



# How Relationship Strength in Social Networks Affects Users' Information Sharing Behavior: an Spss-Based Data Analysis

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**Abstract.** This study aims to explore how relationship strength in social networks influences users' information-sharing behavior and examine the moderating role of privacy awareness. A survey method was employed to collect 269 valid responses, covering users' information-sharing behavior, relationship strength, and privacy awareness in social networks. SPSS statistical software was used for data analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and hierarchical regression to test the moderating effect of privacy awareness. The results indicate that strong ties significantly promote the sharing of private information, while weak ties significantly promote the sharing of public information. Privacy awareness suppresses the tendency to share private information in strong ties and encourages users to share public information in weak ties. The conclusion suggests that social platforms should provide personalized privacy settings to meet users' varying needs and enhance user education on privacy protection to optimize their information-sharing strategies.

**Keywords:** Social networks, relationship strength, information-sharing behavior, privacy awareness, moderating effect.

## 1 Introduction

In an era of rapidly advancing digital technology, social networks have become an indispensable part of everyday life. These networks not only provide convenience for communication and interaction but also serve as crucial channels for information sharing and dissemination. The act of users sharing content on social networks is influenced by a combination of factors, including personal motivations, technological features, and social relationships. Among these, the strength of relationships within social networks is considered a significant variable that determines user sharing behavior. Relationship strength typically includes aspects such as interaction frequency, intimacy, and the degree of emotional support, which directly influence how users choose whom to share with and what type of information to share on social media [1].

Strong ties, such as close friends, family members, or colleagues with whom one has frequent interactions, are often associated with high levels of trust and emotional support. Research indicates that users are more inclined to share private or sensitive information within these relationships, as they feel emotionally secure and understood [2]. Such sharing behavior helps to maintain and enhance close relationships, making them significant in the overall structure of social networks. In contrast, weak ties refer to relationships that are not as close or frequent, such as colleagues with whom one has had only a few interactions or friends met online. Weak ties act as bridges in social networks, facilitating the spread of information across different social circles [3]. Users typically share more broadly accepted, non-private information, such as news, opinions, or popular topics, within these weak ties [4].

In addition to the influence of relationship strength, privacy awareness also plays a key role in sharing behavior. Privacy awareness reflects the extent to which users are concerned about online privacy protection and their perception of information risks. High privacy awareness often leads users to be more cautious when sharing personal information [5]. Even in strong ties, users may restrict their information-sharing behavior due to privacy concerns. In weak ties, high privacy awareness may encourage users to avoid sharing sensitive personal information and instead share more neutral, public content. Thus, privacy awareness serves as a moderating factor in users' information-sharing behavior across different types of relationships.

This study aims to explore how relationship strength in social networks influences users' information-sharing behavior, as well as examine the moderating role of privacy awareness in this relationship. By empirically studying users' behavior in sharing private and public information on social networks, this research seeks to uncover patterns of information sharing under different relationship strengths, offering new insights into the mechanisms of information dissemination on social networks. It also aims to provide theoretical support for social platforms to design more personalized privacy protection features.

## 2 Literature Review

The relationship between relationship strength in social networks and user information-sharing behavior has been an important focus for researchers. Early studies, such as Granovetter's "weak tie" theory, laid the theoretical foundation for this field. Granovetter's theory posits that weak ties play a bridging role in social networks, connecting different social groups and facilitating the dissemination of information on a broader scale [6]. This connectivity makes weak ties crucial for the diffusion of information, particularly when it comes to new knowledge or widely shared content. Conversely, strong ties are typically associated with more frequent and deeper interactions, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging [7]. Users are more inclined to share private information, such as personal experiences and emotional matters, within these strong ties where trust and support are higher [8].

