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Privacy and identity Management on Social Networking Sites With Reference to

Facebook

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According to Nicole B. Ellison and Danah M. Boyd in their article on "Social network sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship", they defined Social Networking Sites as "Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"(2007). In other words, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are websites that are designed to simplify communication between users who share similar activities, attitudes and interests. Today the growth and role of social networking sites has become an issue not only for the users themselves but also for scholars and industrial researchers.

My aim in this research will be to explore Social Networking Sites in general. The concept of Social Networking Sites is very broad; therefore my main study will be dealing primarily with how privacy and restrictions plays a role in identity management with reference to Facebook.

For the purpose of this essay, I will like to point to Daniel J. Solove's book "The digital Person; Technology and Privacy in the Information Age" in defining privacy. To give a better

understanding of privacy as it relates to digital culture, Solove gave a number of metaphors. He used the example of Big Brother invading people's privacy through the use of cameras and other means such as wire tapping and video surveillance. However, he goes further to explain that the issue of Big Brother is just an integral part of privacy issues and disclosure. According to him,

> The problem with databases pertains to the uses and practices associated with our information, not merely whether that information remains completely secret. What people want when they demand privacy with regard to their personal information is the ability to ensure that the information about them will be used only for the purposes they desire. Even regarding the confidentiality of information, the understanding of privacy as secrecy fails to recognize that individuals want to keep things private from some people… (43)

In the same vein, Robert Ellis Smith, editor of the Privacy Journal, defined privacy as "the desire by each of us for physical space where we can be free of interruption, intrusion, embarrassment, or accountability and the attempt to control the time and manner of disclosures of personal information about ourselves."

Privacyinternational.org also gave a viewpoint on privacy which is as follows;

> In the 1890s, future United States Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis articulated a concept of privacy that urged that it was the individual's 'right to be left alone.' Brandeis argued that privacy was the most cherished of freedoms in a democracy, and he was concerned that it

should be reflected in the Constitution.

According to Edward Bloustein, "privacy is an interest of the human personality. It protects the inviolate personality, the individual's independence, dignity and integrity.

According to Ruth Gavison, there are three elements in privacy: secrecy, anonymity and solitude. It is a state which can be lost, whether throughthe choice of the person in that state or through the action of another person. The Calcutta Committee in the United Kingdom said that, 'nowhere have we found a wholly satisfactory statutory definition of privacy.' But the committee was satisfied that it would be possible to define it legally and

adopted this definition in its first report on privacy: The right of the individual to be protected against intrusion into his personal life or affairs, or those of his family, by direct physical means or by publication of information" (2003).

Far back to 1997 the first recognized social networking site was created sixdegree.com and it allowed users to create profiles just like the ones we have now Since then, social networking sites have been growing in a number of ways. Facebook which is among the top social networking sites today has been constantly criticized because of its privacy policies. A good example is when "News Feed" Feature was introduced According to Danah Boyd in her article "Facebook's Privacy Trainwreck. Exposure, Invasion, and Social Convergence":

> On 5 September 2006, Facebook – a social network site primarily used by
>
> college students at the time – launched a feature called "News Feeds". Upon
>
> logging in, users faced a start page that listed every act undertaken by their
>
> Friends within the system – who beFriended whom, who commented on whose

Wall, who altered their relationship status to "single", who joined what group and so on. None of the information displayed through this feature was previously private per se, but by aggregating this information and displaying it in reverse chronological order, News Feeds made the material far more accessible and visible [...] Boyd, 2008

This application has made it possible to see everything that is going on between friends on Facebook even something as private as relationship break-ups. This might not be what all users want from their Facebook accounts, but due to the "News Feed" this information is visible for everyone to see therefore affecting the privacy of that particular person. This led to the development of a community on Facebook called:

"Students Against Facebook News Feeds" to protest against the feature; over 700,000 people joined the aforementioned group to express their frustration and confusion. Less than 24 hours after the launch, Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg responded with a blog entry entitled "Calm down. Breathe. We Hear You". This did not allay participants' concerns and on 8 September, Zuckerberg returned to the blog with an apology and a peace offering in the form of new privacy options. Boyd 2008

These are just some of the problems about privacy evident on these sites. After the protest, Facebook provided privacy features that allowed users to control what would be visible to their friends. Whenever there is an upgrade in the site either, in on display or in the settings Facebook tends to set everyone's profile to a default setting, thereby revealing all the data and information about the user. Users who have little or no knowledge about Facebook settings tend to leave their

accounts on the default setting. With this, users' information is made open, and their privacy is impacted.

