The Normalization of Screenshotting Culture Despite Data Privacy Awareness Among Students

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ABSTRACT:

The increasing use of digital communication platforms has intensified concerns regarding data privacy, particularly in the screenshotting and sharing of private text or chat messages among students. This study examined students' awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and influencing factors related to data privacy in the digital age. It also determined the relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence.

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design involving 610 tertiary students selected through simple random sampling. Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis through Jamovi statistical software.

The findings revealed that students demonstrated high awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act and the protection of personal information. Screenshotting behavior and perceptions of risks and consequences were likewise interpreted as high, while sharing behavior and peer influence were interpreted as moderate. Students commonly engaged in screenshotting practices for documentation, reference, and informational purposes while demonstrating relatively lower tendencies toward sharing screenshots containing sensitive or private content. The results further showed that respondents recognized the legal, ethical, and social consequences associated with unauthorized sharing of private information, particularly risks related to reputational damage, cyberbullying, and loss of control over shared screenshots.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence. The strongest relationship was observed between awareness and privacy concern

($r = .557$, $p < .001$), indicating that students with higher awareness also demonstrated stronger concern regarding privacy-related risks and consequences.

The findings suggest that although students generally possess substantial awareness regarding data privacy, screenshotting behaviors remain evident within digital communication practices. The study highlights the importance of strengthening digital citizenship education, ethical online communication, and responsible handling of sensitive and private information in digital environments.

Keywords: data privacy, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, peer influence, digital citizenship, digital communication, Data Privacy Act

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has transformed how individuals interact, share information, and maintain social relationships in online environments. Messaging applications, social networking platforms, and mobile communication tools have become central to students' academic, social, and personal lives. Alongside these developments, concerns regarding data privacy and the ethical handling of personal information have become increasingly significant in contemporary digital society. One emerging yet underexplored issue within digital communication culture is the widespread practice of screenshotting and sharing private text or chat conversations.

Screenshotting has become a routine feature of online interaction, enabling users to preserve, archive, document, and redistribute digital conversations instantly. While screenshots may serve practical purposes such as documentation, evidence preservation, or information sharing, they also raise important ethical and privacy concerns when private conversations are captured or circulated without consent. The increasing normalization of screenshotting practices has complicated traditional expectations of confidentiality and interpersonal privacy within digital communication environments. Recent studies suggest that screenshot features on messaging platforms have become socially normalized despite their potential to violate interpersonal privacy expectations and digital confidentiality (Shore & Prena, 2023). Similarly, Ingber (2025) emphasized that screenshots transform private conversations into transferable and shareable digital artifacts, thereby complicating privacy management in interpersonal communication.

The growing integration of digital technologies into students' daily communication practices has also intensified concerns regarding privacy protection and responsible online behavior. Research has shown that online environments expose users to various privacy risks, including identity theft, cyberbullying, unauthorized disclosure of personal information, reputational harm, and misuse of digital content (Malhotra et al., 2004). Uploading private chat screenshots on social media platforms may further contribute to cyberbullying, doxing, and breaches of confidentiality, potentially resulting in legal and social consequences (Arsawati et al., 2023). In addition, privacy perceptions and information management behaviors within messaging platforms are influenced by platform trust, screenshot accountability, and social interaction norms (Shore & Prena, 2023).

Within the Philippine context, the enactment of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 strengthened legal protections concerning the collection, storage, and sharing of personal information in digital environments. Educational institutions increasingly promote awareness regarding privacy rights, responsible online communication, and ethical handling of sensitive information. However, despite growing awareness regarding data privacy risks and legal consequences, screenshotting and sharing

behaviors remain common among students in digitally connected environments. This contradiction reflects a broader phenomenon commonly associated with the "privacy paradox," wherein individuals express concern regarding privacy protection while simultaneously engaging in behaviors that may compromise privacy and confidentiality (Barth & de Jong, 2017).

