



Perspectives from FSF Scholars
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He Has A World Of Our Information In His Hand

by

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Almost daily, we read of breaches regarding our personal and private data. In fact, a new poll shows that over 90% of those surveyed do not agree that social networking sites should share geo-location information without prior approval. In fact, as concerning as such tracking is for adults, it becomes even more alarming for our children to be tracked. A McAfee/Harris poll showed 37% of 10 to 12 year olds have a Facebook account. Many have little if any understanding of how their information is being used.

Social networking sites like Facebook have provided incredible connectivity: finding former schoolmates around the world and keeping connected with families in this fast-paced, transient society. Interestingly, even our kids who have universally embraced these new technologies are beginning to realize some of the repercussions of the access to personal data. Warm and fuzzy designations such as "friends of friends" however actually may include "strangers" who do not require pre-approval. In addition, more and more information is also available to businesses seeking access to consumers - even our youngest consumers.

With over 500 million Facebook subscribers, this social networking platform is often described as the fifth largest country worldwide. And, as such, social networking

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sites such as Facebook ought to recognize their own responsibility regarding our legal and ethical privacy rights as “netizens.”

At least three privacy bills are pending in Congress, and CEOs were recently called to testify on them. Federal agencies, including the FCC and FTC, have launched official inquiries regarding how our private information is being used, sold and made publicly available.

At the same time that we do not want to chill innovation and investment, we must find a balance for the individual right to privacy and the control of our most personal information. In addition, state and federal laws must be updated regarding the commercial use of private information. And we must be concerned about private data becoming the basis for intimidation, hate speech or even worse. The recent suicide of a student after having a secretly filmed sexual video “go viral” should make us aware of the horrific consequences which can occur. In this culture of freedom and openness, we must also ensure there are reasonable limits established by society, by the industry and when necessary by the government.

To his credit, the CEO of Facebook, 26 year-old Mark Zuckerberg, recently donated \$100 million dollars to the Newark public school system. However, perhaps what he should be doing is using his extraordinary talent and wealth to focus on providing national - and global leadership - on this privacy issue of utmost import to all of us, and, in some cases to our very identity. Facebook should adopt - and challenge other social networking sites to adopt - a “privacy code of conduct” and then provide education and a curriculum to teach and empower our youth regarding their privacy.

Now that Mr. Zuckerberg has first-hand knowledge from Congress and Americans generally that we are deeply concerned about what is being done with our personal information, I hope he will soon show us a new face on Facebook - one that values and commits to protect the personal information of over 500 million of us. Most importantly, corporations, educators and parents must take seriously their responsibility to protect our children, their identity, and their location. Their future depends on it.

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SEE SUGGESTED PRIVACY POLICY ON NEXT PAGE

Suggested Privacy Policy for Web Sites With Personal Data

1. State privacy policy in clear, simple, understandable language
2. Require PRIOR approval for information to be made public or “sold” or provided to advertisers in any manner
3. Require specific prior approval for each level of use of individual data;-especially geo location
4. Provide a one click button to delete information – COMPLETELY (agree that information will no longer be used for any purpose from a deleted file)
5. Insure the highest level of privacy tools and protection is the **DEFAULT** position and subscribers must choose any lesser levels of protection.
6. Provide youth/teen “friendly” explanations of EVERY policy
7. Provide clear notice or a “pop up” with any changes to policy PRIOR to changing any policy
8. Provide a “cyber” safety tip of the day
9. Improve authentication processes,require PRIOR parental consent for all **under 13** users and any parental approval for change to status
10. Endorse Congressional action to expand COPPA ([Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act](#)) to children from “under 13” to “under 18”