Four myths about privacy

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(Phys.org) —Many privacy discussions follow a similar pattern, and involve the same kinds of arguments. It's commonplace to hear that privacy is dead, that people—especially kids—don't care about privacy, that people with nothing to hide have nothing to fear, and that privacy is bad for business. "These claims are common, but they're myths," said Neil M. Richards, JD, privacy law expert and professor of law at Washington University in St. Louis.

"These privacy myths are not only false, they get in the way of the kind of important conversations we need to have about personal information in a digital age. If we continue to believe privacy myths, if we think about privacy as outdated or impossible, our digital revolution may have no rules at all, a result that will disempower all but the most powerful among us.

"Our understandings of privacy must evolve; we can no longer think about privacy as merely how much of our lives are completely secret, or about privacy as hiding bad truths from society. How we shape the technologies and data flows will have far-reaching effects for the social structures of the digital societies of the future."

In an article, "Four Privacy Myths," available online via the Social Science Research Network, Richards explained why four of the most common privacy myths persist—and how we can avoid them. His arguments in brief:

"First, privacy cannot be dead because it deals with the rules governing

personal information; in an age of personal information, rules about how that information can flow will be more important than ever.

Second, people (and young people) do care deeply about privacy, but they face limited choices and limited information about how to participate in the processing of their data.

Third, privacy isn't just for people with dark secrets; it's for all of us. Not just because we all have things we'd prefer weren't publicly broadcast, but more fundamentally because information is power and personal information is personal power.

Finally, privacy is not always bad for business. One of the best hopes for meaningful privacy protection in the future is for businesses to compete on privacy, and there is some evidence that this is starting to happen."

Richards noted that clearing away the myths is an essential first step to talking about privacy in a helpful and constructive way.

"It's only when we clear away the myths that we can have the essential conversations we need to have about how personal information is shaping our society, now and in the future. We may ultimately decide that we want less privacy, less control of our [personal information](). But the privacy myths are stopping that conversation, those decisions, from happening. Clearing away the privacy [myths]() is an important first step to let us decide as a society what kind of digital future we want to live in."

More information: For more information, visit [here]().

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis