

Privacy 2.0

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Abstract

We live in the era of change. In this world, privacy is not a static concept, but instead has a dynamic component. Overall, it becomes clear that the public and private are not defined in the same manner as in the past and as in the actual world, while our personal information has become a commodity that can raise our visibility in the social media driven world.

Keywords

privacy, mediated visibility, personal data, social networking sites, self-presentation

Try to imagine—or reflect back to—the world of 20 years ago, and you will realize that nothing is permanent or, to put it another way, things are becoming more and more temporary. The mediascape that we used to know is becoming extinct. The digital revolution has really shaken up traditional media. Technology changed the way we experience reality, communicate, learn, and discover. “New media” have become pervasive and ubiquitous. Taking a selfie and checking Twitter and Facebook using our smartphone, tablet, or any other smart device have become the daily routine of the netizen of the 21st century. Continuous communication is now perceived as a kind of expectation and in some cases even a demand.

The Internet “gave” us the many-to-many pattern of communication and also facilitated one-to-many and one-to-one communication. The web of today is very different to the one that first gained widespread acceptance in the mid-1990s. The static “read-only” Web 1.0 of the mid-1990s evolved to the “read-write” web, or Web 2.0, from about 2004 onwards, and it could even become more sophisticated with the advent of Web 3.0, the next generation of web. And, if we adopt the predictions of Internet experts, it will become “like electricity”—less visible, yet more deeply embedded in people’s lives (Pew Research Center, 2014).

The wave of development brought by Web 2.0 was characterized mainly by social media, interaction, and collaboration. Social media, a fluid ecosystem of different networks, is increasingly taking up a greater share of the time we spend online and also bringing an unprecedented integration of consumer and producer roles. In this networked reality, shared experiences have become the cornerstone of social media. The enormous growth of the social Web has thus contributed to the development of new forms of mediated visibility, the rise of digital intimacy, and in effect, the empowerment of narcissistic indulgence.

In this fragmented media *milieu* where the boundaries between offline and online, traditional and nontraditional media, personal life and public image are blurred, the very much talked-about—and difficult to conceptualize—the issue of privacy is being readdressed. At this point, it should be noted that the distinction between *public* and *private* has been one of the “grand dichotomies” of Western thought since classical antiquity (Arendt, 1958; Bobbio, 1989; Weintraub & Kumar, 1997). The foundation of the privacy concept itself is traced in Aristotle’s distinction between *polis* (the public sphere of political activity) and *oikos* (the private sphere associated with family and domestic life). In modern societies, privacy is rooted in the Enlightenment (Fuchs, 2011) and more particularly in the political thinking of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Regan, 1995). Many decades later, Habermas (1987) pointed out that the lifeworld consists of the private world (family, private households, intimacy) where the individual is most in control of his activities and communications and the public sphere (communicative networks that enable private persons to take part in culture and the formation of public opinion). The development of the print and then the electronic media gave birth to new forms of “mediated publicness” (Thompson, 2000) which allowed for an intimate form of self-presentation freed and facilitated the rise of “the society of self-disclosure” (Thompson, 2000) where television, radio, and telephone turned once private places into more public ones by making them more accessible to the outside world (Meyrowitz,

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1986). More recently, it has been argued that the public and the private have been reconstituted as spheres of information and symbolic content that are largely detached from physical locales and increasingly interwoven with evolving technologies of communication (Thompson, 2011).

In this changing social, cultural, and technological backdrop, privacy is not a static concept, but instead has a dynamic component and distinguishes between restricted access theories, control theories, and restricted access/limited control (RALC) theories of privacy (Tavani, 2008). Control theories are focused on self-determination over privacy, while restricted access theories conceive privacy as a moral structure that is aimed at protecting all humans (Fuchs, 2011).

Overall, it becomes clear that the public and private are not defined in the same manner as in the actual world. The social networking sites (SNSs) provide by default extensive—yet more and more moderated—visibility since they allow to individuals that are not in their close environment or even to strangers to learn information for other users that they would not know otherwise.

In this sense, our personal information has become a commodity that can raise our visibility in the social media driven world. What is more, with the advent of the Internet of Things, global interconnectedness is creating new points of data between individuals, devices, and organizations. New challenges and opportunities appear for the highly visible media environments. Can we deal with data more sensibly? How do we want it to be protected? Who should do it? Big Data, Internet of Things, wearables—what next? Notwithstanding the global divides on literacy, income, connectivity in the real world, the rich and complex picture of social media continues to grow, is becoming more and more sophisticated, and is here to stay.

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