In business and industry today, some administrators are using Facebook as a tool to monitor their staff and students, for example.   Many, people are unaware of the risk that is involved in registering or making personal information available online. Privacy is undermined on Facebook because users give so much information out there, like phone numbers, email address, place of studies, and place of work. In February 2011, a new upgrade was made on Facebook that automatically changed everyone's profile to the new profile still viewable in 2012.. This change made it possible to get more information about users, like "works at", "Add language you know" and so much more. Facebook does not take adequate steps to protect users' privacy because each time an upgrade is made on the site it leaves their personal information available for third parties to access. According to an article written by Marshall Kirkpatrick "Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg told a live audience yesterday that if he were to create Facebook again today, user information would by default be public, not private as it was for years until the company changed dramatically in December"(January 2010). This goes further to explain the intention of Facebook when it comes to privacy. For one to fully understand what Facebook privacy stands for and updating one's personal data, one has to wade through the site's privacy policy which contains 5,830 words.

My research on the new privacy setting on Facebook showed that it is possible for users to block, hide, share information and personal data. But still with these privacy settings, it is still easy to get bits and pieces of information that is displayed on a user's profile. This "little" information makes it possible to fill in the blanks to know where one studies, lives or comes

from, the friends he/she has, the pages he/she likes, and more. Due to the constant change and upgrade of Facebook, the concept of "identity management" is useful to explore privacy. According to Wikipedia "Identity management (ID management) is a broad administrative area that deals with identifying individuals in a system (such as a country, a network, or an enterprise) and controlling their access to resources within that system by associating user rights and restrictions with the established identity"(July 2009). In social networking sites, users develop different identities; some tend to play the roles of different people while others tend to bring out their true nature or personality. On Facebook, while others tend to build, construct and manage their identities, other tends to steal and manipulate other people's identity. A change that is really common on Facebook is what we know to be "Face Rape" Urban dictionary defined face rape to be" when you leave your class/office without locking your pc and someone decides to deface your Facebook wall, change sexual preference, messages, your groups, etc"(Mar 2009). People tend to complain on their status messages that they have been face raped because in the past few years or months they have spent on any of these social networking sites, they have been trying to create an identity that suit into their everyday life, and their online friends already know them to be that particular kind of person and when they are been face raped the identity thief tries to make them look different from what they have been trying to be.

Privacy has made it possible for some users on Facebook to keep and manage their identity properly. Due to third party interference, company administrators, government agencies, etc uses

Facebook in their investigation to get information about individuals. Facebook privacy

policy states that;

> We may also share information when we have a good faith belief it is necessary to
>
> prevent fraud or other illegal activity, to prevent imminent bodily harm, or to
>
> protect ourselves and you from people violating our Statement of Rights and
>
> Responsibilities. This may include sharing information with other companies,
>
> lawyers, courts or other government entities. Facebook.com 2011

 This shows that Facebook is willing to give out information about its users to government or

local investigators.

   Further, Facebook privacy policy some years back stated, "We may use information about you

that we collect from other sources, including but not limited to newspapers and Internet sources

such as blogs, instant messaging services and other users of Facebook, to supplement your

profile." But this was later changed and now it states: "We may use information about you that

we collect from other Facebook users to supplement your profile (such as when you are tagged in

a photo or mentioned in a status update). In such cases we generally give you the ability to

remove the content (such as allowing you to remove a photo tag of you) or limit its visibility on

your profile." From both quotes above, we can see that they removed the idea of blogs, instant

messaging services and newspapers.

