

June 2018

Social Media Privacy in Canada

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RECOMMENDED CITATION: Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai, & Dubois. (2018). Social Media Privacy in Canada.
Version: 1.0. Ryerson University Social Media Lab. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP/JVOT0S>

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About This Report

This report was produced by the Social Media Lab (SocialMediaLab.ca) at Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University and is part of the Social Media Data Stewardship Project (SocialMediaData.org). The report was written by Anatoliy Gruz, Jenna Jacobson, Philip Mai, and Elizabeth Dubois. It is based on a census-balanced online survey of 1,500 online Canadian adults conducted between June 1–July 15, 2017.

About the Social Media Lab

The Social Media Lab is an interdisciplinary research laboratory at Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University. The lab studies how social media is changing the ways in which people communicate, share information, conduct business and form communities, and how these changes impact society. The broad aims of the lab's research initiatives are to provide decision makers with additional knowledge and insights into the behaviours and relationships of online network members, and understand how these interpersonal connections influence our choices and actions.

About the Authors

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Foreword

Social media data is a rich source of behavioural data that can reveal how we connect and interact with each other online—in real time and over time. Currently, much of the data collected are used in ways that are not always transparent to users. Once collected, social media data can be shared, sold, and combined with other types of data and analyzed by algorithms to reveal additional, potentially sensitive information about users.

In the wake of Facebook’s Cambridge Analytica scandal, questions around what type of social media data is being collected, how it is used, who is using it, and for what purposes are now more pertinent than ever. Considering 94% of online Canadian adults have at least one social media account¹, it is critical for policymakers, companies, and developers to understand the public’s perception of privacy with regards to people’s social media data (both user- and system-generated).

This is the second report in the series based on an online survey of 1,500 Canadians. Building on the first report that provides a snapshot of the social media usage trends in Canada, this second report analyzes social media

users’ privacy perceptions and expectations.

First, this report identifies online Canadian adults’ privacy experiences, including whether they have personally been the victim of an invasion of privacy on social media and whether they have encountered stories or examples of social media data misuse.

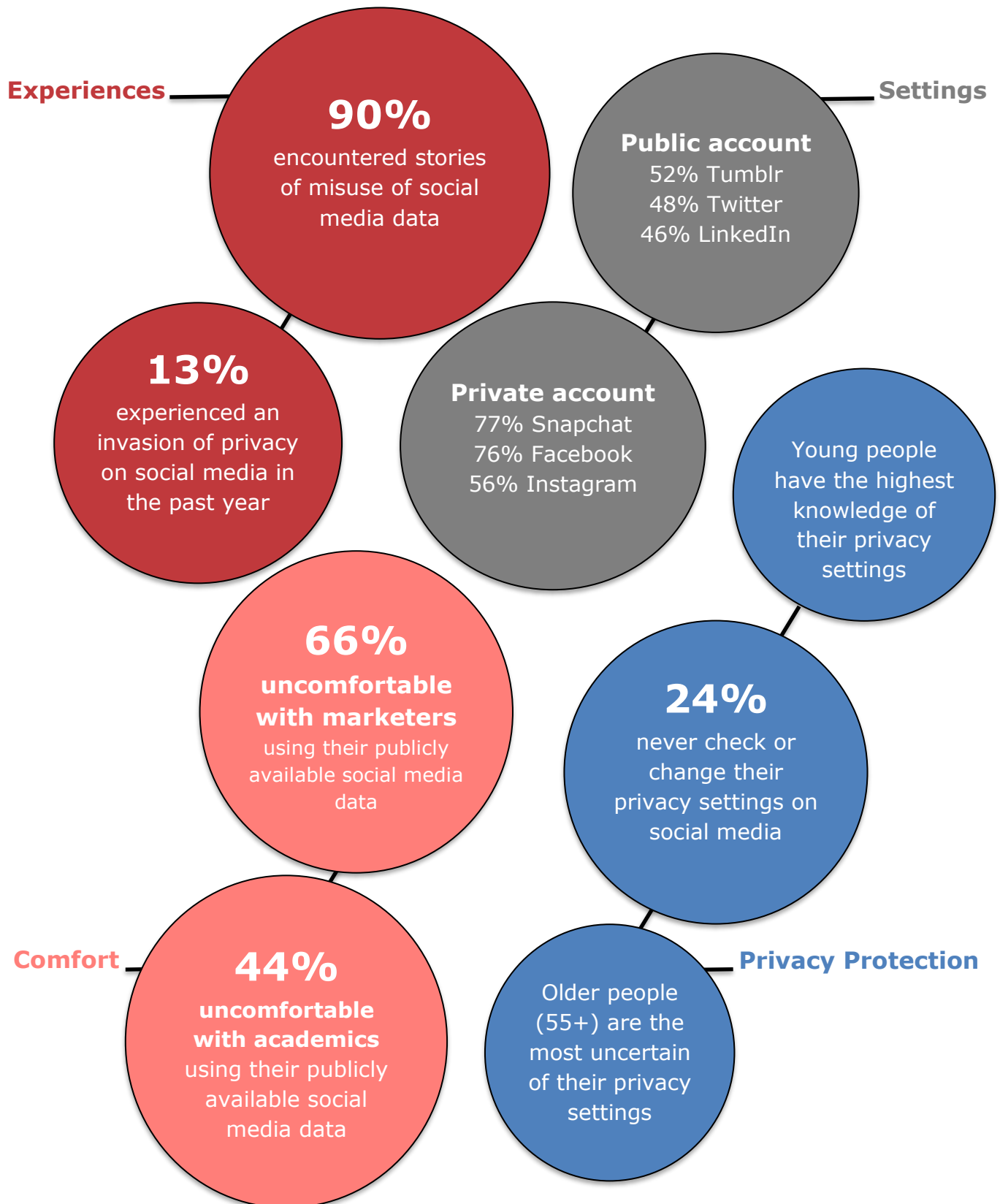
The second part of the report outlines online Canadian adults’ privacy settings on nine social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Reddit.