Existing studies on digital privacy have primarily focused on cybersecurity awareness, social media safety, self-disclosure, and general online privacy concerns (Malhotra et al., 2004; Kim & Kim, 2020). Research has also extensively examined privacy paradox behaviors and online self-disclosure practices across digital platforms (Barth & de Jong, 2017). However, limited studies have specifically examined screenshotting culture as a normalized digital behavior within online communication environments. Existing literature further suggests that online social norms and peer behaviors significantly shape digital disclosure practices and privacy-related behaviors among users (Masur et al., 2021). Despite growing recognition of privacy risks, few studies have explored how students simultaneously recognize the ethical, legal, and social consequences of privacy violations while continuing to engage in screenshotting and sharing practices within digital communication environments.

The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining students' awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and peer influence related to digital privacy practices. More specifically, the study investigates the normalization of screenshotting culture despite students' awareness of privacy risks and ethical concerns in digital communication environments. The findings of the study may contribute to the strengthening of digital citizenship education, ethical online communication practices, and institutional policies promoting responsible handling of sensitive and private information among students.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to examine students' awareness, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and influencing factors related to data privacy in the digital age. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act and the protection of personal information?

2. What is the level of students' screenshotting behaviors involving text or chat messages containing sensitive and private information?

3. What is the level of students' sharing behaviors regarding screenshots and private conversations?

4. What are students' perceptions of the risks and consequences associated with sharing screenshots and private conversations online?

5. What are the peer and social influences associated with students' data privacy behaviors?

6. Is there a significant relationship among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence?

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine students' awareness, digital privacy behaviors, perceived risks and consequences, and influencing factors related to the screenshotting and sharing of text or chat messages containing sensitive and private information. Quantitative research enables the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to describe patterns, behaviors, and relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014).

The descriptive component of the study was used to determine the levels of students' awareness, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and attitudes and influencing factors related to data privacy. Meanwhile, the correlational component was utilized to examine the relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence.

Research Participants and Sampling

The participants of the study consisted of tertiary education students enrolled in various academic

programs to ensure broader representation in terms of educational background, age, and gender. The inclusion of students from different programs provided a more comprehensive perspective regarding digital privacy awareness and online communication practices among college students.

Simple random sampling was employed in selecting the respondents of the study. According to Creswell (2014), simple random sampling ensures that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing sampling bias and improving representativeness. A total of 610 students participated in the study.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a structured survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. The questionnaire was designed to assess students' awareness and knowledge regarding the Data Privacy Act of 2012, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and attitudes and influencing factors related to data privacy practices.

The instrument consisted of five major sections: (1) awareness of the Data Privacy Act, (2) screenshotting behaviors, (3) sharing behaviors, (4) perceptions of risks and consequences, and (5) attitudes and influencing factors. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Likert-scale instruments are widely used in educational and behavioral research because they effectively measure attitudes, perceptions, and self-reported behaviors (DeVellis, 2017).

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire underwent content validation by experts in education, research, and data privacy to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on the recommendations of the validators.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was computed to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire scales. Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to evaluate the reliability of research instruments in social and educational studies (Taber, 2018). The computed reliability coefficients indicated acceptable to excellent internal consistency, suggesting that the instrument was reliable for data collection purposes.

Data Collection Procedure

After securing the necessary permissions, the researcher administered the survey questionnaire to tertiary students from various academic programs. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

The questionnaires were distributed personally and collected after completion to ensure a high retrieval rate and completeness of responses. The gathered data were subsequently encoded, organized, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques through Jamovi statistical software. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Means and standard deviations were utilized to determine the levels of awareness, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and attitudes and influencing factors related to data privacy behaviors.

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence.

Prior to inferential analysis, normality tests were conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk, Kolmogorov–Smirnov, and Anderson–Darling tests to assess whether the data met the assumptions required for parametric statistical procedures. Although the results indicated significant deviations from normality, parametric tests were still considered appropriate due to the large sample size of the study and the robustness of parametric procedures under large-sample conditions, consistent with the Central Limit Theorem (Field, 2018).

