Identity Policy Choices as Propagation of Structure

Problem Statement: Decisions made around identity policy for online communities have direct and indirect effects on the societal and intra-community stance on identity formulations and the benefits or consequences in using them. In order to better understand these effects, we model how structures form from and give form to individual decisions in the decision arena of identity policy as well as society overall.

Motivation: The increasing virtualization of social interaction has given rise to a conflict about how identifying information is used within an online community. This conflict is acted out in, among other places, decisions about stringency of identity policy (anonymity vs. pseudonymity vs. “real name”) and users’ participation in such communities, and warrants closer inspection.

Norms of access, benefits, trust, and behavior associated with a particular identity form have direct impacts on group and individual decisions: these associations are treated as rules.

Industry uniformity or trends, while indirectly affecting users through the implementation of their networks, also influence users’ decisions about what to commit to, disclose, or trust.

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Start here: Promotion of individual actions to group

Create identity policy
Enforce identity policy
Encourage/discourage behavior
Package & adopt other products & ID services

Commit to a form of identity
Visibility of other forms
Associate behavior to identity form
Identity form & commitment to it as access

Join social network
Level and nature of disclosure
Level and nature of participation
Trust of others’ information in network
Use of others’ information

Commit to network configuration
Visibility of social group members
Benefits of participation
Trust in network
Pressure on disclosure/non-disclosure

Individuals multiply benefit or lose out in multiple structures: the effects stack.

Individual level:
Actions made and effects felt by individuals

Promotion
Adoption

Group level:
Actions made by and for groups
Individuals with administrative power act at this level

Trend level:
Sectors display trends or uniformity of action

Promotion of a structure or idea depends on the resources (reputational, monetary, etc.) and visibility of those who commit to it.

Adoption of a structure or idea is driven by cost considerations for resources; the more entrenched an idea, the more resources at stake in refusing to adopt.