Chapter 4.2
Cross Cultural Perceptions on Privacy in the United States, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors will briefly discuss some cross cultural concerns regarding Internet privacy. The authors believe that due to the cross cultural nature of the Internet itself, different cultures will tend to result in different concerns regarding Internet privacy. As such, there is no single system of protecting Internet privacy that may be suitable for all cultures. The authors also utilize focus groups from various countries spanning Asia and the United States to discover the differences between cultures. Hopefully an understanding of such differences will aid in future research on Internet privacy to take a more culture sensitive approach.

INTRODUCTION

As the world's population becomes increasingly plugged into the Internet, many of the new and wondrous capabilities that the Internet has come to offer have come under serious scrutiny and debate as double-edged swords. File sharing, addiction, freedom of speech, and online gam-

ing are just a handful of topics that have spurned heated discussions. More often than not, one side of the debate invariably comes to involve underlying privacy issues. One example is the popularity of blogs. Hailed by many as a means of transforming journalism and disseminating information (Dietrich, 2006), blogs have also been scrutinized by companies and organizations as things that must be tightly controlled as a means of corporate strategy (Hanson, 2006). However,

the question that then arises is: How private are personal blogs? Should an employee's personal blog also be restricted in content? Should an individual be held publicly accountable for an off-side comment in a personal blog? As organizations are trending towards restricting employee blogs and in severe cases firing employees for personal blogs (Horwedel, 2006), the debate has moved onto free speech and privacy concerns. As complicated as the debate is, the issue of blogs is but a small slice of privacy concerns that plague the Internet. One subject that looms on the horizon, and yet has not been seriously challenged, is the question of Internet privacy across cultures. The views and laws governing Internet privacy in the United States differ from those in the European Union, which in turn differ from those in many Asian countries. The cross-borders nature of the Internet means consideration must be taken on different cultural perceptions on this matter. This chapter will briefly discuss some of the concerns in approaching privacy on the Internet, in particular how different cultures view and handle privacy.

BACKGROUND

Just as the Internet has allowed for the instant transmission of much needed information, it has also become a channel for some unsavory elements. Organizations and individuals can now collect information on individuals with speed, ease, and relative accuracy. Masses of unwanted solicitation e-mails, commonly known as "spam," have been identified by many as a "scourge" upon the Internet (Herbert, 2006). Also of concern are various scams that are precipitated over the Internet, the most famous probably being the 419 scam, more commonly known as the "Nigerian" scam, where the e-mail recipient is asked to provide private information in exchange for large amounts of cash money. While at first glance this scourge may simply be an annoyance for ISPs and e-mail inboxes, privacy is also an underlying

concern here. Most companies who participate in spam and scams usually obtain e-mail lists that are available for purchase commercially. E-mails on such lists may be harvested manually, or more commonly, simply obtained when Internet users carelessly disclose their e-mail addresses.

However, while arguments rage over various sides of the privacy issues, be it debates over the blurring of public and private space and ethical responsibilities (Tavani & Grodzinsky, 2002), the legal and ethical battle between right to know and right to privacy (Sitton, 2006), or clashes on whether Internet service providers (ISPs) are required to disclose user information to the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA), little attention has been paid to how different countries react to the issue of Internet privacy. In the United States, several years of unsolicited telephone calls and spam e-mail have resulted in the National Do Not Call (DNC) Registry, the CAN-SPAM act, and the Spy Act of 2007 (H.R. 964), and Verizon, a United States cellular telephone service provider, has recently won a court case against cell phone spammers. While the intentions and effectiveness of acts such as CAN-SPAM and H.R. 964 are fiercely debated, it is important to recognize that for better or for ill, legal measures have been taken in an attempt to curb or at least control matters involving privacy and spam.

In Asia however, measures such as DNC and CAN-SPAM are nowhere to be seen. Many residents of Taiwan complain privately about receiving telephone calls from scammers, and spam e-mail is as prevalent as ever. However, no attempt has been made to legislate unsolicited phone calls and e-mails, as Americans have. While most Taiwanese citizens view of such spam as nuisances, little thought is spent on how personal mobile phone numbers, e-mail, and family information is obtained by spammers and scammers in the first place. This is very different from American attitudes, where thoughts of spam and scams bring to mind fears that personal information is being freely peddled on the open market. At present, no

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