The interpretation of mean scores followed the scale below:

Mean Range	Interpretation
4.21–5.00	Very High
3.41–4.20	High
2.61–3.40	Moderate
1.81–2.60	Low
1.00–1.80	Very Low

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles in conducting research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents after explaining the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was disclosed, and all responses were treated with utmost confidentiality. The data gathered were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Results

Students' Awareness, Digital Privacy Behaviors, and Influencing Factors

Table 1 Students' Awareness of the Data Privacy Act

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Awareness of the Data Privacy Act and its provisions	4.18	0.741	High
Institutional information dissemination about the Data Privacy Act	4.07	0.764	High
Awareness that sharing personal information without consent is illegal	4.26	0.811	Very High
Understanding the consequences of violating the Data Privacy Act	4.18	0.724	High
Institutional provision of information on data protection	4.16	0.686	High
Receipt of institutional updates and reminders about data privacy	3.89	0.774	High
Awareness of rights regarding personal information collection and use	4.22	0.711	Very High
Knowledge of requesting deletion of personal data	3.85	0.860	High
Confidence in identifying privacy violations	3.94	0.771	High
Knowledge of reporting data privacy concerns within the institution	3.82	0.835	High
Overall Mean	4.06	0.557	High

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act and the protection of personal information (M = 4.06, SD = 0.557). The highest-rated indicators were students' awareness that sharing personal information without consent is illegal under the Data Privacy Act (M = 4.26, SD = 0.811) and awareness of their rights regarding the collection and use of

personal information (M = 4.22, SD = 0.711), both interpreted as very high.

Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicators were knowledge of where to report data privacy concerns within the institution (M = 3.82, SD = 0.835) and knowledge of how to request deletion of personal data when needed (M = 3.85, SD = 0.860), although both remained within the high interpretation range. Overall, the results indicate that respondents generally possess substantial awareness regarding data privacy principles, institutional responsibilities, and personal privacy rights in digital environments.

Table 2 Students' Screenshotting Behaviors

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Regular screenshotting of text/chat messages	3.41	0.945	High
Screenshotting conversations containing sensitive information	2.95	1.239	Moderate
Asking permission before screenshotting private conversations	3.85	0.829	High
Screenshotting for documentation of important information	4.13	0.809	High
Saving screenshots as proof or future reference	3.97	0.824	High
Considering privacy impact before screenshotting messages	3.98	0.766	High
Avoiding screenshotting private conversations without valid reason	4.00	0.855	High
Screenshotting private chats for sharing with others	3.08	1.227	Moderate
Using screenshots for non-academic sharing with friends	2.76	1.076	Moderate
Comfort in screenshotting conversations without sensitive information	3.51	1.000	High
Overall Mean	**3.57**	**0.397**	**High**

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of screenshotting behavior overall (M = 3.57, SD = 0.397). The highest-rated indicators included screenshotting for documentation of important information (M = 4.13, SD = 0.809), avoiding screenshotting private conversations without valid reason (M = 4.00, SD = 0.855), considering privacy impact before screenshotting messages (M = 3.98, SD = 0.766), and saving screenshots as proof or future reference (M = 3.97, SD = 0.824), all interpreted as high.

Meanwhile, screenshotting conversations containing sensitive information (M = 2.95, SD = 1.239), screenshotting private chats for sharing with others (M = 3.08, SD = 1.227), and using screenshots for non-academic sharing with friends (M = 2.76, SD = 1.076) were interpreted as moderate. Overall, the results suggest that students commonly engage in screenshotting practices primarily for documentation, reference, and informational purposes while showing relatively lower tendencies toward sharing screenshots containing sensitive or private content.

Table 3 Students' Sharing Behaviors of Screenshots and Conversations

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Sharing screenshots without others' consent	3.14	1.151	Moderate
Frequent sharing of screenshots with friends or on social media	3.04	1.132	Moderate
Acceptability of sharing screenshots containing non-sensitive information	2.59	1.041	Low
Sharing group chat screenshots without permission from all participants	3.20	1.229	Moderate
Sharing screenshots only when information is relevant to others	3.61	0.946	High
Checking screenshots for personal or private information before sharing	3.91	0.826	High
Sharing screenshots to resolve disputes or misunderstandings	3.55	0.923	High
Use of messaging applications with screenshot notifications	3.36	0.949	Moderate
Belief that sharing screenshots is harmless if content is not highly personal	2.35	0.965	Low
Exposure to peers sharing screenshots on social media	3.41	0.959	High
Overall Mean	**3.22**	**0.340**	**Moderate**

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a moderate level of sharing behavior regarding screenshots and private conversations (M = 3.22, SD = 0.340). The highest-rated indicators included checking screenshots for personal or private information before sharing (M = 3.91, SD = 0.826), sharing screenshots only when information is relevant to others (M = 3.61, SD = 0.946), and sharing screenshots to resolve disputes or misunderstandings (M = 3.55, SD = 0.923), all interpreted as high.

