



Vanishing boundaries of DIGITAL PRIVACY

Picture this: your morning starts when the alarm rings. As you finish your morning routine, with your coffee in hand and your day's schedule and reminders all set before you, it dawns upon you that you are half an hour earlier than usual, and did not exactly set any of the alarms that have so conveniently gotten you ready.

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Your only recollection is that a few days ago, you had exchanged a text with your friend about getting together for a quick morning chat. From that single exchange of information, the ever-helpful and always-listening ubiquitous virtual assistant has set up a new routine, without giving away much to let you know of the steps it has taken. Would you consider this convenience as a breach of your privacy? Sure, there is no human contact involved in this, but what if it was done by an unknown person?

Let's take a different approach altogether in visualising this — how much are you willing to give up about yourself to use technology and make the best use of its benefits? Opening an account for minimum services anywhere requires you to enter your personal details, which may include mandatory fields asking about your location, age, and address. Add to the fact that these are stored and analysed by machines with little to no human contact for purposes unknown or buried underneath roughly sixteen pages of "Terms and Conditions of Usage."

DIGITAL LOOPHOLES OF A HUMAN RIGHT

Privacy is a fundamental human right, as mentioned by the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in many other international and regional treaties. Interest in the right of privacy increased in

the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of information technology. The surveillance potential of powerful computer systems prompted demands for specific rules governing the collection and handling of personal information.

The text book definition of *Privacy in the Internet age* goes along the lines of stating the concept as a claim of individuals to be left alone, free from surveillance or interference, from other individuals or organisations, including the state.

Advances in data storage techniques and rapidly declining storage costs have been responsible for maintaining a database on individuals by private and public organisations. These advances in data storage have not only made the routine violation of individual privacy cheap, but effective as well. Furthermore, advances in data analysis techniques for large pools of data is another technological trend that heightens ethical concerns. Profit mongering companies, and government agencies are able to find out highly detailed personal information about individuals with unprecedented ease.

Internet technology has posed new challenges for the protection of individual privacy. Any information that is sent over this vast network may pass through many different computer systems before it reaches its intended final destination. Each of these systems is capable of monitoring, capturing, and storing communications that pass through it.

It has not been an overnight development in blurring the lines between

virtual and real-life privacy, but the progress has been astonishingly fast. From the rise of Facebook as the all-engulfing social media platform, and the hub of connectivity to the smart devices that capture, record, and attempt to predict a particular behaviour of the user — there is no end to the possibilities of how a person can be exploited digitally in the cybersphere.

SURVIVING AS A NON-TECHIE

Being technologically handicapped and trying to lead a modern life in 2020 is as good as being unvaccinated and wandering in a disease stricken area. There is simply no way around being connected and using the digital communication platforms to get-by every day.

But there is one fact you have to accept when you partake in this 'connection'. From cell phones to the home, and office computers and devices, right down to the so-called smart devices to make your life less difficult, you are leaking information about yourself in minuscule to somewhat large chunks.

Ask yourself this: do you really need a device to open up curtains in the morning, and does your refrigerator really need to be controlled by your smart phone? Also, do you have to make your smartphone a witness to your many activities throughout the day which you would not dare to let a single living soul know of? That Wi-Fi connection with no password might be tempting and have excellent connectivity — but are you sure you want to use it?

CONTINUED TO PAGE 9












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