



Chapter 16

Mapping Boundaries: Variations in Digital Devices and Years' Online Privacy Concerns


Dharmesh Dhabliya

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6340-2993>
Vishwakarma Institute of Information
Technology, India

Ankur Gupta

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4651-5830>
Vaish College of Engineering, India

Sukhvinder Singh Dari

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6218-6600>
Symbiosis International University (Deemed),
India

Monika Soni

*Auricle Global Society of Education and
Research, India*


Jambi Ratna Raja Kumar

*Genba Sopanrao Moze College of Engineering,
India*

Sharayu Ikhar

Yashika Journal Publications Pvt. Ltd., India

Sabyasachi Pramanik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9431-8751>
Haldia Institute of Technology, India

ABSTRACT

Different digital communication technologies provide different methods and capacities for monitoring, self-disclosure, and privacy control. As a result, different user behaviors and attitudes about privacy are elicited. This study examines the similarities and differences between computer and mobile phone usage using content analysis of 12 focus groups with college students at a US institution between 2006 and 2022. It does this by drawing on the media mastery framework and the comparative privacy research framework. The comparisons and their combinations among certain privacy-related codes from the boundaries subcomponent of the media mastery framework show both notable parallels and differences, according to the analysis. Excerpts from the focus groups provide more context for these conclusions. A cluster analysis of the codes identifies a number of overarching themes, including trust and safety and stepping over the private-public dividing line. There are theoretical and practical ramifications to the topic.

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INTRODUCTION

Over time, using digital technology has benefits and drawbacks for consumers. The introduction of digital technology has completely changed how we work and live in contemporary society. It has made it possible for us to share resources globally, get information quickly, and manage challenging jobs with simplicity. Its benefits, however, go well beyond this; they are many and have played a crucial role in expanding our technical capacities. One of the main benefits of digital technology is its capacity to increase productivity, from expediting routine tasks to instantly completing complex computations. Beyond that, technology makes it possible for people to communicate with each other more effectively via online platforms, enabling the unparalleled pace of idea and information sharing. Additionally, digitalization makes real-time data analysis possible, enabling speedy, informed decision-making without the need to wait for tedious computations or manual processing. Although digital technology is pervasive in today's environment, not everything is as it seems. While digital technology has greatly simplified our lives, there are also significant disadvantages to take into account. Digital technology does have certain drawbacks that should be considered, such as strained vision from staring at displays too much and security issues from online banking. Relying on technology for communication instead of in-person interactions may also result in feelings of loneliness. Furthermore, an excessive dependence on technology might prevent us from developing our problem-solving abilities and promote an instant-gratification society in which patience is no longer prized.

In the end, this results in increased production and time and cost savings. As a result, consumers must go between the advantages and hazards related to these gadgets. A significant issue is striking a balance between consumers' necessity for self-disclosure and dialogue when managing one's internet privacy. As consumers may effort to regulate the privacy settings on digital devices (and related applications), sites, and platforms) might put users' privacy at risk by persistently presenting social and advantages to encourage sharing of knowledge, communication, searching, and widespread usage. Numerous theories and studies (Sarker, I. H. et al. 2023) have shown how individuals retain various protection practices and different privacy problems inside a certain device (e.g., digital gadgets, algorithms, and mobile phones), platform (such as social media). But there is not any knowledge of the potential differences in privacy concerns across various technologies (cell phones vs. devices). As increasingly sophisticated digital devices in a variety of formats and with more functions appear accessible, these difficulties and viewpoints may vary throughout technologies, resulting in more varied advantages as well as concerns with privacy management. The foundation for media mastery directs us to comprehend how individuals come to handle a variety of technologies in their daily lives, and how devices in thereby limiting or having an impact on those users. Media proficiency is determined by traits of digital media, and as a result changes over time, across media, and in context.

These advancements and modifications to various digital gadgets give rise to (at least) two study questions: (1) what are the similarities and (2) variations in users' perceptions and management of privacy problems related to digital devices across devices and time? In addition to serving as practical assistance for better public education on online privacy and technological designs, the answers to these questions could have theoretical implications for communication, self-disclosure, and online privacy management. Thus, we investigate how users' online privacy issues—generated through goal-free focus group discussions—compare across devices (desktop/laptop/table computers vs. cell phones and smartphones) and years (2006 vs. 2022). We do this by applying the comparative privacy research framework and the boundaries subcomponent of the media mastery framework.

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