# Chapter 1
# Introduction to Privacy Online

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Even before the various networks supporting online communication converged as the Internet, tensions existed between users' desires to communicate online in very personal ways and their assumptions that their disclosures would or should be treated as privileged and private. These tensions have not abated with the advent of social media. Just as it was with the most bare-bones, text-based online communities of the past, it is with contemporary media: The more users disclose of themselves, the more they may enjoy the benefits these systems have to offer. At the same time, the more they disclose, the more they risk what they themselves consider breaches of their privacy. In light of this ongoing issue, this volume is not only timely in the manner in which it addresses these tensions as they are manifest in contemporary social media platforms, it also contributes to a tradition of research on the dualism of privacy, privilege, and social interaction that online communication has incurred as far back as (or farther than) the advent of the Internet itself.

Three complicating factors that have and continue to confront users of online systems include (1) a misplaced presumption that online behavior is private, (2) that the nature of the Internet at a mechanical level is quite incommensurate with privacy, and (3) that one's expectation of privacy does not constitute privileged communication by definition.

Perhaps it is due to the analogous offline activities which online communication resembles or replaces, that many Internet users notoriously post information online which they do not anticipate will be seen by others than the specific group they imagined when posting. A personal face-to-face conversation is fleeting. A phone call is most likely to be confined to the dyad that conducts it. A social party on held private property is presumably self-contained. These settings allow participants to maintain their sense of privacy consistent with the definitions reflected in Stephen Margulis's Chap. 2, that focus on individuals determining for themselves when,

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how, and to what extent their communications are transmitted to others (except of course by hearsay rather than by duplication and transmission). The presumptions accompanying these precedent settings may be hard to dispel, and it may be difficult for Internet users (at least those who are not digital natives) to recognize that online exchanges are neither fleeting nor confined. This divergence has led to many surprises and disappointments. These include the notorious anecdotal reports of students or employees being terminated or punished as a result of posting depictions of or statements reflecting illegal, insulting, or foolish behavior on their social network profiles.

These disparities between traditional communication settings and new media may be due in large part to the mechanical infrastructure of the Internet. The *psychological* privacy afforded by communication channels may lull users into a false assumption of *informational* privacy, a central distinction that informs the thesis of Sabine Trepte and Leonard Reinecke's Chap. 6. This may be true of the phone call and the conventional letter (which can also be intercepted), as well as the Internet. But the Internet is, at its root, a store-and-forward technology. That is, in order for the Internet to work as it does it must be able to capture, retain, and transmit the information which users enter into it (see Walther 2002). This differs from face-to-face, telephonic, and written exchanges. Yet many Internet users fail to realize that something once put online more or less stays online and may be retrieved by others and replicated, despite the subsequent inclination or efforts of the original poster to protect or remove it. Moreover, the nature of systems' architectures facilitate, if not determine, the propagation of social information, an argument articulated in contemporary terms in Zizi Papacharissi and Paige Gibson's work in Chap. 7 that includes "sharability" among the characteristics defining social media's very makeup.

Users also frequently believe that the expectation of privacy that they had when conversing or posting online constitutes some legal protection against that information being shared. Although the expectation of privacy does indeed privilege certain forms of communication under US law, the domains to which these legal restrictions apply are far more narrow than many Internet privacy advocates suggest. That is, the law privileges only conversations between patients and their doctors or therapists, and attorney-client conversations. Yet the myth prevails that any conversation is privileged that took place with an expectation of privacy, however misplaced that expectation may have been, contributing to what Bernhard Debatin refers to in Chap. 5 as "ignorance and a false sense of security (that) play an important role" in users' approach to the privacy of their online postings.

This position has been propagated by numerous researchers who have argued that if Internet users believe that they communicate privately online, then it is unethical and may be illegal to analyze their messages for research purposes and that human subjects review boards should almost never allow it (Frankel and Sang 1999; see also Hudson and Bruckman 2004; McArthur 2001). Counterarguments have been raised along the lines that, again according to US legal doctrines, messages that have been captured and stored in a publically-accessible space

have no privilege whatsoever (Walther 2002) aside from copyright protection (Jacobson 1999), and that the analysis of such messages requires no more human subjects protections than analyzing newspaper content. It is clear that journalists who wish to quote from publically-available online communities and other social media do so quite regularly and without seeking permission, as discussed by Wiebke Loosen in Chap. 15, and as Jan-Hinrik Schmidt discusses in Chap. 12, Twitter users "retweet" others' messages without reservation to audiences unintended by the original source. By definition and in practice, it appears, if anyone in the Internet-using public can see one's messages, the messages are in the public domain.

In light of this, educating users about their online footprints seems to be a more promising objective than to change laws or admonish researchers and other viewers to behave differently with respect to online information. As Mike Yao points out in Chap. 9, despite norms and customs affecting "privacy issues offline, to which a set of well-established cultural, social, and legal norms may be applied, the burden of online privacy protection is primarily shouldered by an individual's own conscious effort." More effective efforts should be devoted to helping users to understand the nature of the Internet in order to develop, according again to Debatin (Chap. 5), "an enlightened understanding of technology and its unintended consequences" in terms of a "*privacy literacy* that enables them to. . .make educated choices." Yao (Chap. 9) depicts what may be required in terms of shaping those choices in terms of attitudes and subjective norms, while Kevin Lewis's Chap. 8 shows how the normative behavior of one's Facebook friend network influences the behavior of privacy setting adoptions over time.

Just as history shows that controversies over online privacy are not new, it also shows that technological efforts for the protection of privacy have a long line of succession, especially in realms in which the Internet provides unique benefits to its users. In Chap. 16, Jochen Peter and Patti Valkenburg describe the unique affordances that Instant Messaging and social media offer adolescents for communication that is vital to their development. Online communication, especially that which may be done anonymously, pseudonymously, or confidentially, allows for the exploration of identity generally and for the examination of sexual identity as well.

