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Privacy attitudes and privacy behavior: A review of current research on the privacy paradox phenomenon

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Abstract

Do people really care about their privacy? Surveys show that privacy is a primary concern for citizens in the digital age. On the other hand, individuals reveal personal information for relatively small rewards, often just for drawing the attention of peers in an online social network. This inconsistency of privacy attitudes and privacy behavior is often referred to as the “privacy paradox”. In this paper, we present the results of a review of research literature on the privacy paradox. We analyze studies that provide evidence of a paradoxical dichotomy between attitudes and behavior and studies that challenge the existence of such a phenomenon. The diverse research results are explained by the diversity in research methods, the different contexts and the different conceptualizations of the privacy paradox. We also present several interpretations of the privacy paradox, stemming from social theory, psychology, behavioral economics and, in one case, from quantum theory. We conclude that current research has improved our understanding of the privacy paradox phenomenon. It is, however, a complex phenomenon that requires extensive further research. Thus, we call for synthetic studies to be based on comprehensive theoretical models that take into account the diversity of personal information and the diversity of privacy concerns. We suggest that future studies should use evidence of actual behavior rather than self-reported behavior.

Keywords: privacy; personal information; information privacy; privacy behavior; privacy paradox.

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