

Money makes you reveal more online: Study

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AHMEDABAD: Priyanka Thacker is among more than 100m users captivated by Facebook in India. Today, she is plagued with spam messages and unsolicited calls. Inadvertent disclosure of information by users like Thacker often ends up with online predators causing financial and social damage. So what makes people reveal personal data online?

IIT-Gandhinagar has carried out a study on 200 IT students of Ahmedabad and Mumbai, which revealed that not only short-term rewards make people trade-off privacy but also mere exposure to money increases self-disclosure.

The survey team was led by IIT-Gn professor Jaison Manjaly with the help of IIM-A post doctoral fellow Sumitava Mukherjee and New York University professor Maithilee Nargundkar. "Although self-disclosure enhances personal relations, it also imposes threats like frauds and thefts. Shopping websites, embedded with monetary cues like discounts, are collecting personal data from users. FB also often displays ads with monetary cues. Priming a concept or emotion significantly affects preferences, judgments and decisions," says Jaison.

What then would be the effect of simply priming the idea of money? Even in the absence of actual rewards, would cues of money affect self-disclosure preferences such that it trades off privacy? The survey shows that people are less willing to pay for protecting their data compared to their willingness to accept money in exchange for personal information. Considering the psychological aspect of money, implicit reminders of money affect personal and interpersonal processes as money induces a feeling of self-sufficiency.

Given the malleability of privacy preferences and the ubiquitous monetary cues in daily lives, the team measured the contextual effect of reminding people about money on their privacy disclosure preferences. It found that priming money increased willingness to disclose personal data on an online shopping website. The team also tested whether priming money increases propensity for actually giving out personal data. The team found that priming money increases the reported willingness and actual disclosure of information.