Privacy Suites
Shared Privacy For Social Networks
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Creating usable and expressive privacy controls for social networks is a major challenge. Users’ lack of understanding of privacy settings can lead to unwanted disclosure of private information. We propose a new paradigm which allows users to choose a “suite” of privacy settings designed by friends or experts, modifying them if they wish. Such a system could dramatically increase privacy for users who otherwise stick with operator-chosen defaults.

Privacy Usability Is Hard

Modern online social networks are very complicated. Facebook, for example, implements over 50 ways for users to interact and has over 60 privacy settings. A deep understanding of the site is needed to comprehend the effects of many settings:

- Don’t allow friends to view my memberships on other websites through Facebook Connect.

Many users remain opted-in to little-known privacy-violating features which they don’t know exist. Additionally, new features are frequently introduced, so managing privacy requires continual diligence.

Learning From Others

A plethora of “how-to” articles have sprung up on the internet to guide frustrated users in managing their privacy, including one costing US$9.99.

Delegating Privacy

Delegating management to a trusted third-party has been a successful paradigm in many areas of computer security where configuration is complex and tedious. Examples include OS patching, anti-virus software, firewall management, and ad blocking. The AdBlock Plus extension for Mozilla Firefox has been downloaded over 50 million times, allowing users to import blacklists from the authority of their choice.

Abstract Specification Format

We must first define a privacy settings language independent of the interface used to configure it. This could be as simple as XML or could be a more powerful scripting language.

```python
def showPhotoStream(self, user):
    if user in self.friends:
        return True
    mutual = self.friends & user.friends
    return len(mutual) > 10
```

Privacy Suites

Once privacy settings are specified in transferable documents, they can be shared amongst users. Users could choose one based on the reputation of a trusted expert or organisation. They may also choose to adopt a suite used by one of their friends, enabling privacy to spread virally along social links.

Open Questions

- How will users establish trust in a privacy suite?
- How can we “localise” a suite to each user’s situation?
- Can we “subscribe” to a privacy suite, automatically getting future updates?
- Will major SNS operators support privacy suites, or must we build it as an external add-on?