   Matt Brian in his essay titled "Wikileaks founder: Facebook is the most appalling spy machine

that had ever been invented", quoted the founder of wikileaks Julian Assange as saying, "here we

have the world's most comprehensive database about people, their relationships, their names,

their addresses, their locations, their communications with each other, and their relatives, all sitting within the United States, all accessible to US Intelligence". Once again the idea privacy on Facebook has been compromised. This goes further show that Facebook is ready to give out its users information. Recently there was a new application that was introduced on Facebook called the "Family Tree." This application makes it possible for a user to have a list of all his family members from the parents down to his cousins, and this application goes further more to express the idea Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg stated in a press review "that if he were to create Facebook again today, user information would by default be public, not private as it was for years until the company changed dramatically in December" (January 2010). Facebook not being able to do this yet, and they have developed other applications like the News feed feature that help to review user's identity much more.

Privacy on Facebook is a major issue when it comes to sharing, commenting, posting, and making status updates, checking, and other functions. When it comes to identity management on Facebook, there are two types of users: those that are very active and those that are not. The active users are those that fill in all of their information, always post, and sharing status messages, and commenting on other people's activities. These set of people demonstrate what it means to be in an online community, they try to keep in touch with old friends, make new friends, share information and ideas with each other, and they are ready to explore any online community that they think is fun for them. While the others are those that have their profile on Facebook, and almost everything is set on private. They don't post anything or share any status messages- this set of people is trying to build and manage their identity online. In explaining more about inactive users, they have the mindset of the term Panopticon according to practices of

looking the term Panopticon can be defined as "A concept used by French philosopher Michel Foucault to characterize the ways modern social subjects regulate their own behavior, borrowing from nineteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham's idea of a panoptic prison, in which the prisoner can always be observed by the guard tower yet not know when that gaze is directed on him and when it is not". In his own book, "Discipline and Punish", Foucault explains panopticon as:

> a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. Foucault 200

In other words these users see themselves as being watched so most of the time they don't really know who among their friends is a spy or if someone from either employee or government is watching them. Individuals should be aware of that they are supervised, which will automatically lead to an altered behavior in the individual Knowing oneis being watched, makes one regulate one's behavior. very person who uploads a picture on Facebook, loses their rights over those pictures, and so they are just giving Facebook even more power with that information. This power game is operating by itself and with the spirit of the Panopticon, Facebook with it members is just getting more power and control. Facebook has opened the borders between the private and the public sphere, which has made it possible for an employer to supervise

employees. The employer has the same role as the supervisor in Foucault's theory of the Panopticon, and the employer is like the guard sitting in the tower, looking over the employees in their cells. The employer is the one with the control and power over the employees through the constant supervision that is taking place, which is causing less privacy for the "prisoners."

  Sharing on Facebook sometimes can be much fun but it can also cause harm, because users usually know who reads their posts or how far that particular post or shared information is been passed around. Users sometimes go too far on these social networking sites, like making comments about their job or co workers which might possibly lead to serious offense back at work. my research, I found out that users have lost their jobs or benefits due to contents intended for friends posted on Facebook. A good example is the story of the Canadian woman who lost her benefits due to a picture she posted on Facebook of her having fun on a vacation while she was receiving benefit for being depressed and unable to work According to Ki Mae Heussner of ABC News, in the article "Woman Loses Benefits After Posting Facebook Pictures";

> For the past year, Blanchard has been on leave from her job at IBM's Bromont, Quebec office. After a doctor diagnosed her with major depression, she started receiving monthly sick-leave benefits from Canada's Manulife Financial Insurance. But this fall, the checks stopped coming. When Blanchard called Manulife to find out why, she said she was told it was because the Facebook pictures indicated she was no longer depressed and ready to return to work. ABC.com 2009

There are more of such examples whereby employees lose their jobs or get suspended due to "harmless" posts on Facebook that are only intended for friends on their list. The organizations gain access to this information through Facebook. It goes to show that Facebook really is willing to divulge personal information regardless of consequences for the individuals concerned.