Meanwhile, lower-rated indicators included the belief that sharing screenshots is harmless if the content is not highly personal (M = 2.35, SD = 0.965) and the acceptability of sharing screenshots containing non-sensitive information (M = 2.59, SD = 1.041), interpreted as low. Overall, the results suggest that although students are exposed to screenshot-sharing practices within digital environments, they still demonstrate caution regarding the sharing of private or sensitive content.

Table 4 Students' Perceptions of Risks and Consequences Associated with Sharing Screenshots and Private Conversations

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Awareness of legal consequences of sharing private chats without permission	3.96	0.836	High
Perception that sharing private information may lead to identity theft	3.87	0.858	High
Viewing screenshot sharing as a breach of trust	3.69	0.946	High
Perception that sharing sensitive chat information may result in cyberbullying	4.07	0.843	High

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Awareness that screenshot sharing may damage a person's reputation	4.10	0.799	High
Exposure to cases involving serious consequences from sharing chat screenshots	3.92	0.871	High
Belief that individuals should face consequences for unauthorized sharing of private information	3.94	0.892	High
Belief that screenshots shared online are difficult to control	4.00	0.823	High
Hesitation to share screenshots due to privacy risks	3.80	0.862	High
Consideration of long-term effects before sharing private chats	3.91	0.754	High
Overall Mean	**3.93**	**0.627**	**High**

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of perception regarding the risks and consequences associated with sharing screenshots and private conversations online (M = 3.93, SD = 0.627). The highest-rated indicators included awareness that screenshot sharing may damage a person's reputation (M = 4.10, SD = 0.799), perception that sharing sensitive chat information may result in cyberbullying (M = 4.07, SD = 0.843), and belief that screenshots shared online are difficult to control (M = 4.00, SD = 0.823), all interpreted as high.

The results further showed that students were highly aware of the legal, ethical, and social consequences associated with unauthorized sharing of private information. Overall, the findings suggest that respondents generally recognize the potential harm, privacy risks, and long-term consequences associated with screenshotting and sharing private digital conversations.

Table 5 Students' Attitudes and Influencing Factors Related to Data Privacy Behaviors

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Peer influence on screenshotting and sharing behaviors	3.50	0.933	High
Reduced importance of privacy concerns within close friend groups	2.62	0.979	Moderate
Respect for privacy even in seemingly harmless conversations	4.00	0.803	High
Perceived influence of gender on privacy approaches in messaging	3.63	0.981	High
Pressure from social media trends to share screenshots or posts	2.54	1.008	Low
Importance of discussing online privacy with peers	3.82	0.823	High
Sharing screenshots due to observing similar behavior on social media	2.96	1.109	Moderate
Influence of data privacy awareness on online behavior	3.94	0.759	High
Difficulty balancing online sharing and respect for others' privacy	2.45	1.050	Low
Improvement of data privacy knowledge through peer discussions	3.99	0.749	High
Overall Mean	**3.35**	**0.309**	**Moderate**

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a moderate level of attitudes and influencing factors related to data privacy behaviors (M = 3.35, SD = 0.309). The highest-rated indicators included respect for privacy even in seemingly harmless conversations (M = 4.00, SD = 0.803), improvement of data privacy knowledge through peer discussions (M = 3.99, SD = 0.749), and the influence of data privacy awareness on online behavior (M = 3.94, SD = 0.759), all interpreted as high.

Students also highly recognized the importance of discussing online privacy with peers (M = 3.82, SD = 0.823) and acknowledged the influence of peers on screenshotting and sharing behaviors (M = 3.50, SD = 0.933). In contrast, lower-rated indicators included pressure from social media trends to share screenshots or posts (M = 2.54, SD = 1.008) and difficulty balancing online sharing with respect for others' privacy (M = 2.45, SD = 1.050), both interpreted as low.

