the truly and fully information society in the contemporary world, at the same time it is also a very good platform that creates almost ideal conditions for any kind of fraudulent use or better a misuse of the available data. So far we could list at least the most common and most frequently happening cases related to that enormous amount of readily available especially personal data:

- Unwanted soliciting and marketing and propagation of various services, products, advertisements, etc. Not excluding also such that otherwise could not be propaganda in such a massive way and to so many people

- Various offers of fictions and otherwise clandestine jobs, activities, etc. that are based just on the misuse of the particular personal data and interests as placed on Internet and into the particular SNs or UGCs

- Typical otherwise fraudulent businesses or commercial activities and Internet based e-commerce, e-sales, e-shopping that are again misusing the available personal data and various interests of people who placed them into various social networks,

- Spreading of pornography, sex trade, various forms of sexual abuse including those of minors, children, youngsters etc., especially regarding a relatively easy misuse of their photos, photo albums, videos, etc.

- Distribution of various other forms of information that otherwise are by the most of people considered as their most private and sensitive personal data like those regarding their sexual orientation, sexual habits, practices, etc.

There are of course existing also many positive examples that on the basis of the particular and wide variety of personal data are helping to their „owners" e.g.:

- To find otherwise hardly to be found jobs exactly corresponding to their expectations, qualifications and preferences. In this respect many „brain hunters" are using data on SNs and UGCs as one of their most effective „hunting" space

- Equally there are many positive examples that the same personal data have helped to their owners to find their new friends, partners, etc. exactly according to their specific interests, hobbies, free time activities, etc.

- Especially for many young people it is nowadays one of the most popular ways and means how to searching and dating their future sole mates and even life partners for living together or for future marriages

- The very latest positive impact of communications through SNs and UGCs has been the ongoing process of „revolutions" in the Arab world .that has already led to the overthrowing of several long-year dictatorships and some other have been in progress mainly thanks to the wide, active and intensive communications between their organizers and all that not only on the national but also cross-border and international levels.

- In this connection it is important to mention also another important fact. The particular communications through SNs and UGCs are not only helping to the organizers and all participants but also to the communications with the outside world, world media, etc. So one could say that these very unexpected and so strong protests are running almost in the live, direct transmissions and under the real time monitoring. That is one of the most strongest factors of the entire this revolutionary movement in the Arab world as even the most brutal or oppressive dictator cannot for long and absolutely ignore the world opinion, related pressure and other important impacts coming from the outside world. That all happening even in case when other official communication channels are restricted, jammed, etc.

- It is then no surprise that the current people's movement and/or revolutions in the Arab world are often already dubbed as first ever e-revolutions through SNs and UGCs and it is almost for sure that the Arab region is in this respect the very first one but definitely not the last one and their example will positively effect also other countries in the region but also globally in the rest of the world.

All these and many other benefits but of course also negatives are of course not limited to only one country and/or one of languages but as we have already mentioned it above, many of the analyzed 107 SNs and UGCs have been offering possible communications also in several more or many more countries worldwide i.e. on the very truly and fully global scale.

5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion we would like to summarize at least very briefly some main findings of our ongoing research under the EU/7FP/CONSENT project. The one of the most important findings is the fact that through the existing SNs and UGCs the current stage of the development of the modern contemporary Information society has got a very strong and efficient tool and instrument how to bring the political and theoretical statements and strategies on Information society to the practical reality.

An other important conclusion is that SNs and UGCs are results of no specific top down going political decisions or strategies but it is a typical example of the grassroots initiatives of some young entrepreneurs who managed to offer in SNs and UGCs the tool that has become from the very beginning very popular for all walks of life. In addition to many benefits as we have tried to present them in the previous parts of this paper there are existing also some very serious negatives especially regarding the potential misuse of personal and other sensitive data.

In the future proceeding in our ongoing research within the CONSENT project it will be necessary to prepare for the EU authorities some conclusions and recommendations that could help them to find the ways and means how to achieve some kind of policies and/or regulations that would prevent the misuse of the personal and other sensitive data through the particular regulatory measures while at the same time to preserve, protect and enhance the unique character of SNs and UGCs as such.

6. LITERATURE

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