 In today's contemporary society, social media plays a very important role and gives its users the power to express themselves in many ways and through different channels. During the last crises in Egypt we could see the role of social media (Facebook), how it helped in organizing and protecting the identity of some of the protest leaders. Mike Giglio in his article, "Middle East Uprising: Facebook`s Secret Role in Egypt", explores the impact of Facebook:

> Email records obtained by Newsweek, conversations with NGO executives who work with Facebook to protect activist pages, and interviews with administrators of the We Are All Khaled Said page reveal the social media juggernaut's awkward balancing act. They show a company struggling to address the revolutionary responsibilities thrust upon it—and playing a more involved role than it might like to admit. The DailyBeast.com 2011

This shows that Facebook can also sometimes play an important role when it comes to protecting users' privacy and identity. However, they do not have to wait until they are pushed to do so as indicated in the article above . Studies have shown that it is also possible for private individuals unaffiliated with Facebook to data mine information about user(s). this is proven by two students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ,Harvey Jones and Jose Hiram Soltren in their essay "Facebook: Threats to Privacy". In their words, "we harvested data from the Facebook site

directly". This they did using an automated script and a total of 70,000 Facebook profiles were accessed. This is just one of the problems Facebook) is facing. And after this incident Facebook improved on its security protection for users. And n response stated this: "We've built numerous defenses to combat phishing and malware, including complex automated systems that work behind the scenes to detect and flag Facebook accounts that are likely to be compromised (based on anomalous activity like lots of messages sent in a short period of time, or messages with links that are known to be bad)", "Chamakhe Maurieni Facebook is Deception". Despite all the criticism and lapses on Facebook, they also try to protect their users in different ways Some countries around the world know what the power of social networking sites can do, so therefore they have blocked some of these social networking sites from operating in their country for reasons best known to them. In replacement to that some of these country have developed their own social networking site in which their administrators or government have control over, just to make sure that they have full access to what's going on within their cyber world. An example is that of China. In an article by Emily MacDonald called "China`s Facebook Status: Blocked" , she cites a reporter for ABC News who states the reason: "One possible explanation for the choice to block major foreign sites and not their domestic equivalents is that the Chinese government might be more concerned about international criticism than internal tension" (July, 2009). This started just before the 2008 Olympic as tension rose over Tibet in Chinese sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia were blocked, and these sites where replaced by Youku, the Chinese version of YouTube or Xiaonei, the version of Facebook. These changes were made because the government wanted full access to what was going on within the country and also to stop criticism from international bodies.

Once again this goes further more to show how privacy has been invaded. Social networking

Sites are supposed to be made open and accessible by all, It's a place where people

Can express his or her self, but in some of these countries this right has been taken away

From them This is like taking the right to speak from an individual. Facebook has its

Advantages and disadvantages, and one of its advantages is that the social networking site can

save a memorial book for both friends and loved ones. When we post a picture on Facebook,

which helps to save that particular experience, event or memories, users often leave messages of?

grief, hope, birthday wishes or sadness on individual's page. According to Kellner in an article

 February 2007 called "Facebook profiles become makeshift

Memorials", "Facebook notes accounts of deceased members and allows the

profile to remain on the site for 30 days in which time friends can still post on the wall. After the

30 days, the profile is removed". Due to users responses this, Facebook amended its policy.

Its new policy regarding memorialization says, "If we are notified that a user is deceased, we

may memorialize the user's account. In such cases we restrict profile access to confirmed

friends, and allow friends and family to write on the user's Wall in remembrance. We may close

an account if we receive a formal request from the user's next of kin or other proper legal request

to do so." Facebook helps in keep track on friends and loved once with the help of their status

message, comment post and the most recent of them all "the check-ins" which help its user to

make their present location available to others. This recent application makes it possible for users

to check-in other friends who are in the same location with them. This application has

both its advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is that it makes one's location

known to family and friends should you be in trouble. With this application, it

makes it easier for others to know a user's whereabouts. Also it helps in making ones

Location known to other friends who are around them at a particular time. One of the

a disadvantage of this application is that murderers and burglars can use it. For example, if