Whereas Peter and Valkenburg limit their focus to adolescents, the use of the Internet for identity exploration and sexual exploration by adults has also been a focus of research and speculation for some time. In an adult context, similar behaviors are described in exploratory or therapeutic rather than developmental terms (Cooper et al. 1999; Turkle 1995, resp.). Such exchanges were frequently noted on Multi-User Discussions (MUDs), where the pseudonymity provided by these systems has been described as a critical enabling feature of such virtual spaces for identity exploration (Stone 1995). Yet controversy arose even within these text-only pseudonymous venues, when users who had developed strong relationships with others through their pseudonymous selves felt betrayed at the outside publication of doubly-pseudonymized quotations (see Bruckman 2002), foreshadowing quite precisely what boyd (2007, p. 2) has since characterized as the privacy-threatening

aspects of social network sites ("persistence, searchability, exact copyability, and invisible audiences"). Moreover, just as MUD users developed intimacy with one another by divulging their secrets as well as their real-life names and email addresses (Jacobson 1996; Parks and Roberts 1998). Like the text-based virtual reality use of the past, "social Web use offers advantages and gratifications that increase in direct proportion to the degree of self-disclosure," according to Monika Taddicken and Cornelia Jers in Chap. 11 of this volume. Yet then as now such intimacy comes at jeopardy of privacy, just as Debatin (Chap. 5) points out that for contemporary users of social media, "their level of privacy protection is relative to the number of friends, their criteria for accepting friends, and the amount and quality of personal data provided" online. These risks can be mitigated somewhat, according to Nicole Ellison and colleagues in Chap. 3, by limitations in friending behaviors, privacy settings, and disclosures.

Another form of Internet-enabled therapeutic exchange came as users asked for and received advice on deeply personal issues on discussion systems such as Usenet News. It appears that such personally-revealing and advice-oriented exchanges remain valued activities among older Internet users today, according to Wiebke Maaß in Chap. 17. When Usenet was at its peak, individuals who posted to some of its discussions shielded their identities through the use of *anonymous remailers*. They often did so when addressing stigmatizing issues such as certain illnesses, sexual dysfunctions, or psychological problems. Anonymous remailers posted messages to Usenet without the user's identifying address (see Bacard 2010). By appending a pseudonym to the message instead, users could track which replies subsequently developed that addressed their own original posting. They could post follow-up messages using the same pseudonym via such systems. *Traceable remailers* kept a record of the original sender's address, so that other users could respond by email to the pseudonymous address, whereupon the remailer sent replies back to the original sender. Indeed, anonymity was one of the major attractions for the use of online versus offline social support (Walther and boyd 2002), where, unlike offline social support, both men and women communicated similarly (cf. Mike Thelwall in Chap. 18). Despite growing technological sophistication of anonymous remailers, their use for slander, copyright violations, or potentially subversive political whistle-blowing (much as WikiLeaks provides today) made them susceptible to international subpoenas calling on their operators to reveal the identity of users and thereby abridge the privacy such systems offered. This led the most famous of these systems, anon.penet.fi, to be shut down by its operator rather than be opened to police (see http://w2.eff.org/Privacy/Anonymity/960830_penet_closure.announce). The rise of alternative and easier-to-use web applications has displaced both MUDs and Usenet discussions to a great extent, yet as Peter and Valkenburg make clear, newer systems still benefit users' psychosocial development by providing apparently private communication opportunities.

Yet even in contemporary social media, with full view of one's name and a plethora of identifying features, users actively manage their online self-presentations, as Nicole Krämer and Nina Haferkamp detail in Chap. 10. Indeed, social network sites enable individuals the "*mass management* of real world ties,"

as Marc Ziegele and Oliver Quiring suggest in Chap. 13. These tendencies sit rather uncomfortably alongside Joinson and colleagues' assertion in Chap. 4 that social network sites provide to at least those whom individuals have granted certain privileges a "radical transparency" about a profile owner's self and behaviors, that may even include, as Maren Hartmann's Chap. 14 points out, the disclosure of individuals' geographic locations by their location-aware mobile phones. It is somewhat paradoxical that, on the one hand, "social network sites. . .are thriving on users' willingness to disclose and consume personal information," as Joinson et al. reflect, plus the fact most of one's Facebook "friends" are known to a profile owner offline to at least some extent (Ellison et al. 2007), but that, on the other hand, impression management activity remains fertile within these sites.

The paradox may be resolved to some extent by noting that impression management has limited and unintended effects. Facebook users can readily identify elements on their own profiles (including their online photos) and in those of their friends that are distorted and not quite true offline (DeAndrea and Walther in press). Although they excuse themselves and their close friends for such exaggerations, they attribute greater hypocrisy and blame for such distortions to those of their friends who they know less well. It is unclear whom individuals are trying to mislead with these inaccurate self-presentations, given the radical transparency of which Joinson and colleagues write. Perhaps it is themselves, as another part of the psychosocial development that Peter and Valkenburg describe of adolescents.

In sum, the chapters in this book offer readers much more than a thorough and contemporary treatment of online privacy and the social web. They offer a sophisticated collection of installments on topics that are quite traditional in their concern and quite under development as Internet communication technologies continue to evolve. They offer a glimpse of the future as well, not only by exploring emergent issues that are arising with new technological applications. They do so by suggesting theory-based research agendas that can guide inquiry beyon the current incarnation of social technologies, just as the privacy issues that arose with the development of earlier Internet communication technologies have morphed but remain with us today.

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