Overall, the results suggest that students' attitudes and behaviors regarding data privacy are influenced by awareness, peer interaction, and respect for online privacy, although social media pressure and imitation behaviors were perceived less strongly among respondents.

Table 6 Summary of Students' Awareness, Digital Privacy Behaviors, and Influencing Factors

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Awareness	4.06	0.557	High
Screenshot Behavior	3.57	0.397	High
Sharing Behavior	3.22	0.340	Moderate
Peer Influence	3.35	0.309	Moderate
Privacy Concern	3.93	0.627	High

Table 6 presents the levels of students' awareness, digital privacy behaviors, and influencing factors related to the screenshotting and sharing of sensitive and private information. The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding data privacy and the protection of personal information (M = 4.06, SD = 0.557). Screenshotting behavior was likewise interpreted as high (M = 3.57, SD = 0.397), while sharing behavior was moderate (M = 3.22, SD = 0.340). Peer influence was also interpreted as moderate (M = 3.35, SD = 0.309).

Relationships Among Awareness, Screenshotting Behavior, Sharing Behavior, Privacy Concern, and Peer Influence

Table 7 Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Awareness Total	—				
2. Screenshot Behavior Total	.527***	—			
3. Sharing Behavior Total	.253***	.211***	—		
4. Privacy Concern Total	.557***	.466***	.262***	—	
5. Peer Influence Total	.284***	.220***	.390***	.491***	—

Note. $^{**}p < .001$.

Table 7 presents the relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence. Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships among all variables at $p < .001$. The strongest relationship was observed between awareness and

privacy concern (r = .557), followed by awareness and screenshotting behavior (r = .527). Peer influence was positively correlated with sharing behavior (r = .390) and privacy concern (r = .491). Sharing behavior also showed positive relationships with awareness (r = .253), screenshotting behavior (r = .211), and privacy concern (r = .262).

Discussion

Awareness of Data Privacy and Legal Responsibilities

The findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding data privacy principles, institutional responsibilities, and the protection of personal information. Respondents particularly showed strong awareness that sharing personal information without consent is prohibited under the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and that individuals possess rights regarding the collection and use of their personal data. Students also reported substantial understanding of the consequences associated with privacy violations and institutional data protection practices.

These findings suggest that students are generally knowledgeable about privacy rights and legal responsibilities within digital environments. The increasing integration of online communication platforms into students' academic and social activities may contribute to greater familiarity with issues surrounding data protection, cybersecurity, and digital ethics. Educational institutions also increasingly disseminate information regarding responsible handling of personal information, which may further strengthen students' awareness of privacy-related concepts.

The findings support previous studies indicating that frequent engagement with digital platforms increases exposure to privacy-related discussions, thereby improving users' familiarity with online privacy concerns and information management practices (Trepte et al., 2017). Similarly, Livingstone et al. (2018) emphasized that digitally connected individuals tend to develop broader awareness regarding online privacy settings, risks, and digital rights through continuous interaction with digital technologies. The high awareness observed in the present study therefore reflects the growing visibility of privacy-related issues within contemporary digital culture.

Perceived Risks and Consequences of Screenshot Sharing

The findings further revealed that students demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the risks and consequences associated with sharing screenshots and private conversations online. Respondents strongly recognized that screenshot sharing may contribute to reputational damage, cyberbullying, identity theft, and legal or ethical violations. Students also acknowledged that screenshots shared online may become difficult to control once distributed across digital platforms.

Among the highest-rated indicators were awareness that screenshot sharing may damage an individual's reputation and recognition that sharing sensitive conversations may result in cyberbullying. These findings suggest that students are conscious of the potential social and psychological harm associated with unauthorized sharing of private information. Exposure to online conflicts, viral content circulation, and public discussions regarding digital misconduct may have heightened students' recognition of the harmful effects of irresponsible online behavior.

Previous studies similarly indicate that individuals who actively engage with digital communication platforms often develop stronger concern regarding privacy threats, unauthorized information disclosure, and misuse of personal data (Malhotra et al., 2004). Dienlin and Trepte (2015) further explained that privacy concerns are frequently associated with fears involving information exposure, online vulnerability, and loss of personal control over digital content.