The third section of this report describes users’ comfort with the use of their social media data. We differentiate various third parties (such as marketers, academics, and government) and various data types (such as photos, geolocation, and textual posts). Importantly, we only focus on data that is “publicly available,” which refers to data that third parties can access and mine without users’ consent.

Finally, the report analyzes the privacy protection behaviours that Canadians employ to protect their privacy, including self-censoring and reviewing their privacy settings on social media.

¹ Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai, & Dubois. (2018). The State of Social Media in Canada 2017. Version: 1.0. Ryerson University Social Media Lab. DOI:[10.5683/SP/AL8Z6R](https://doi.org/10.5683/SP/AL8Z6R)

Highlights



1. Privacy Experiences

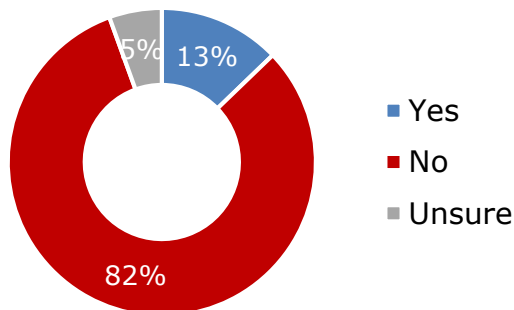
1.1 Social Media Misuse

The vast majority (82%) of online Canadian adults reported that they have not personally experienced an invasion of privacy on social media; while 13% did.

Even before the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal there was widespread knowledge of the potential misuse of social media data. 90% of online Canadian adults have encountered stories or examples of social media data misuse.

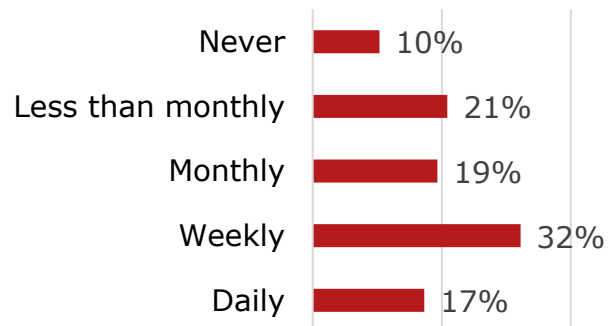
Canadians may learn of the misuse of social media data from people in their personal network or from media stories. In recent years the media has covered stories on the use of social media data to predict the risk of suicide, develop a credit score, implement mass surveillance, and direct microtargeted advertising for the purpose of influencing voting behaviours².

