

# Privacy on social networks

[Sociology](#), [Social Networking](#)



Network Sites (SNS) are websites that allow users to upload information to a public profile, create a list of online friends, and browse the profiles of other users of the SNS. The websites have membership rules and community standards. Users disclose identity-relevant information via their profile to others. This information is referential, directly referring to a person, or attributive, describing attributes to the data subject. Although most laws and regulations restrict the access to referential information, attributive information is not protected as such.

However, the aggregation of large amounts of attributive information on SNS profiles poses new privacy risks, disclose identity-relevant information via their profile to others. Also, the privacy options in social networking sites do not work out in the way they are supposed to do. Keep your private life private! What does social network do? In real life, you have a circle of your friends. But what about their friends? And the friends of the friends of your friends? You can get to know people from literally any part of the world.

That means you are sharing information with them. And that also means you are sharing a lot of information that you don't want to share! Information spreads faster through a Social Network Site than through a real life network. Information might be disclosed to a group of people unexpectedly, because the digital information is easily copied, can be stored indefinitely and is searchable. It especially harms users when information travels through different social spheres, and ends up with people whom it was not intended for.

People have been fired, missed out on job interviews and academic opportunities, and been suspended from school for instant messages, wall posts and other messages they mistakenly thought were like private real world conversations with friends. Do not post anything in social networks that you won't want to shout out in public. You can send private emails for that, but NEVER social networks. Social network is a place where you never know whom you are sharing private information with unless you yourself created the network! So be careful, stay safe! Applications and external links on social networking sites

Have you ever used the 'applications' of facebook, myspace or any other social networking sites? Did you read the policies of that site about those applications? In most cases, the games or applications owners have access to almost all of your information that you provided in your social networking account. Moreover, they may also use them for commercial purposes. Some of these applications may offer you to participate in a survey to earn 'credits' or virtual 'money'. You might, for example, earn some quick Farmville cash by answering a brief survey. Sounds a lot better than using your credit card, right?

But you're probably safer breaking out your wallet. TechCruch cites one instance in which players could win currency if they filled out such a survey. At the end of the survey, they would be asked to provide their phone number so that they can receive a PIN via text to get the results. Once they've entered that PIN into the site, they're subscribed to a horoscope service for \$9.99 per month--something they won't know unless they diligently read all

the fine print. Ouch. The victims could immediately try to cancel the subscription, of course, but they could still end up being charged.

Unwanted charges aren't the only thing players are susceptible to: Social networking games make you a target for viruses and hackers as well. You will find a couple of threads in Zynga's community forums in which moderators warn users against accepting any gifts or invitations within a certain game on Facebook. (They didn't specify exactly what would happen if users accepted these buggy gifts or requests! ) Sometimes users also claim that a bug in the game wiped out all of their game progress. That can be pretty devastating for someone who has dedicated lots of time and money to it.

Laws to minimize privacy threats Not all threats for privacy in Social Network Sites materialize and damage users in the same way. A risk analysis approach is needed to incorporate these insecurities into the analysis. The experts identified multiple threats for users of Social Network Sites. When these threats materialize, they become incidents that affect a certain amount of people. However, not all of these incidents damage users in the same way. The damage incurred depends on the type of threat and the perception of the user.

Laws are directed at preventing the threats from materializing. More specifically, American tort laws create means for people to find compensations against the damages they incurred. Experts rate to what extent the tort laws address the threats for privacy and resulting damages they identified. The ratings of the various tort laws are depicted in illustration

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below. In 1986, Congress passed the Stored Communications Act as part of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act to address privacy issues attendant to the advent of the internet.

Through the SCA, Congress intended to restrict disclosure of private communications by providers of electronic communications services.

However, when Congress passed the SCA, the internet was in its infancy. The few networks available to consumers, such as Prodigy and America Online, were self-contained, and most people had never heard of the term e-mail, let alone utilized the limited form of electronic messaging that existed at the time. The World Wide Web did not yet exist, and it would be nearly a decade before the introduction of the web browser in the mid-1990s.

Do you think the social networking sites abide by laws? Just because they are popular and big-game websites, doesn't mean their policies are always convenient for you. The Privacy Policies of popular social networking sites were found contradictory to the Canadian privacy law. In July 2009, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada issued a report on an in-depth investigation triggered by a complaint from the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic.

Third-party application developers Deactivation of accounts Personal information of non-users Accounts of deceased users Uses of user information Facebook did agree to change their privacy policies to avoid being banned or may be sued by Canadian government. But did that really make any difference? The Privacy Commissioner herself expressed dissatisfaction with the result. " While Facebook took some steps to resolve

privacy concerns, the Commissioner remained dissatisfied by Facebook's response at the end of the investigation.

She was particularly concerned about the risks posed by the over-sharing of personal information with third-party developers of Facebook applications such as games and quizzes. " [Source: News release from Privacy Commission of Canada; Ottawa, August 27, 2009: 'Facebook agrees to address Privacy Commissioner's concerns'] As having access to other people's private information is getting easier, laws can do a very little to protect us. We, ourselves have to be aware of where our information is going and who can have access to it.