

An Investigation of Legal and Ethical Issues with User-Generated Content and Other Forms of Electronically Stored Information Communicated via Social Media, Messaging Apps and Social Devices, Including the Internet of Things

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On social networking services, sharing is caring. However, depending on who or what is involved, sharing can be the source of a community transgression, copyright infringement, a violation of employment policies or worse. If people who use social media, mobile messaging apps and social devices do not know where the ethical or legal lines are drawn, in jurisprudence, in vendor Terms of Service, in professional codes of conduct or in keeping with online social norms, they are in jeopardy of being publicly shamed or even sued. Users may also put their employers, friends and colleagues at risk of community, professional or legal penalties in an era where the boundary between work and leisure is becoming even more blurred. This mixed-methods, interdisciplinary research project explores the current state of awareness on a range of legal and ethical issues involving User-Generated Content (UGC) and other forms of Electronically Stored Information (ESI) on social networks and devices for personal and enterprise use and for several different constituencies, including marketers, artists, journalists, academics, educators, entrepreneurs, bloggers, photographers and videographers. The quantitative, numeric data resulting from an online survey as well as qualitative, descriptive data gathered from semi-structured interviews with participants and observations gleaned in contextual inquiry will help address gaps in current research on this subject. In addition, the research findings will guide design directions for a tool, intervention or affordance to help users become better informed about privacy, intellectual property and information governance in the context of electronic sharing and more easily put this knowledge into practice. The first phase of developing the survey protocol is already underway, with a literature review completed and the survey submitted for IRB review as #1602921512. Pilot contextual inquiries and field studies are being pursued to guide development of qualitative research phases in the future.

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