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"Essentially made of information": concepts and implications of informational privacy

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Abstract

Introduction.

This paper presents an approach to a conceptual understanding of privacy issues, rooted in Luciano Floridi's philosophy of information and information ethics. It draws from Floridi's ideas of ontological information privacy, in combination with other frameworks.

Methods

Qualitative conceptual analysis of a set of material found by a comprehensive search for articles and books discussing Floridi's informational privacy, and a selective search for related relevant materials; sources used were Web of Science, Library and Information Science and Technology Abstracts, and Google Scholar. A detailed evaluation of Floridi's ideas of informational privacy within his philosophy of information, and a comparison with other informational privacy models, leads to an analysis of their applicability to research and practice in the library and information sciences.

Results

There are five major considerations: each person is constituted by their information, so that informational privacy is fundamental, overlaying other privacy type; breach of informational privacy is an aggression against personal identity and self-development, and hence protection of privacy should be based directly on the protection of human dignity; explicit protection for group privacy is as important as for individual privacy; digital technologies can both defend and damage privacy, and can also change our understanding of it; information friction, anonymity, and obscurity are key concepts.

Conclusions

Floridi's conception of privacy, within his philosophy of information, offers, in our view, the best basis for developing information privacy as a field of research, study, and practice within the library/information disciplines and professions. Suggestions for future research include: formulation of LIS privacy issues in terms of Floridi's conception, to assess its value; introduction of information privacy concepts into models of information behaviour and information literacy; investigation of quantitative and semi-quantitative privacy modelling, based on a formal analysis of informational frictions.

Keywords: philosophy of information; information ethics; privacy; conceptual models