

Privacy Aware Social Network Site: Is the Diaspora Approach a Solution to Privacy Challenges on Social Network Sites?

Privacy on social network sites [SNS] has been a hot topic within the field of media and communication studies since sites like Facebook have become central platforms for communication with friends and network for many young people. Researchers have expressed multiple privacy concerns (Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Lewis, Kaufman & Christakis, 2008; Livingstone & Brake, 2010) particularly about the merge of multiple social contexts (Boyd, 2008; Nissenbaum, 2010) on platforms like Facebook. This paper discusses the academic critique and examines how Diaspora, a new SNS, in practice addresses some of these privacy issues. Notably Diaspora's new feature 'aspects' is an explicit option with which to contextualise and frame communication. The paper furthermore compares the strategy of Diaspora with that of Facebook from a user perspective, on the basis of interviews with two focus groups (age 16-17 and 24-30). Findings show that the teenagers seemed less worried about privacy issues and the convergence of multiple contexts while the older group expressed interest in the option to target communication. None, however, believed that Diaspora's privacy features would make them move their profile. The paper will finally discuss whether users consider collapsing contexts acceptable tradeoffs for functionality which Diaspora currently does not offer.

References:

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