Experienced an invasion of privacy on social media (%)



Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017
 “Social Media Privacy in Canada”
 Ryerson University Social Media Lab
 Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

Encountered stories of social media misuse (%)

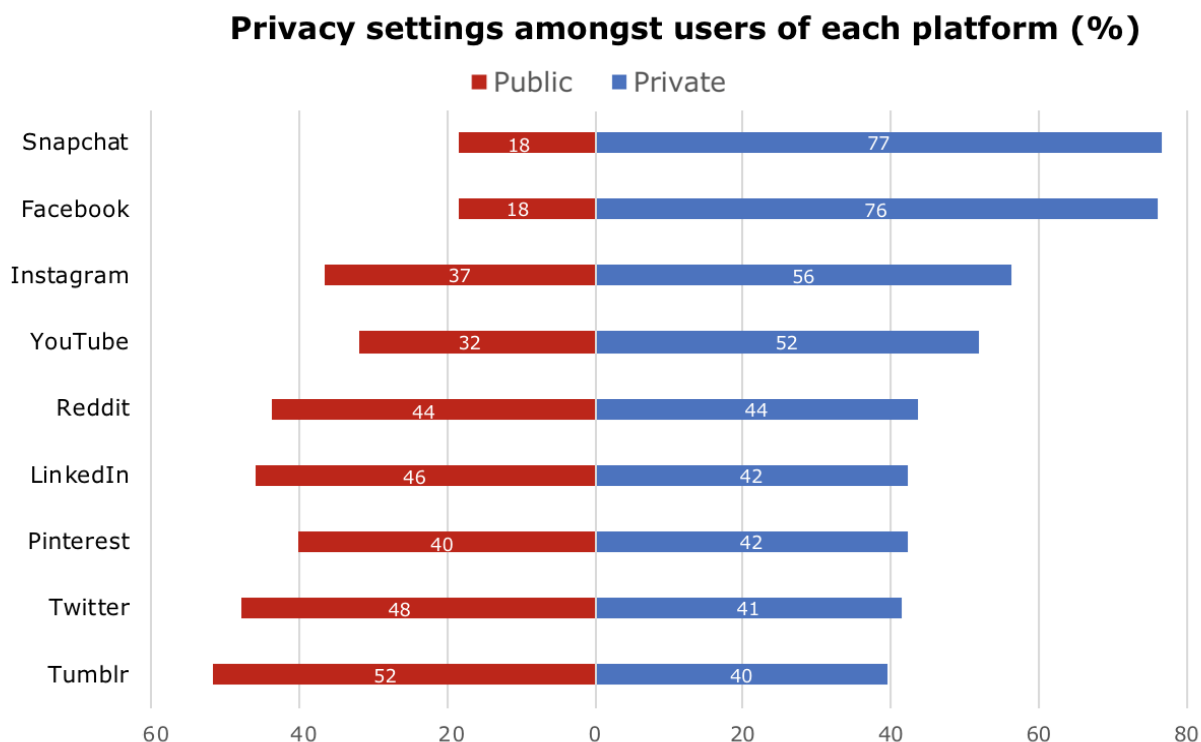


Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017
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 Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

² Visit <http://socialmediadata.org/social-media-data-use/> for more examples of social media data use and misuse.

2. Privacy Settings

2.1 Overview of Social Media Users' Privacy Settings



Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017

"Social Media Privacy in Canada"

Ryerson University Social Media Lab

Participants' responses varied across platforms when asked whether their social media accounts are primarily "public" or primarily "private."

Online Canadian adults largely have private accounts on Snapchat (77% private), Facebook (76% private), Instagram (56% private), and YouTube (52% private).

Reddit and Pinterest users were about evenly split between those with public

versus private accounts (44% vs 44% on Reddit; and 40% vs 42% on Pinterest).

There were more users (percentage wise) with public accounts on Tumblr (52% public), Twitter (48% public), and LinkedIn (46% public).

