

Dimensions of Time and Privacy in Online Social Networks

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Users of Online social networks (OSNs) publish contents which remain there for an unlimited time. This article refers to this situation as *information eternity*. The easiness of searching and retrieving information creates a new condition, in which information is easily seen by others long after it was first published, thus affecting the data subject in unexpected ways. This condition is true for the Internet at large; however, OSNs have a unique social context which is their core idea. Accordingly, we argue that OSNs should be analyzed separately. We analyze information eternity through two prisms: the users' privacy management and self-presentation management. With privacy management, users are required to cope with a growing difficulty in controlling their personal data that might be disclosed to new social circles. With self-representation, users are required to consider the effect of new and old contents on their perceived representation by others. We analyze information eternity while referring to theories of privacy and self-representation, and to users' perceptions and behaviors, based on empirical studies. Lastly, we refer to technological and legislative solutions, and suggest focusing on solutions that enable control and create norms that help to manage information in a social context.