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Feedback on “Integrating Privacy, Personal Disclosure, and Social Exchange Theory: An Experimental Test”

Greetings — first, thanks for taking the time to attend my workshop presentation. I appreciate your participation and feedback.

The paper I’ve submitted for discussion is an excerpt from my dissertation work (filed May 2018), which focused on exploring whether social exchange theory (SET) is a useful framework for empirical studies of privacy (and in my specific application, disclosures of personal information to institutions/companies). In this draft, I present an argument for using SET as well as the experimental work I conducted to test the application of the theory.

My motivations for pursuing this line of inquiry were my concerns that existing empirical research in privacy and human-computer interaction generally ignores social factors that could influence an individual’s decision to disclose their personal information. Thus, we get the privacy paradox — an assertion that despite saying they care about privacy, individuals act as if they don’t. My work attempts to question that assumption, and instead suggests that disclosure behaviors are in fact quite rational if one takes a broader view of the structures in which they are participating.

Because this is exploratory work — there are only two other papers I’ve found that attempt to interleave privacy and SET — I’m interested in the group’s general impressions of this line inquiry. Do others agree with my core assertion? If not, why?

Note that this work doesn’t suggest that we use social exchange theory as a way to understand privacy per se; I continue to draw on Helen Nissenbaum’s theory of Contextual Integrity (CI) to explain why or why not a disclosure or a use of personal information can be viewed as a privacy disruption. However, one of the points I bring up is that an aspect currently missing from CI is an accounting for the influence of power on shaping societal norms; CI as currently theorized accepts norms as a given without interrogating where they derive from and how powerful interests might attempt to shape norms for their benefit. I think this is a real concern with technology, as we contend with spaces that are designed by companies and others with explicit values that benefit the designers at the expense of the users.

In sum, this work is an attempt to incorporate societal factors, such as social structure, into empirical studies of HCI and privacy. Very curious to hear your thoughts.

Thanks!

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