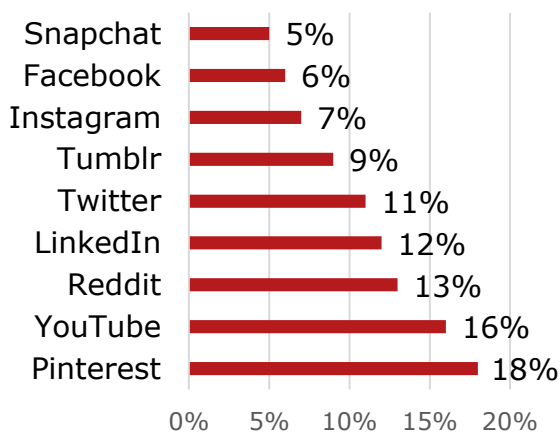
There were also some people who were unsure of their privacy settings (see p. 8).

2.2 Uncertainty of Privacy Settings

Participants who are unsure of their privacy setting ranged from 5% to 18% unsure. Pinterest (18% unsure) and YouTube (16% unsure) users were most unsure about their account's privacy setting—relative to users on other platforms. Snapchat (5% unsure) and Facebook (6% unsure) users were the least unsure of their privacy settings—relative to users on other platforms.

The likelihood of not knowing one's privacy setting increases with age on most social media platforms. Young people 18–24 years old, followed by those 25–34 years old, tend to have the highest knowledge of their privacy settings on social media. This finding may speak to higher levels of digital literacy for younger people in comparison to older cohorts.

Unsure of privacy setting, by platform



Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017
 "Social Media Privacy in Canada"
 Ryerson University Social Media Lab
 Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

Unsure of privacy setting, by age

Age	Average "Unsure"
18–24	6%
25–34	8%
35–44	12%
45–55	13%
55+	14%












Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017
 "Social Media Privacy in Canada"
 Ryerson University Social Media Lab
 Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

3. Comfort with Social Media Data Access

3.1 Third Parties

Third parties are individuals or organizations—other than the social media platforms or platform users—who can access and use social media data. These third parties might use social media data for a variety of reasons from academic research to marketing. Since privacy is contextual, it is important to understand whether people have comfort levels that differ across types of third parties.

Participants were asked, “How comfortable would you be if one of the following entities accessed information about you or posted by you publicly on social media?”; online Canadian adults reported being least uncomfortable with academic researchers (44% uncomfortable) and most uncomfortable with government, financial institutions, political parties and marketers using their publicly available social media data (65-66% uncomfortable).

	Third Party	Percentage Uncomfortable
	Academic researcher	44%
	Your current employer	56%
	Potential employer	57%
	Custom & border protection officer	61%
	Legal professional	61%
	Insurance company	63%
	Journalist	64%
	Government	65%
	Financial institution	65%
	Political party	65%
	Marketer	66%

Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017

“Social Media Privacy in Canada”










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Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

3.2 Data Types

There are different types of data that can be collected from social media platforms, including user-generated content (e.g., photos and textual posts), metadata (e.g., location), network data (e.g., communication network and friend list), and analytical data that requires some computational processing (e.g., posting frequency, sentiment, activity level, and topics).

The majority of online Canadian adults are uncomfortable with third parties using all data types queried. Participants were most uncomfortable with their communication network (63% uncomfortable) and photos (62% uncomfortable) being used by third parties. Participants expressed the lowest level of discomfort with third parties using the following data types: posting frequency (50% uncomfortable) and sentiments (51% uncomfortable).

	Data Type	Percentage Uncomfortable
	Posting frequency	50%
	Sentiments	51%
	Activity level in group	54%
	Topics	54%
	Textual posts	55%
	Location	59%
	Friend list	60%
	Photos	62%
	Communication network	63%

Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017

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Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

