Title: The fate of our Privacy in the 21st century

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Abstract:

The explosive growth of Computer and information technology over the past few years has both its good and bad side to the society. For sure, it has alleviated some of our endemic problems and has even change the way people conduct their daily activities, from business to communication, sharing of information, to conducting research etc. These new changes although widely accepted has also created some basic challenges and problems to our society.

Among the challenges that we face in this information age is the issue of our privacy. The definition of privacy is the ability of an individual or group to seclude themselves or information about themselves and thereby reveal themselves selectively. Implicitly, this definition is gradually becoming obsolete. The usage of the term in this context is loosing it's meaning.

On the other hand, we might also associate the term Privacy to anonymity, the wish to remain unnoticed or unidentified in the public realm. When something is private to a *person*, it usually means there is something within them that is considered inherently special or personally sensitive. The degree to which private information is exposed therefore depends on how the public will receive this information, which differs between places and over time. Since the inception of technology, this concept has been challenged.

Most of the things that one will probably wish to make private is no longer protected. for example, lets consider patients in the hospital, before the database issue came up, most record of patients are stored on papers and files and it is practical impossible for a patient history to be disclose to other doctors or agency. But today, patient history is always on the fly as all information can easily be found and distributed from the hospital database. To a length, this is an invasion of privacy.

Secondly, the ability to control what information one reveals about oneself over the Internet, and to control that can access that information, has become a growing concern. These concerns include whether email can be stored or read by third parties without consent, or whether third parties can track the web sites someone has visited. Another concern is whether web sites which are visited collect, store, and possibly share personally identifiable information about users.

The advent of various search engines and the use of data mining created a capability for data about individuals to be collected and combined from a wide variety of sources very easily.[6][7][8]

This new-fangled phenomenon has created a lot of adverse effect to Mankind and has posed a threat to our right to privacy. In this article, we review the previous and present concept of privacy and the challenges we face in this era and proffer some solution on how one can protect his/her privacy.

History of privacy

Since the existence of man, Privacy has been a long term issue. From one perspective at least, humans have been facing issues of privacy or the lack of privacy since the time of ancient Rome.

In 1890 in what is now regarded as the key early modern writing on privacy, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis referred to privacy as the 'right to be let alone, and argued the need for a legal protection of this right in the face of 'recent inventions and business methods'.

While the face of the world and business methods have changed, the Warren and Brandeis formulation remains one of the simplest and most meaningful answers to the question of 'what is privacy?' Privacy is a human right. Some fundamental part of human dignity requires privacy. Privacy is part of the claim to personal autonomy. It supports the various freedoms that democratic countries value.

As then Professor Zelman Cowen said in the 1969 Boyer lectures 'A man without privacy is a man without dignity; the fear that Big Brother is watching and listening threatens the freedom of the individual no less than the prison bars' Cowen went on to argue that without privacy one cannot in a meaningful sense be an individual, he says that growth and development of the individual depends partly on a conceded area of solitude and

anonymity. This is true as psychologically we feel protected when we know that we have some secrets that others don't know.

Privacy is recognized globally as a universal value. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Right is one of a number of international instruments that recognize privacy among the basic rights. Article 17 states 'No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation.

Over the last century, the idea of privacy has changed, privacy is now discussion on whether and when it is worth protecting, and if it is, how it should be done. With the new face and new concept of this issue, it is becoming more difficult to handle For example, the development of photography and printing presses meant that candid images of people could be recorded and distributed without consent. This development lead to court cases where more complexities about 'the right to be let alone' were debated – including the notion that this right needed to be weighed against the public's right to know about things of legitimate public concern.

The difficulty in defining privacy is illustrated by the fact that in the Commonwealth Privacy Act, we have an Act dedicated to protecting privacy, yet it does not define it. Just as much of the thinking on privacy has developed in response to threats to it, the Privacy Act defines 'interferences' with privacy rather than privacy itself.

Indeed, privacy is something that arouses more thought and interest in its absence or when it is threatened than in its presence. Prince Edward illustrated this when he was quoted as saying on the eve of his marriage that you don't value your privacy until you have lost it. We are in a period of rapid technological change where the technology is spawning new information and many new ways of collecting information (for example Internet click stream data; data that identifies where you, your car or your phone were at a particular time etc). As a consequence, interest in and debate about privacy appears to be at one of its peaks.

In the Information Age, personal information has become a highly valued commodity

that is captured and compiled, bought and sold in ways never before imagined. Whole industries and bureaucracies have formed solely to collect and distribute sensitive information that individuals once viewed as under their exclusive control: medical records, personal shopping habits, credit histories. As our wallets become "e-wallets" financial data, housed somewhere out on the Internet rather than in our back-pockets, and as our public institutions, businesses, and even cultural institutions find homes online, the confidentiality of our communications, papers, and information encounters an increasing risk of compromise.

Justice Brandeis' vision of being "let alone" no longer suffices to define the concept of privacy in today's digital environment, where every bit of personal information can be transported and distributed around the world in seconds. Individuals should be able to interact in modern society without losing control over their personal information. The modern right to privacy also entails, therefore, the right to control our personal information even after we disclose it to others. Earlier discussions about privacy tend to rely on the facts that one must protect its property and secure its belongings. This fact stands in major countries that build walls and fence in their houses to prevent unauthorized entry and physical examination of their belonging by strangers. They really dwell on the thought on how their home and family life could be protected

However; the recent approach has changed with new forms of technology and communication that have overcome the physical boundaries that used to separate the domestic and public spheres. New business practices has emerged to outwit the traditional brick and Mortar business, throwing challenges on the privacy retention

Some people claim that because of new technologies privacy no longer exists or is no longer a useful way of trying to protect our selves and our interests. Opinion polls and surveys consistently show that most people continue to believe that privacy is important.

In conclusion, amidst all these challenges, we should know that Privacy still very important as a bedrock of our human rights despite the growth this technology which pose threat to our privacy. You should be aware of this trend by reading thoroughly any

information that might violate your privacy. The privacy laws are created to help protect any unlawful invasion of privacy.

References:

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The only discipline that counts is self discipline