

Playing with Privacy: Promoting Online Privacy and Consent discussion through Game Design

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The **Visualisation and Other Methods of Expression (VOME)** project is working on a card game to support the discussion and teaching of issues of online privacy and consent. The game emerges from research that the VOME team have conducted into people's experiences of privacy and consent online, and understanding of these issues. It draws upon research into the most effective ways to communicate information on these topics. The aim is to develop alternative conceptual models of online privacy which enable users to make clearer choices about online disclosure.

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Privacy

Games as a Method of Expression

Online privacy for the individual user is situated within a global network of personal information practices. Socio-technical design approaches suggest that it is often unclear what an information network looks like. This creates difficulties both in communicating the nature of this network to others, and making systematic and rational judgements about actions within that system (Scacchi 2004:6). 'Looks like' is itself a imperfect metaphor for coming to understand a complex network of interactions.

Games provide a potential way to represent, experience and understand complex sets of interactions. It is possible to represent more complex material in a game format than would be easily accessible in a diagram or text. Understanding privacy requires relatively abstract thinking, and games (or the playing of games designed to do so) can help to make abstract thinking more visible and concrete.

Bogost (2007) argues for thinking of games as having the potential to contain procedural rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric is 'the art of persuasion through rule based interpretations and interactions'. Games represent how real or imaged systems work and invite players to make judgements about them. Extended to social and information processes, a game therefore becomes a way to represent the consent and privacy ecology, its actors and logics.

Koster (2005) argues that games are abstracted from reality because they are iconic depictions of patterns of the world. This parallels how we experience reality by abstracting it and recognising patterns within the infinitely complex perceptual environment. For our purposes we try to mirror the 'rules' of online privacy and consent. This abstraction is contrasted with other elements of the VOME project which instead highlight the complexity, contingency and contextuality of online privacy. A game looking at complex social systems must adhere closely to reality in terms of visual imagery and narrative.

Players of a game can be invited to ask questions such as 'what are the rules of the system?', 'what claims about the world do these rules make?' and 'how should I respond to these claims?' (Bogost 2007:258). These last two questions are associated with critical cognitive styles linked with deeper learning. A critical game prompts reflection upon the processes procedurally represented. A player might learn by playing that there are unexpected consequences for sharing their personal information online. They may then reflect on their out of game experience.



A Design Brief for an Online Privacy Education Game

An online privacy educational game has the following requirements:

- Meaningfully based upon a theoretical model of the online privacy ecosystem.
- The core game mechanism should feature the disclosure, retention and exchange of information. Information should be valuable in the game, and the management of this resource should be the route to winning or losing.
- Players should have to choose to disclose or conceal some information. They may have to offset different and competing values.
- Decisions about privacy and personal information are made without full information about the state of play.
- There should be multiple types or categories of personal information.
- Playable roles to represent the different actors involved in online privacy and consent. Roles should value different categories of information. Roles should allow players to understand motivations.
- Players should be able to lie or hide certain information in game.
- Playable in a short space of time whilst still delivering a meaningful education experience.
- Supported by additional educational material for use in classroom and less formal educational contexts, to support educators in use the game to stimulate their own discussions of online privacy.
- Strong feedback to players on the results of their decisions and choices.
- A legitimate, playable and enjoyable game experience.

The game design is supported by qualitative ethnographic, interview and focus group research methods. Issues and roles featured in the game are drawn directly from this research, and quoted on the cards themselves. Cranfield University conducted an analysis of existing e-safety education material currently being used in schools, as well as analysing feedback from (ISC)2 /Childnet International 'Safe and Secure' sessions. Cranfield has also examined existing methods of public sector engagement in online identity management (Barnard-Wills & Ashenden 2010). The game is therefore underpinned by social scientific research.



The game has been play-tested with Consult Hyperion and the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum. The production of a tangible, playable game presents the opportunity to offer something back to research participants and contributors in the VOME study. The game can therefore be seen as both a dissemination and knowledge transfer activity for research, but also as a tool for conducting further socio-technical research.

Notes:

- Barnard-Wills, D. & Ashenden, D. (2010) *Public Sector Engagement with Online Identity Management*. Identity in the Information Society. Vol. 2. No.3. 657-674.
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