4. Privacy Protection Behaviour

4.1 Self-Censorship

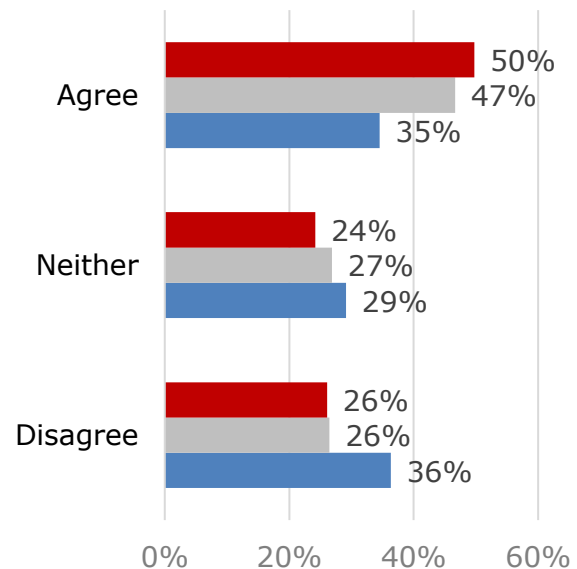
One way social media users may protect their privacy is to decide not to post certain types of information.

According to our survey, 50% of online Canadian adults choose to self-censor their social media posts because they believe that companies may use the data for advertising. 47% of online Canadian adults choose to self-censor their posts because the social media site may sell their data.

A relatively smaller percentage (35%) of online Canadian adults self-censor their social media posts if they perceive the government might be collecting and/or using the content for surveillance.

Self-censorship because...

- A company might use your content to advertise to you
- The social media site might sell your data
- The government might collect and/or use your content for surveillance



Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017

"Social Media Privacy in Canada"

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Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

4.2 Check Privacy Settings

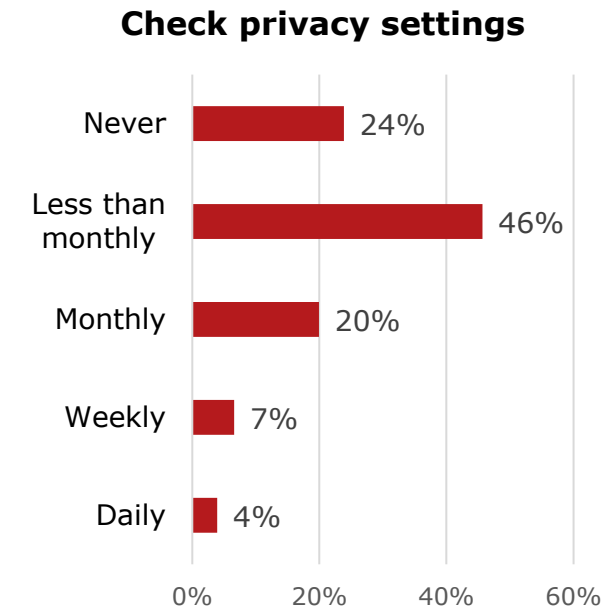
Social media platforms are continually adding new features to their platforms; as a result, “default” privacy settings can change with little or no notice. This means that those who do not check their privacy settings would be relegated to the default privacy settings as dictated by the platforms themselves.

To protect themselves against this practice, some users would often check and change their account’s privacy setting.

In our survey, three-quarters of online Canadian adults report checking or changing their privacy settings on social media. 24% of online Canadian adults report never checking or changing their privacy settings on social media.

There may be a number of reasons for this, users may: lack the digital literacy to do so, be confident in their privacy settings, trust the social media platforms, or not care about their privacy settings.

24% of online Canadian adults never check or change their privacy settings on social media



Source: Survey conducted June 1–July 15, 2017

“Social Media Privacy in Canada”

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Note: All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

Methods

Data was collected using a market research data company, Research Now, for panel recruitment. The survey was open from June 1 to July 15, 2017 and was hosted by Qualtrics. We received a total of 1,500 completed responses after data cleaning. The survey was made available to online Canadian adults in French and English. The term “online Canadian adults” refers to Internet users aged 18 and older.

To increase the representativeness of the data, we used quota sampling by age, gender, and geographical region to match the distributions in the 2016 Statistics Canada Census³. We recognize gender is not binary; however, the sampling question was phrased to be in line with Statistics Canada for recruiting a representative sample of adult Canadians. Later in the survey, participants were invited to self-identify as “trans*, non-binary, two-spirit, genderqueer, or other” and 0.8% (12 people) did. Considering the small and non-representative sample of this group, the gender-based distributions are only reported based on the counts of participants who self-identified as female or male. Four respondents were excluded from the demographic-based counts due to their incomplete demographic data.