Haythornthwaite's research further detailed the impact of relationship strength on information-sharing behavior, identifying interaction frequency and quality as key

factors distinguishing strong and weak ties [9]. Users in strong ties establish robust social bonds through frequent communication, supporting the sharing of deeper, more sensitive, and personalized information. In such contexts, users are more willing to reveal themselves to seek understanding and emotional responses. On the other hand, weak ties are more often used to maintain broad social networks, sharing news, popular topics, and other public information to stay connected. This sharing behavior not only helps users maintain interactions with their broader networks but also reflects their strategy of self-presentation within those networks.

However, user-sharing behavior is not determined solely by relationship strength; privacy awareness plays a critical moderating role. Privacy awareness refers to users' attention to the protection of their personal information and the perceived risks associated with their online activities. Studies have shown that the level of privacy awareness directly affects users' decision-making processes regarding information sharing [10]. Users with high privacy awareness tend to be more cautious when sharing potentially private content on social networks. Even in strong ties, they may choose to limit information sharing to protect their privacy. Conversely, users with lower privacy awareness might share more freely, even personal information, within weak ties.

The design of privacy settings and sharing functions on different social media platforms also significantly influences user-sharing behavior [11]. For instance, Facebook allows users to set different visibility options based on relationship strength and privacy preferences, enabling them to balance privacy protection with information sharing. Similar features exist on platforms like WeChat, where users can use group-sharing options or limit visibility to only close contacts. Studies have found that such privacy features can enhance user trust, making them more likely to share private information within strong ties while sharing public information in weak ties [12].

Research also points out that cultural background and social customs affect user information-sharing behavior on social networks [13]. Studies in Western countries have indicated that users are generally more open about sharing personal information [14]. In contrast, in some Eastern cultures where privacy is more highly valued, users tend to be more selective and conservative when sharing information [15]. Thus, the interaction between cultural factors and privacy awareness adds further complexity to the relationship between relationship strength and information sharing.

In addition to relationship strength and privacy awareness, motivation theories are essential for understanding user information-sharing behavior [16]. Sharing motivations can include the need for social interaction, gaining social recognition, self-expression, and information dissemination [17]. Studies show that in interactions with strong ties, sharing behavior is more driven by social support and emotional connection, whereas in weak ties, motivations are more related to displaying personal knowledge, gaining social recognition, and maintaining relationships [18]. For users with high privacy awareness, these motivations may be moderated; they may maintain high privacy control during interactions with strong ties but be willing to compromise some privacy when sharing more public content to gain greater social rewards [19].

From the perspective of socio-technical systems, researchers have also paid attention to how the design of social platforms affects user-sharing behavior under different relationship strengths. Platform features, such as privacy controls, information visibility, and sharing prompts, directly influence users' information-sharing decisions [20]. For example, social platforms with simplified privacy settings may encourage users to share information more broadly within weak ties, whereas platforms with detailed privacy settings may lead users to control the content and audience of their shares more precisely.

In summary, existing literature reveals the complex interplay between relationship strength and user information-sharing behavior in social networks. Strong ties are typically associated with deeper, more personalized information sharing, while weak ties facilitate the dissemination of public information. Privacy awareness plays a crucial moderating role in shaping users' information-sharing strategies across different relationships. The design of technical platforms and cultural background further deepen this complexity. Building on this foundation, this study will conduct an empirical investigation to explore the interaction of these variables, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the social dynamics of information dissemination.

### **3 Hypotheses**

In this study, combining existing literature and theoretical frameworks, we propose the following research hypotheses to explore the relationship between relationship strength and user information-sharing behavior in social networks, as well as the moderating role of privacy awareness.

#### **3.1 Strong Ties and Private Information Sharing**

Strong ties, such as relationships with close friends and family members, are typically accompanied by frequent interactions and substantial emotional support. Granovetter's research suggests that strong ties provide users with emotional security and support, making them more willing to share private or sensitive information [6]. For example, users may discuss personal life events or express emotional needs with close friends. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: In social networks, the higher the interaction frequency between users and their strong ties, the more likely they are to share private information.