The findings also align with Nissenbaum's (2010) theory of contextual integrity, which emphasizes that privacy is shaped by socially expected patterns of information flow. When private conversations are screenshot and redistributed beyond their intended context, individuals may lose control over how their information is interpreted, circulated, or used by others. The respondents' recognition of these risks therefore reflects growing awareness regarding the

permanence and uncontrollable nature of digital content once shared online.

Screenshotting Culture and Ethical Ambiguity in Digital Communication

Despite students' recognition of privacy risks and consequences, the findings showed that screenshotting behaviors remained highly prevalent among respondents. Students commonly reported taking screenshots for documentation, reference, evidence preservation, and informational purposes. Respondents also indicated that they consider privacy implications before screenshotting conversations and generally avoid capturing private conversations without valid reason.

These findings suggest that screenshotting has become embedded within routine digital communication practices among students. Rather than being viewed solely as a privacy violation, screenshotting may be interpreted as a functional and socially accepted communication behavior when used for documentation or informational purposes. This distinction may explain why respondents reported relatively lower tendencies toward sharing screenshots containing sensitive information while still demonstrating high levels of screenshotting behavior overall. The normalization of screenshotting practices reflects broader transformations in digital communication culture, where online interactions are increasingly archived, reproduced, and redistributed through digital technologies. Boyd (2014) argued that participatory online culture encourages users to preserve and circulate digital interactions as part of everyday communication practices. Within this context, screenshotting becomes integrated into ordinary digital behavior and may gradually lose its perceived ethical sensitivity among users.

The findings further demonstrate the ethical ambiguity surrounding screenshotting practices in online communication. Students appeared to distinguish between screenshotting for practical purposes and screenshotting intended to embarrass, expose, or harm others. Such distinctions indicate that privacy boundaries within digital environments are often interpreted situationally rather than absolutely. This supports Nissenbaum's (2010) argument that privacy expectations are influenced by contextual norms governing information sharing within specific social environments.

Peer and Social Influence on Digital Privacy Behaviors

The findings revealed that students' data privacy behaviors were moderately influenced by peer interaction and social communication practices. Respondents highly recognized the importance of respecting privacy even in seemingly harmless conversations, discussing online privacy with peers, and improving their understanding of data privacy through interactions with friends and classmates. Students also acknowledged that peer behaviors influence screenshotting and sharing practices within digital environments.

The correlation analysis further showed positive relationships between peer influence, sharing behavior, and privacy concern, indicating that students' online actions are shaped not only by individual awareness but also by social interaction and group norms. In digital communication environments, behaviors are frequently reinforced through observation, imitation, and peer validation.

These findings support Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which explains that individuals acquire behaviors through observing and interacting with others within their social environment. Exposure to peers who routinely share screenshots or engage in screenshot-based communication may reinforce the perception that such behaviors are socially acceptable or normal within online interaction spaces. At the same time, peer discussions regarding online ethics and privacy may also contribute to increased awareness regarding responsible digital behavior.

Interestingly, respondents reported relatively lower agreement regarding social media pressure to share screenshots or difficulty balancing online sharing with respect for others' privacy. This suggests that although students recognize the influence of peer behavior, they may still perceive themselves as capable of maintaining personal ethical boundaries in digital communication. Nevertheless, peer

interaction remains a significant factor shaping students' online privacy practices and perceptions.

The Awareness–Behavior Gap and the Privacy Paradox

One of the most significant findings of the study is the coexistence of high privacy awareness and persistent screenshotting behavior among students. Respondents demonstrated strong awareness regarding privacy rights, legal responsibilities, and digital risks while simultaneously reporting frequent engagement in screenshotting practices. Correlation analysis further revealed significant positive relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence. This finding reflects the broader concept of the "privacy paradox," wherein individuals express concern regarding privacy protection while continuing to engage in behaviors that may expose personal information or compromise confidentiality (Barth & de Jong, 2017). In digitally connected environments, convenience, social norms, habitual communication practices, and perceived harmlessness of certain online behaviors may weaken the practical application of privacy awareness in everyday interaction. The findings suggest that awareness alone may be insufficient to regulate online behavior within digitally normalized communication environments. Although students recognize the ethical and social implications associated with unauthorized sharing of private information, screenshotting practices remain embedded within contemporary digital culture. This indicates that digital privacy behavior is influenced not only by legal knowledge or individual concern but also by routine communication practices, peer interaction, and evolving social norms surrounding online information sharing.

