

# Facebook as a Surveillance Tool: From the Perspective of the User

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**Abstract:** With the increasing use of online social networks such as Facebook in recent years, a lot of research has been focussing on the privacy issue of the network. The main question being asked is: how do users navigate their privacy on Facebook? While this research has been very important for the understanding of the privacy issue on Facebook, it also has the tendency to focus entirely on the user and look at personal information revelation, ignoring societal aspects, such as capitalism and the changing notion of privacy in the current society.

Recently, there has been a new trend in studying privacy on Facebook - looking at Facebook as a surveillance tool and studying the privacy issue within the political economy of capitalism, led mainly by Christian Fuchs (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). This research raises important questions as to what happens with our data and how Facebook uses its users.

This paper looks at the perspective of the user by using the critical approach, or Critical Media and Communication Studies. The privacy in the age of the Internet can be described as either social or institutional (Raynes-Goldie 2010). The social focuses on the control of personal information, while the institutional focuses on the data usage by corporations, such as Facebook. By talking to different users about privacy, I was interested to learn what they think about both aspects of privacy. From my interviews it emerged that users care about both social and institutional privacy, but while, in most cases, they are quite aware, and concerned about the surveillance aspect of Facebook's usage, the benefits of using the network at this moment are too strong to either leave Facebook or switch to an alternative medium. There is a definite feeling among users, based on my interviews, that their options are limited, and more should be done to raise the level of knowledge among users about how they can better protect both their social and institutional privacy.

We will start this paper with a short introduction and an explanation of the methodology, then, we will briefly look at the current research on privacy on Facebook, move to a more in-depth overview of Facebook as a surveillance tool and finally look at the perspective of the user, followed by a conclusion.

**Keywords:** Facebook, privacy, capitalism, critical media and communication studies, surveillance, europe-v-facebook, protection of personal data.

**With the** advancement of the Internet, people's lives can become much more visible and in some instances, it can even lead to disastrous consequences. Anything you post on the Internet can be archived, copied, pasted and can then re-emerge at the most inconvenient time - when, for instance, a picture of you, drunk at a party, becomes suddenly visible, while you look for a job.

Online social networks, such as Facebook, reinforce this trend. Facebook, for instance, asks for a real name when signing up, and anything you put on it can potentially become visible to a large public, if the content, for instance, is copied by one of your friends, even if your settings are turned to private.

The semi-public nature of the network led some researchers (for instance, Acquisti and Gross 2006; Dwyer 2007; Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini 2007) to proclaim that Facebook and other online social networks are dangerous and can create risks for its users, especially young people and kids. Researchers proclaiming that online social networks are dangerous argue that its users can become victims of sexual harassment, cyber stalking, data theft, data fraud, etc. One of the cases of identity theft concerns Matthew Firscht, who was awarded £22,000 in damages for breach of privacy and libel against a former friend, Grant Raphael, who created a fake Facebook profile in his name. He also created a Facebook group called 'Has Matthew Firscht lied to you?' which was accusing Mr. Firscht and his company of having lied in order to avoid paying debts. On top of it, the fake profile depicted Mr. Firscht as a member of various gay groups who was 'Looking for: Anything I can get' in relationships (BBC news, 2008). This example is a clear case of identity theft, but as some researchers point out, on many occasions people reveal too much about themselves in their profiles and posts and do not care about privacy.

For instance, Acquisti and Gross (2006), conducted an online survey of online social networks users and concluded that many people do not know much about Facebook's privacy policy and for which purposes their data is used. "Twenty-two percent of our sample do not know what the FB privacy settings are or do not remember if they have ever changed them. Around 25% do not know what the location settings are. To summarize, the majority of FB members claim to know about ways to control visibility and searchability of their profiles, but a significant minority of members are

unaware of those tools and options" (Acquisti and Gross 2006, 52). According to the authors, users tend to reveal too much about themselves because of peer pressure, relaxed attitude towards personal privacy, not sufficient information about privacy issues and too much trust.