Someone checks in to a location outsides his country or house, this makes it possible for a

burglar to break into their apartment knowing they are far away from home. This case applies to

most users whose address and information are listed on their profile. A report published in 2009

by Legal & General, called "The Digital Criminal", revealed that 38% of social network users

post status updates with details of their holiday plans, which can be an "open invitation to

burglars" as many users also posted their home address on their profiles. The Telegraph.co.uk

also reported that "In August 2009, a burglar in Hove accessed his victim's Facebook profile to

taunt her over the theft of her laptop by posting comments on her profile". "Also if someone is

been stalked, with the help of this application (check-in) it makes it easier and possible for the

stalker to have full information of the users whereabouts. In Facebook privacy policy, it is

possible for users to change their settings if they want to be checked in" at places Also, in its

privacy settings Facebook makes it possible for its users to control most of their information

users can decide on what they want their friends to see on their Facebook profiles, examples are:

Birthdays, relationship status, friends, status message Facebook has been seen as a tool for

Cyberbullying, stalkers, and other criminals. because it is possible for any user to create an

Online profile. This criticism is not unique to just Facebook it can

be applied to any site which has the potential for its users to create false account.

   With the help of Facebook's privacy setting, it is possible for uses to control and make proper

use of its applications: it is also possible for one to control pictures and videos in which users

are tagged, and allows permission for other users to comment on one's wall. This setting makes

it possible for users to block or restrict other users from commenting on one's status update,

friends` wall posts and photos. Facebook privacy setting has so many functions only if its users

take their time to go through its policy. Facebook has been a vital tool in today's community. It

has helped in keeping friends and family members who live far away in contact with each other

It helps in keeping user's informed aboutwhat they have been up to with the help of status

message and shared photos and with the introductions of new applications on Facebook.

Facebook can also be used to send out information to different part of the world just from a

single post or update; with this process I can say that, Facebook helps to keep us aware on what

happens in our surrounding, this can be both fun and dangerous at the same time. In other words,

rumors and gossip plays a central role on Facebook. Not only are they fueled by the way the news feed system works, but in some ways they also provide the social glue that keeps the community alive and interesting. Facebook's creators may have been aware of the social desire for gossip and its function in a social network when they introduced the news feed. Indeed, gossip and rumor mongering make up a key element of why people use Facebook even if they don't want to admit it or seem not quite aware of it.

In the past few years many people have been displeased from Facebook, some of them go the extra miles and delete their account, but after a few weeks, days or months they return back to the site and the unanswered question remains, why? According to benefits and gratifications from using Facebook as a social tool can override the effects of even extremely negative experiences. In the article "Facebook and online Privacy: Attitudes, Behaviors and Unintended Consequences", writers cite a few examples of people who deleted and reopened their accounts;

> Brian encountered the most extreme form of Facebook privacy invasion by having his profile hacked into multiple times, which twice led him to delete his profile, and (after the second occurrence) to institute strict privacy settings. The first time, the hacker changed some of Brian's groups and altered his "interested in" to insinuate (incorrectly) that Brian was gay. He brushed the incident off as a joke, changed his password, and "went on with everyday life." At that time, he was not aware of privacy options. Then, the hacker again entered his profile, changed his password back, and altered some things. Brian changed them back again and wrote on his status, "ok, you know, enough is enough … the joke's over, this isn't funny anymore." On the third day, his profile was completely changed,

including groups and interests, and his profile picture showed a combination of his head and a porn star's body. The hacker had also put in a relationship request with Brian's freshman-year roommate and changed his status to "I was just kidding. I'm having a hard time coming out of the closet right now."

To Brian's dismay, all these changes were made public through the news feed. This incident prompted Brian to delete his profile and stay away from Facebook for 3 months. But because he felt that Facebook is "a really easy way to keep in contact with people," Brian rejoined Facebook with a new e-mail address, assuming the hackers had finished their game. Yet six months later, his profile was attacked again, this time with a shot at his girlfriend. The hackers used the same manipulated profile picture, but added the character Donkey from the movie *Shrek* and tagged Donkey as Brian's girlfriend. Brian deleted the profile again, and set up another profile with a nonschool e-mail and strict privacy settings. The whole incident left him guessing who did it and why. He also said that he was very upset about the incident, particularly because his girlfriend became the target too.

From this experience it is remarkable that Brian stayed with Facebook and kept coming back to it again and again. This goes further more to show the lack of security and privacy on Facebook also that once can get addicted from using Facebook.

