

CS-234

Technologies for
Democratic society

Fall 2021

Week 11

Anonymity vs. identity

- Why be anonymous online?
 - Freedom of speech/expression,
no worry about repercussions
 - Freedom of association - interest groups etc.
 - Privacy - avoid release of nonessential identity info that could be used for tracking, spam, etc.
 - Privacy - avoid harassment, bigotry, racism, ...
 - Share "banned" information, ideas, discussion, ...
censorship resistance
 - more focused, fullfilling, unbiased discussions
 - flatter discussion hierarchy, everyone's opinion equal
 - improve participation, inclusion

Why anonymity (cont'd)

- separate different roles "hat"
- Role playing games - have fantasy identity
- celebrities, public figures, - have an unknown identity
- eg. JK Rowling, Stephen King? ...

In what contexts?

- Speech, discussion, media
- Voting in elections - ensuring reveal "true preference"
- Research: data anonymization (GDPR), minimization
medical systems, sensors, ...
- Scholarly peer review
Reviews of products, restaurants, etc.

Anonymity - The Dark Side

- limited recognition
- less considerate, civil, more harsh (Flaming)
- abuse: harassment (gender, racial bullying)

Doxxing - reveal sensitive info publicly

hate speech w/o accountability

revenge / doxxing culture

- politically-motivated

- "Schrodinger's douchebag"

- claim to be expert, spread misinformation

- anonymous sponsored "research"

- astroturfing - fake "grassroots" popular support

- scamming, identity theft, protecting criminality

Mitigations, ways to "balance" anonymity vs identity

- Pseudonymity: long-lived "identity" (pseudonym)
 - build reputation → something to lose
 - if pseudonyms are "scarce" (if costly to create)
 - create "convincing" account/profile
 - if pseudonyms are
 - 1-per-person
 - 1-per-device? (YubiKey)
 - 1-per-phonet# (WhatsApp...)
- Traceability: way to trace, deanonymize an abuser
 - who has the power to trace? When?
- Accountability: some cost / repercussions for abuse
- Moderation: ensure content is "reasonable"
 - open, anonymity-positive
 - problem: moderation trauma