

Thesis Portfolio

Privacy in Anonymous Social Media
(Technical Report)

Social Construction of Privacy: Reddit Case Study
(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Engineering and Applied Science
University of Virginia • Charlottesville, Virginia

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

Rajiv Sarvepalli
Spring, 2021

Department of Computer Science

Sociotechnical Synthesis

In our modern era, privacy has become an invaluable commodity. Many companies view our information as a form of currency. Therefore, we must recognize the value of our own information, but also the amount we give away freely. Many people use anonymous social media and anonymous accounts on sites like Reddit to prevent their information from being misused. These people intend to protect their information behind the anonymity of a username. Privacy itself has constantly changed in definition and must be viewed as a social product because of the modern data-driven world.

In my STS research, I analyzed the perspectives of privacy using Reddit as a case study. Economic players, governments, and individual users all have constructed and shaped opinions on privacy. Additionally, I considered the question of why privacy scandals continue to happen. The economic forces do not seem to stop companies from continuing to exploit data and failing to protect it. The technical project produced a means of providing users with their total information given away. With a large amount of data available for each individual, people cannot easily understand how much personal information is given away. In anonymous social media, this becomes especially relevant since users wish to retain their anonymity. Therefore, the technical project worked to create a tool that provides users with a score for how much information they gave away with respect to location.

The complexity of privacy in our modern era cannot be understated. With each added form of connectivity, new privacy concerns arise in the form of new data. The ethical concerns of privacy remain at hand, but seemingly, little is done about them. Every year, a new privacy scandal happens at a company, and every year, that same company continues to break its records for profits. A potential solution is privacy literacy: providing people with more understanding of the data their giving away and the possible ramifications. My technical project worked to enhance privacy literacy to some degree. Regardless, the very essence of privacy itself has become a more complex issue than previously imagined or expected.

Table of Contents

Sociotechnical Synthesis

Privacy in Anonymous Social Media

Social Construction of Privacy: Reddit Case Study

Thesis Prospect