From my research, I noticed some users on Facebook wanted some changes to be applied to the site with a lot of security measures to protect their identity. Some of these changes are; people

want to know about other users that have visited their page, know who is stalking them, more privacy settings. According to Mark Zuckerberg on *From Facebook answering privacy concerns with new settings,*" People want to share and stay connected with their friends and the people around them. If we give people control over what they share, they will want to share more. If people share more, the world will become more open and connected. And a world that's more open and connected is a better world. These are still our core principles today" (May 2010).

Privacy issues on Facebook have been sources of major concern to scholars, critics and to the society at large. This concern stems from the constant update on Facebook privacy policies and the way this affects users to indiscriminate disclosure of personal information to third parties. Albeit it is an undeniable fact that Facebook has bridged a lot of communication gaps and is indeed fulfilling the predictions of Marshall McLuhan: That is the world is becoming a global village, and huesprivacy concerns have to be reviewed and a permanent solution proffered.

Although users are obliged to read through the terms and conditions and hence know what to expect from the use of Facebook, the terms and conditions on Facebook as of September contained 5830 words How many people would be patient enough to go through that much writing just to be able to socialize with friends and family on a social networking sites? Facebook and its administrators would do well to make the terms and conditions more concise and straight to the point so that users could read and understand what is at stake and decide if they still want to join or not. Also, the constant changes on the privacy settings on Facebook and the way it affects users' accounts should be addressed. Facebook owes it to users to notify them of changes and how it will affect accounts. Facebook users' accounts are usually reset to default settings whenever there is a change in the privacy policy because anytime this happens, users

account becomes open thereby leaving users vulnerable. Privacy concerns on Facebook are not only limited to the use of the site, but also when a user is offline. According to the Mediabistro website, Facebook was recently sued for violating the United States Wiretap statutes by tracking people's browser history even when they are not logged into the site:

> The use of cookies, a tracking script left in your history when you visit a site, isn't uncommon in the web world, but from a legal standpoint, they aren't supposed to track your history once you leave a website. But that's what Facebook's trackers appear to be doing.
>
> The 17-page complaint, which also alleges breach of contract, unjust enrichment, trespassing and invasion of privacy, claims that Facebook has been tracking, collecting, and storing users' electronic communications, including — but not limited to — portions of Internet browsing history even when a user wasn't logged into the social network.

With all said and done, users on Facebook also have work on their hands regarding protecting their accounts; they have options of setting their privacy levels. However, constant change in settings by Facebook keeps resetting users profile to the default. Moreover, users' account are susceptible to attack through the constant infiltration of advertisement, like posts that appear on walls supposedly showing that another user, usually someone on the recipient's network, has sent the post. However, it usually turns out that the sender has not sent any such thing but has been vulnerable by clicking the link that usually comes with such posts. By clicking the link, the post is automatically shared with random users on the user's network. Facebook and its administrators need to look into this issue and proffer a solution to users. Most times, many users are oblivious of the dangers of these posts and innocuously click the link. Aside from being a

breach of privacy, it is also a source of embarrassment to the affected parties. Although users have the choice of marking such posts as spam or reporting it, Facebook does not seem to do anything about it because marking a particular post as spam does not automatically indicate an end to getting such posts. Thus, the essence of reporting or marking as spam is defeated. Although Facebook has tried in recent times to protect how users protect their personal information through an approval system where users have the choice of approving certain information like work place, institution attended but more can still be done especially in the areas of indiscriminate postings to other users' profile by an unsuspecting user. Although, many features on Facebook allow users to control some personal information, there are still some lapses especially on the part of Facebook. Facebook could also do more in the area of protecting users and their privacy by constantly sensitizing them through pop-ups whenever their policies are adjusted. Facebook should also desist from indiscriminately sharing users' information with third parties without prior knowledge or express approval of the user involved. In protecting users against avoidable embarrassments from employers and other agencies, Facebook should have a clear policy regarding disclosure of private information and post from "unethical employees and individuals". The terms of use for this class of users should be clearly stated so that in the event of disclosure, it will be clear that such users have been clearly warned, hence their privacy has not been invaded in any form.

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