Designing for Networked Privacy: Ethical Dilemmas that Come to the Forefront for the User

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Abstract

As relationships and social life are increasingly enmeshed with social media, researchers have focused on how to support networked privacy. In open and transparent online environments, users are offered features to limit their exposure and accessibility. Socially isolated individuals are offered features to reach out and receive attention. However, these features can bring forth new ethical dilemmas for the user. For example, on a location-sharing social network a user may have to choose between sharing his current location and using a feature to lie about his/her location. Some users may have ethical objections to the feature. However, avoiding the decision by going offline or sharing a vague (city-level) location may not be viable. This may decrease the usefulness of the social media, or may lead to more ethical dilemmas. On the other end of the spectrum, some users desire to be more connected to others. They may avoid self-disclosure on social media, though, because they perceive that as narcissistic and thus against their personal values. We hope to engage in discussion around how we can better consider the ethical decisions users face when weighing their privacy needs against upholding their personal values.

Introduction

Many privacy theorists describe privacy as a continual boundary regulation across various dimensions: Between being more open or closed, accessible or inaccessible, across identity boundaries (e.g. identity as a colleague vs. a mother), across temporal boundaries, etc. [1,6,7]. As social media are increasingly mediating and shaping our relationships, scholars have identified parallels between privacy regulation in the offline and online world. For example, Palen and Dourish point to the example of closing a door to regulate accessibility to oneself [6]. They indicate that the online world can similarly have virtual doors to make one more or less accessible, to disclose more or less. Over the past decade, social media researchers and designers have introduced many privacy features to help users navigate these boundaries online. For example, appearing online versus appearing offline so that one is more or less accessible, or controlling how much and to whom certain information is shared.

Ethical Dilemma on the Private Side

While privacy features help people negotiate their social media engagement (and disengagement), there is a difference in how these mechanisms are put in place and used online as opposed to offline. For instance, in the offline world, people do not face the decision of whether or how to communicate their current location

to people who aren't at the same location since it is unavailable by default. With location-sharing social media such as Facebook's Friends Nearby and Swarm (the offshoot of Foursquare focused on *social*), location-sharing is the key to connecting people. Once someone joins a location-sharing platform, the decision to turn off or obscure their location becomes an active decision. In other words, the user must weigh his privacy needs against his ethical sense that lying about or hiding information is the wrong thing to do (regardless of whether others can tell that he/she lied). This is an ethical question that comes to the forefront online but can remain unasked in the offline world.

For example, in a mixed methods study Page et al. found that individuals who have a higher propensity to lie are more privacy concerned and stay away from using location-sharing social media since it does not support their preferred privacy management tactic of lying [5]. However, addressing these users' needs by introducing a way to lie offends another segment of the population. Case in point, one of the interviewees thought aloud about how people's privacy could be protected if the platform allowed them to edit their current location. He then reflected:

> There are applications which force people to lie, force people to do wrong things. And I may want to take my words back. If you're writing it down, just don't write it down because I don't want to be the reason for such a bad feature.

Here he believes that providing a privacy feature that could facilitate lying would be unethical. What's more, he believes such features and technologies "force people to do wrong things." This use of the word *force* suggests that the privacy feature does not really offer a

viable choice for someone desiring privacy. In fact, it forces the user to choose an unethical privacy protection tactic. The lack of free choice is notable: choosing between exposing my information and lying is not really a choice for this interviewee.

In our current interview study of social media users and non users, we have also noticed participants with similar ethical dilemmas. Not just limited to location-sharing or features that allow lying, ethical tensions kept some people from using privacy features. They were left to deal with the consequences of unresolved privacy concerns. Others would use the features but feel badly about themselves as a result.

We are still unpacking the ethical dilemma faced by these interviewees, but what has become clear is that designers need to consider the ethical dilemma faced by some users. Furthermore, they need to consider that for these users, introducing a privacy feature that supports an unethical value may be perceived as worse for the societal good than no feature at all. This may create technology that forces "people to do wrong things".

Ethical Dilemma on the Social Side
Privacy is not just about hiding information, but also about disclosing and getting the desired attention and interaction. So features to increase engagement or expand the reach of one's disclosures are also part of the privacy management equation (though not commonly classified as privacy features). This includes features to share information, or to signal that one is available to interact with others.

Scholars have found that self-disclosure and interaction on social media can lead to many benefits (e.g.

increased social capital [4]). However, we found individuals who do not engage in self-disclosure online because they view that action as inappropriate, and frankly, narcissistic. However, these individuals expressed the desire for some of the benefits of self-disclosure. So they may be missing out because of this tension between desire for social connection and determination to be non-narcissistic.

Others engaged in self-disclosure but expressed dismay at their own behavior, and repeatedly wished that social media did not exist. These were the individuals who felt that participating in social life required self-disclosure but this was at odds with their moral sensibilities. These interviewees felt similarly "forced" to choose between participating in social life and exercising the proper restraint with self-disclosure.

Ongoing Study
We have conducted semi-structured interviews with ninety-three social media users and non users spread across age ranges and life stages (students, working, retired, etc.). We probe on their use of a broad range of privacy management features such as deleting posts/tweets, limiting the audience of a post/tweet, unfriending or removing followers, etc. We also look at barriers to use and reasons for abandoning social media. Through grounded theory analysis, we are analyzing the data to understand people's privacy management behaviors.

Open Questions
We are interested in the idea that people can feel compelled to engage in unethical behavior because of the privacy features offered (whether it is to increase or decrease disclosure). In other words, we are interested in studying whether (and how) social media may nudge

people to do things they might not do offline. Moreover, we want to understand whether they internalize the behaviors and their associated values. In other words, does frequently lying about my location online lead to my being more comfortable with lying and using it in other contexts offline? Viewing privacy features as having the ability to change or encourage certain behaviors emphasizes the role of social media designers as designers of societal values.

This idea is not without precedence. Some scholars have hypothesized how certain behaviors afforded by social media may normalize the behavior and lead to more general acceptance. Buffardi and Campbell [3] surmise that the prevalence of narcissistic behavior enabled by Facebook gives rise to such behavior in the general user population.

Understanding whether people feel social media is "forcing" them to change their values is also important to understanding why some people are opting not to use social media. Our data suggests that for some, the easy way out of making ethical decisions between protecting one's privacy and adhering to one's values is to avoid the technology completely.

In summary, some key questions that we feel need to be addressed in research are:

- How is the choice to use a privacy feature an ethical decision for some users? Which users?
- Can social media shape our values?
- What is our role as designers and researchers in addressing these ethical questions?

We hope to engage with workshop participants in this discussion.

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