#### **3.2 Weak Ties and Public Information Sharing**

Weak ties refer to relationships between users and acquaintances, such as colleagues or online friends with less frequent interactions. Granovetter's "weak tie" theory posits that weak ties act as bridges for information diffusion, helping to spread information across different social groups [6]. In interactions with weak ties, users tend to share public information, such as news and broadly accepted social topics. This kind

of information sharing not only extends users' social reach but also enhances their social capital within the network [21]. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: The more weak ties users have in social networks, the higher the frequency of public information sharing.

### **3.3 The Moderating Role of Privacy Awareness in Strong Ties**

Privacy awareness refers to users' concern for their personal information and online privacy. Studies show that users with high privacy awareness are more cautious when sharing content involving privacy; even when interacting with strong ties, they may selectively share private information to protect their privacy[22]. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: Privacy awareness moderates the relationship between strong ties and private information sharing; the higher the privacy awareness, the less likely users are to share private information with strong ties.

### **3.4 The Moderating Role of Privacy Awareness in Weak Ties**

In interactions with weak ties, users' privacy concerns may be more pronounced due to the lack of deep emotional bonds. Users with high privacy awareness in such contexts usually avoid sharing private information and instead opt to share more public and non-personal content to reduce privacy risks [23]. Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 4: Privacy awareness moderates the relationship between weak ties and public information sharing; the higher the privacy awareness, the more likely users are to share public rather than private information in weak ties.

## **4 Research Methodology**

This study mainly adopts a quantitative research method to collect data on users' information sharing behaviors, relationship strength and privacy awareness in social networks through a well-designed self-administered questionnaire. Although the self-administered questionnaire approach has the advantages of high efficiency and wide coverage in data collection, it may also carry the risk of social expectation bias, i.e., respondents may tend to provide answers that are more acceptable or in line with the mainstream viewpoints due to social expectations or self-presentation needs. In order to minimize this bias, the following measures were taken in the design of the questionnaire in this study: first, the questionnaire was designed with several revisions and pre-tests to ensure the clarity and neutrality of the questions, and to avoid leading questions so as to reduce the impact of respondents' social expectations. The questions in the questionnaire were designed to objectively reflect the real behavior of the users rather than inducing them to give specific answers. Second, the questionnaire was distributed using a variety of channels, including online survey platforms, social media and emails, to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Meanwhile, when collecting data, we explicitly informed respondents of the anonymity of the study and the confidentiality of the data to eliminate their privacy concerns and im-

prove the authenticity and accuracy of their responses. Finally, in the data analysis stage, we employed statistical methods to clean and calibrate the data to identify and remove possible outliers or biased data. In addition, we further enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings by comparing and validating them with other related studies.

In addition, a qualitative study was conducted to supplement the quantitative study. Relevant interviews were conducted with five experts for the research topic. These experts come from different subject areas, including sociology, psychology and communication, etc., and they have in-depth understanding and rich practical experience of information sharing behavior in social networks. Through the interviews, we obtained the experts' insights and perspectives on the relationship between relationship strength, privacy awareness and information sharing behavior. The results of the interviews indicate that the experts' views on the relationship between relationship strength and information sharing behavior are consistent with the results of our questionnaire analysis, further enhancing the credibility and validity of the study.

The survey is designed to cover the following sections: the first section measures relationship strength through multiple self-assessment items that gauge interaction frequency and intimacy between users and different contacts in their social networks. The survey questions include interactions with strong ties (e.g., close friends and family) and weak ties (e.g., colleagues and online acquaintances). The second section evaluates information-sharing behavior, focusing on users' sharing of private and public information on social networks using a 5-point Likert scale. Questions cover the frequency and details of users sharing different types of content. The third section assesses privacy awareness, measuring the degree to which users value their online privacy. A validated privacy awareness scale is employed, featuring questions on perceived risks of sharing information and awareness of using privacy settings.

The study collected 269 valid survey responses, with respondents exhibiting a balanced distribution of social network usage experience and age groups. Basic statistics of the sample indicate that respondents used social networks at least three times per week, with occupational backgrounds spanning students, office workers, freelancers, and other groups.