Census-Balanced Sampling by Gender, Age, and Region

CANADA	2016 %
GENDER	
Female	51
Male	49
AGE	
18–24	11
25–34	16
35–44	16
45–54	18
55+	39
REGION	
Western (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan)	32
Atlantic (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island)	7
Ontario	38
Quebec	23

Ethics

The data is anonymized and presented in aggregate in this report. Prior to data collection, Research Ethics Board approval was obtained from two Canadian universities. Participants were shown a comprehensive consent form. Participants were offered eRewards for completing the survey, which can be transferred to various loyalty rewards programs.

Reporting

All percentages are rounded to the nearest 1%

³ Unfortunately, Research Now does not have panel survey participants from Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon.

Survey Questions

For this report, we analyzed the following 9 questions from our survey:

Social media accounts Do you have an account on the following social media sites? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook LinkedIn Instagram Twitter Snapchat Tumblr YouTube Reddit Pinterest [Yes; No; Unsure]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance company Potential employer Your current employer Journalist Government Legal professional Customers and border protection officer Political party Person you used to date [Extremely comfortable; Moderately comfortable; Slightly comfortable; Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable; Slight uncomfortable; Moderately uncomfortable; Extremely uncomfortable]
Privacy setting What is the privacy setting of your social media account(s)? [Primarily PRIVATE; Primarily PUBLIC; Unsure]	Privacy victim In the past year, have you ever...? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personally been the victim of what you felt was an invasion of privacy on social media [Yes; No; Unsure]
Data type How comfortable would you be if a third party accessed the following information about you or posted by you publicly on social media? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How active you are in an online group A list of users who you follow or who follow you on social media Who you are communicating with on social media How often you post to social media What topics you are discussing on social media How positive or negative your social media posts are What places you visited based on your social media activities Photos that you shared on social media What you are saying on social media [Extremely comfortable; Moderately comfortable; Slightly comfortable; Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable; Slight uncomfortable; Moderately uncomfortable; Extremely uncomfortable]	Social media misuse Within the last year, how often have you encountered stories or examples of the potential misuse of social media data? [Several times a day; Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Less than monthly; Never]
Third party How comfortable would you be if one of the following entities accessed information about you or posted by you publicly on social media? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic researcher Marketer Financial institution 	Privacy frequency Thinking about all of the social media sites you use, how often do you...? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check or change your privacy settings [Several times a day; Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Less than monthly; Never]
	Self-censorship You sometimes choose NOT to post a comment or link on social media because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A company might use your content to advertise to you The social media site might sell your data The government might collect and/or use your content for surveillance [Strongly agree; Agree; Somewhat agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree]
	Age What is your age group? [18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55+]

Funding

This research was undertaken, in part, thanks to funding from:



The Canada Research Chairs Program (CRCP) is a tri-agency (SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR) program launched in 2000. The CRCP is designed to enable Canadian universities and affiliated research institutes and hospitals to foster research excellence and to enhance their role as centres of research excellence in the global, knowledge-based economy. Chair holders are entrusted with improving our depth of knowledge and quality of life, strengthen Canada's international competitiveness, and help train the next generation of highly skilled people through student supervision, teaching, and the coordination of other researchers' work.



The Ted Rogers School of Management (TRSM) at Ryerson University is Canada's preeminent entrepreneurial-focused business school that is shaping

the country's next generation of global innovators and leaders. TRSM is home to six schools of management, three innovative graduate degrees (two MBA degrees and one research-focused Master of Science in Management), and 14 cutting-edge research centres, institutes, and labs. The Ted Rogers School of Management is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and is home to nearly 10,000 students and 250 industry-connected faculty members.



eCampusOntario, a not-for-profit corporation, is funded by the Government of Ontario to be a centre of excellence in online and technology-enabled learning for all publicly-funded colleges and universities in Ontario.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Jordan Kilfoy, Christine Gagnon, and Jocelyn St phane Cadieux for their help with the French translation of the survey and members of the Social Media Lab for their feedback on the survey design.

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