

Chapter 63

Privacy Awareness and the Networking Generation

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the social and privacy implications of children's access to the internet and to information technologies of communication (ITCS) services. The growing rate of children online represents an epochal change for issues related to their personal safety and protection, as well as for their privacy rights and chances of improved life. In order to better understand the long term privacy implications of these phenomena the discussion reviews sociological studies that have investigated the structure of friendships networks among adolescents, and describes theoretical frames adopted in analysing social practices concerning the private sphere. Results of these studies provide clues on how interpersonal online relations are structured and how attitudes and practices circulate across and inside different social settings. Finally, implications for privacy issues related to the upcoming Internet of Things (IoT) are debated using the case of ethical design in engineering as an alternative option to the control option exercised by governments and companies.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years as the rate of world-wide population connected to the internet is rising, we experiment some of the changes favoured by networking communications and social organizing technologies. Information technologies (or IT) and Internet connected services provide the opportunities for social participation, new communication services and diffusion of information but not all the changes induced by these technologies will be immediately perceivable or visible, and this is specially the case of attitudes changes that are assumed to take place among the younger generations. Looking backward, one of the first new millennium reports of the Pew Research Center in 2001 dedicated to teens and technology stated that a large proportion of American children under the age of 18 (45%) used online communications and services and among adolescents the rate nearly doubled (73%). Until 2001 most of adolescents were learning to cope, experiment and have fun with a new communication arena, the Internet, mostly

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7113-1.ch063

inside the educational or domestic contexts, and their experience of technologies was mediated by the adults. Thanks to the improvement in the broadband mobile technologies only few years later the following generations of children and adolescents – the generation of ‘millennials’, the X-Gen and more recently the I-Gen – were going to discover a new independence and autonomy from the adult society and to access openly the Internet almost worldwide with their personal smartphones. In the 2015 ‘Pew Teens and ITCs Survey’ over 92% of the American adolescents report going online daily and constantly accessing social media platforms. This penetration rate is almost similar for the affluent world countries where pervasive technologies constitute a relevant dimension of children’s social participation to daily life, and the international organizations foresee a similar trend in access to the Internet also for middle income countries in East Asia and South America (ITU, 2016).

Acknowledging the relevance of these changes as epochal turn-off, this article focuses the discussion on privacy implications of communication and media applications of Information Technologies adopted globally by younger users and explores behavioural and social implications that pervasive technologies may have in the sphere of personal relations. While the continuous arrival of advanced communication in daily life is transforming societies, from the more economically advanced countries to the less prosperous ones, the changes in communication and socializing patterns related to global access to Internet are expected to have noticeable outcomes as well as more profound implications in human societies. In particular, due to the amplification effect of social media communication on established boundaries between private and public spaces, these changes may involve challenging consequences for sociability and social norms reproduction among the younger generations, both Western and non-Western societies, with possible collateral effects in the economic and political sphere. In view of that, this chapter illustrates and discusses results from recent surveys and empirical social studies that analyse the access and use of Information Technologies of Communication among the younger population at the world level. Their findings constitute a starting point for a reflexivity on the evolution of privacy that arise from the growing participation of adolescents and children to the WebSphere and the advent of publicized forms of privacy. Specifically, the central part of the article synthesizes results from empirical researches of friendship relations among adolescents in off-line networking and discusses thought-provoking connections among these studies and the exploration of privacy implications in hyper-connected technologies of communication. The structural patterns of friendship and romantic relations in fact exemplify and summarize elements of social control and interests sharing that are part of the social meaning of associating in the public space of Internet. Concluding, the article focuses on the upcoming societal impact of children accessing the Internet and explores the techno-ethical implications for privacy of the younger generations, suggesting the need for a more responsible and proactive approach to technological change and innovation in communication.

Privacy Awareness and the Next Generation of ITCs Users

In the last ten years the access of children and teens to digital services and social media has been reported in constant rise for almost all European and Asian countries, as result of the wider diffusion of internet broadband and affordable mobile devices (World statistics, 2017). The daily use of online services in most of the European countries is close to full population coverage, which means over 90% of all population including children, for Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom (Eurostat data, 2014 and 2015) and for the affluent Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. In several Middle East countries and in countries such as India or Brasil, social media platforms are very popular among the

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