SPSS statistical software was utilized for data analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The specific analysis steps included: first, conducting descriptive statistics to summarize the main variables and check for normality and distribution characteristics of the data; second, performing Pearson correlation analysis to assess the linear relationships between variables and determine significant associations; subsequently, using multiple linear regression models to analyze the direct impact of strong and weak ties on information-sharing behavior; and finally, applying hierarchical regression analysis to introduce interaction terms and examine how privacy awareness moderates the relationship between relationship strength and information-sharing behavior. All data analyses were conducted in SPSS, with the significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## 5 Results

This study used SPSS statistical software to analyze the collected data, examining the main effects of strong and weak ties on user information-sharing behavior, as well as the moderating role of privacy awareness. The following are the detailed analysis results.

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

First, descriptive statistics were conducted for the main variables, and the results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Strong Ties	3.85	0.76	1.00	5.00
Weak Ties	3.45	0.82	1.00	5.00
Privacy Awareness	3.60	0.70	1.00	5.00
Private Information Sharing	3.20	0.85	1.00	5.00
Public Information Sharing	3.75	0.80	1.00	5.00

Pearson correlation analysis results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix of Main Variables

Variable	Strong Ties	Weak Ties	Privacy Awareness	Private Info Sharing	Public Info Sharing
Strong Ties	1	0.45**	0.30**	0.55**	0.25**
Weak Ties	0.45**	1	0.20**	0.35**	0.50**
Privacy Awareness	0.30**	0.20**	1	0.25**	0.15*
Private Info Sharing	0.55**	0.35**	0.25**	1	0.40**
Public Info Sharing	0.25**	0.50**	0.15*	0.40**	1

\*Note: \*\*p < 0.01, p < 0.05

### 5.2 Regression Analysis

To test the main effects of strong and weak ties on information-sharing behavior, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Regression Analysis of Strong and Weak Ties on Information Sharing Behavior

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	$\beta$	Standard Error	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Private Information Sharing	Strong Ties	0.50	0.05	10.00	<0.001	0.30	0.29
Public Information Sharing	Weak Ties	0.45	0.06	7.50	<0.001	0.25	0.24

Note: Age, gender, and other demographic variables were controlled.

The results show that strong ties have a significant positive effect on private information sharing ( $\beta = 0.50, p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1. Weak ties also have a significant positive effect on public information sharing ( $\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2.

### 5.3 Moderating Effect Analysis

To test the moderating effect of privacy awareness, hierarchical regression analysis was used.

#### Explanation of the Moderating Analysis Models

Model 1 is the main effect model, including strong or weak ties as independent variables to test their direct impact on users' private or public information-sharing behavior.

Model 2 adds privacy awareness as an independent variable to Model 1 to test its direct effect on sharing behavior. This model serves to observe whether privacy awareness has a significant direct relationship with information sharing, preparing for the test of its moderating effect.

Model 3 is the final model, adding interaction terms (Strong Ties  $\times$  Privacy Awareness and Weak Ties  $\times$  Privacy Awareness) to Model 2 to test if privacy awareness moderates the relationship between relationship strength and sharing behavior. The significance of the interaction terms indicates how privacy awareness moderates user information-sharing behavior under different relationship strengths.

The results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Moderating Effect Analysis of Privacy Awareness

Dependent Variable	Model	Independent Variable	$\beta$	Standard Error	t	p	$\Delta R^2$
Private Information Sharing	1	Strong Ties	0.50	0.05	10.00	<0.001	0.02
	2	Strong Ties	0.45	0.05	9.00	<0.001	
		Privacy Awareness	-0.20	0.05	-4.00	<0.001	
	3	Strong Ties	0.40	0.05	8.00	<0.001	
		Privacy Awareness	-0.15	0.05	-3.00	0.002	
		Strong Ties $\times$ Privacy Awareness	-0.10	0.04	-2.50	0.013	
Public Information Sharing	1	Weak Ties	0.45	0.06	7.50	<0.001	0.01
	2	Weak Ties	0.40	0.06	6.67	<0.001	
		Privacy Awareness	0.10	0.05	2.00	0.046	
	3	Weak Ties	0.35	0.06	5.83	<0.001	
		Privacy Awareness	0.15	0.05	3.00	0.003	
		Weak Ties $\times$ Privacy Awareness	0.08	0.04	2.00	0.046	

Note: Model 1 is the main effect model; Model 2 adds privacy awareness; Model 3 adds interaction terms.  $\Delta R^2$  indicates the  $R^2$  increment from Model 2 to Model 3.