The study therefore highlights the need to strengthen digital citizenship education beyond awareness-based approaches by emphasizing ethical decision-making, contextual privacy understanding, and responsible online communication practices.

Conclusion

The study examined students' awareness regarding the Data Privacy Act of 2012, screenshotting behaviors, sharing behaviors, perceptions of risks and consequences, and peer-related influences associated with digital privacy practices. The findings revealed that students demonstrated high levels of awareness regarding data privacy principles, legal responsibilities, and the potential consequences of unauthorized sharing of private information. Respondents also showed strong recognition of risks associated with screenshot sharing, particularly those related to reputational damage, cyberbullying, identity theft, and loss of control over digital content.

Despite this high level of awareness and recognition of privacy risks, screenshotting behaviors remained highly prevalent among students. Screenshotting was commonly practiced for documentation, evidence preservation, informational purposes, and routine digital communication. Peer interaction and social communication norms also influenced students' privacy-related behaviors within online environments.

The findings further revealed significant relationships among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence. These results suggest that students' digital privacy behaviors are shaped not only by awareness and legal knowledge but also by social interaction, communication culture, and normalized online practices.

The study's most significant theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that privacy awareness alone is insufficient to prevent normalized screenshotting behavior within digitally connected communication environments. Although students recognize privacy risks and ethical concerns, screenshotting practices remain embedded within contemporary digital culture due to routine communication habits, peer reinforcement, and socially accepted online behaviors. The findings therefore highlight the complexity of digital privacy behavior and contribute to emerging discussions regarding screenshotting culture, ethical ambiguity, and the awareness–behavior gap in online communication.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of strengthening digital citizenship education, ethical online communication, and contextual understanding of privacy beyond purely awareness-

based approaches. Educational institutions should promote responsible digital behavior by encouraging ethical decision-making, respect for digital confidentiality, and critical reflection regarding the long-term consequences of sharing private information online.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered in interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study relied primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, response bias, or participants' tendency to provide socially acceptable answers regarding privacy-related behaviors. As a result, actual screenshotting and sharing practices may differ from respondents' reported behaviors.

Second, the study was conducted within a specific educational context involving tertiary students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations, institutions, or cultural settings. Students from different regions, age groups, or educational backgrounds may demonstrate different digital privacy behaviors and perceptions.

Third, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which captured respondents' perceptions and behaviors at a single point in time. Consequently, the study cannot determine changes in privacy behaviors over time or establish long-term behavioral patterns related to screenshotting culture.

Finally, although significant relationships were identified among awareness, screenshotting behavior, sharing behavior, privacy concern, and peer influence, the correlational nature of the study does not permit causal inferences. The findings therefore cannot conclusively determine whether awareness directly influences behavior or whether other unmeasured social, cultural, or technological factors contribute to students' digital privacy practices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed. Educational institutions should strengthen digital citizenship education programs that emphasize ethical online communication, responsible screenshotting practices, and respect for digital confidentiality. Privacy education initiatives should move beyond awareness-based instruction by incorporating discussions on ethical decision-making, contextual privacy, and the social consequences of unauthorized sharing of private information.

Schools and universities may also develop institutional policies and awareness campaigns addressing screenshotting behaviors, consent in digital communication, and responsible use of messaging and social media platforms. Workshops, seminars, and student-centered activities may further help reinforce ethical online behavior and critical reflection regarding digital privacy practices.

Future researchers may expand the study by involving participants from multiple institutions, educational levels, or cultural contexts to improve generalizability. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies may also provide deeper understanding of how screenshotting culture develops over time and how students negotiate privacy boundaries within evolving digital environments. Further studies may likewise explore other factors influencing screenshotting behavior, such as personality traits, digital literacy, platform design, social media engagement, and online communication habits.

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