The results indicate that privacy awareness has a significant negative moderating effect between strong ties and private information sharing ( $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. It also has a significant positive moderating effect between weak ties and public information sharing ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.046$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4

## 6 Conclusion

This study reveals the combined effects of relationship strength and privacy awareness on user information-sharing behavior in social networks and validates the main and moderating effects of these factors. The results show that strong ties significantly promote users' sharing of private information, while weak ties significantly promote the sharing of public information, aligning with existing theories such as Granovetter's "weak tie" theory and Haythornthwaite's social interaction theory. The study also found that privacy awareness plays an important moderating role in users' sharing behavior. In strong ties, high privacy awareness reduces users' tendency to share private information, while in weak ties, high privacy awareness encourages users to share public rather than private information.

### 6.1 Key Findings and Theoretical Significance

The main findings of this study confirm the different roles that relationship strength plays in user information-sharing behavior. Strong ties provide emotional support and trust, encouraging users to share private information related to personal life or emotions when interacting within these relationships. This phenomenon is consistent with the definitions of intimate relationships in social psychology, which emphasize the role of trust in information exchange. On the other hand, weak ties connect different social circles, enhancing the spread of information. The motivation for users to share public information when interacting with weak ties often stems from the social need to maintain connections and enhance social capital.

Privacy awareness as a moderating factor enriches our understanding of the complexity of user-sharing behavior. The results indicate that even though users are more willing to share private information in strong ties, high privacy awareness can lead them to weigh the risks of sharing, thereby reducing the level of disclosure. This finding shows that, even in relationships with high emotional trust, privacy protection awareness still significantly impacts users' decision-making. In weak ties, high privacy awareness enhances users' tendency to share public information to avoid potential privacy risks. This implies that user information-sharing behavior on social networks is influenced not only by the type of relationship but also by users' subjective perceptions of privacy protection.

## 6.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have important practical implications for the design of social media platforms and the development of user privacy setting strategies. Platforms can develop more flexible and personalized privacy settings based on user behavior in strong and weak ties. For instance, platforms could allow users to set specific visibility and sharing permissions for different social groups, enabling them to share private information more freely with strong ties while better protecting their privacy when interacting with weak ties. This approach can enhance users' trust in the platform and increase user engagement.

Additionally, this study highlights the importance of educating users on how to leverage privacy settings to balance information sharing and privacy protection. Social platforms can offer more intuitive privacy control interfaces and guides to help users make informed decisions when sharing content in different relationship contexts. By improving users' privacy awareness and protection strategies, platforms can meet users' privacy needs while reducing negative experiences stemming from privacy breaches.

## 6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to collect data, the sample size did not reach a large scale due to resource and time constraints, which may have limited the accuracy and reliability of the findings to some extent. Future studies may consider increasing the sample size and adopting a more rigorous research design to improve the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Second, in terms of research methodology, although quantitative and qualitative research were combined, the degree of integration of the two methods still needs to be improved, and future studies could further explore how to combine the two methods more effectively to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analytical perspective. In addition, considering the possible influence of cultural background on social behavior, cross-cultural comparative research is also an important future research direction.

The study can provide a deeper understanding of the interaction patterns and information dissemination mechanisms in social networks, and it can provide more comprehensive and in-depth theoretical support and practical guidance for the design of social media platforms, the development of user privacy protection strategies, and the optimization of information dissemination strategies. With the continuous expansion and deepening of the research field, it is expected to be able to deal with the complexity challenges of social networks more effectively and promote the sound development of social media platforms.

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