However, the problem with this kind of research is that it focuses too much on the user and implies that people do not take enough individual responsibility and have no real understanding of the use of online social networks. Christian Fuchs defines this research as "victimization research" (Fuchs 2011, 146) and says that "such research concludes that social networking sites pose threats that make users potential victims of individual criminals, such as in the case of cyber stalking, sexual harassment, threats by mentally ill persons, data theft, data fraud, etc. Frequently these studies also advance the opinion that the problem is a lack of individual responsibility and knowledge and that as a consequence users put themselves at risk by putting too much private information online and not making use of privacy mechanisms, for example, by making their profile visible for all other users" (Fuchs 2011, 146).

According to Fuchs (2009), this kind of research ignores the societal aspects by focusing entirely on the users and does not take into account capitalism and the changing notion of privacy, as in the age of the Internet, if you are not on online social networks, you can miss out on important aspects of socialisation.

On the other side of the spectrum, some researchers argue that online social networks should be autonomous spaces, where people should be free to express themselves as they want, and that privacy as we know it, is undergoing important transition. The main emphasis in this approach to privacy is on sharing. The idea behind is that online social networks such as Facebook allow for greater transparency and cooperation, thus leading to increased democracy. Clay Shirky talks, for instance, about "a remarkable ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action" (Shirky 2008, 20F). Manuel Castells talks about empowering: "people build their own networks of mass self-communication, thus empowering themselves" (Castells 2009, 421).

Danah boyd, a prominent researcher on online social networks says that "privacy is simply in a state of transition as people try to make sense of how to negotiate the structural transformations resulting from networked media" (boyd 2008, 39). This kind of research can be described as techno-optimistic research and is one of empowerment (Fuchs 2009). This approach claims that the victimization discourse aims at control by older people over the young as to how to behave on online social networks, and that online social networks should be autonomous spaces where young people should be able to express themselves. For instance, boyd (2008; 2010) in her research often argues that online social networks allow for self-expression, identity-building and help people in personal development, and therefore, everyone should be able to express themselves as they wish.

However, the problem with both pessimistic and optimistic approaches towards privacy mentioned above, is that they focus entirely on the user and ignore the societal aspect of privacy and Facebook within the framework of capitalism, like the question as to what exactly happens with our data?

Both of the above approaches focus on the 'bourgeois' notion of privacy (Fuchs 2011, 143) Capitalism is based on the idea that the private sphere should be separate from the public sphere, where the individual should in principle be able to enjoy certain autonomy and anonymity. The notion of privacy under capitalism is linked to the freedom of private ownership. It is expected that individuals should enjoy some privacy in their private lives. However, in order to function, capitalism exercises surveillance over individuals, with the aim to have as much information as possible over workers and consumers to control them and encourage them for further consumption. Therefore, in the current age of capitalism, the idea of privacy is undermined by surveillance (Fuchs 2011).

Most analyses of privacy in online social networks pursue the liberal discourse of privacy by focussing on the individual. However, the analysis of how individuals protect their own privacy within online social networks misses totally the control that Facebook exercises over the users when it collects their data. However, one of the most know definition of privacy by Westin says that the "privacy is the claim of individuals, groups or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others" (Westin 1967, 7). This definition taken at its face value should also cover the aspect of surveillance practiced by Facebook.

Raynes-Goldie (2010) distinguishes between two aspects of privacy, the social and the institutional. In our opinion, by distinguishing between individual protection of privacy and institutional 'violation' of privacy we could reach a better understanding of the privacy issue within Facebook. The social aspect of privacy deals with being able to control access to personal information, while the institutional aspect deals with the question as to how corporations behind the personal information (in our case Facebook) use this information.

In the analysis of privacy and Facebook, both aspects should be taken into account. My data comes from seventeen semi-structured face-to-face interviews and five online interviews with users of Facebook, as well as from ethnographic observation made through a three year period (from 2009 till 2012). My main emphasis during the interviews was on the subjective thoughts and feelings of participants versus Facebook. While privacy was not the main question during the interviews, opinions about it emerged during all interviews. The process of interviewing was ongoing: with some emerging themes derived from initial interviews I contacted my participants again with additional questions and asking for clarifications. The fact that my research is entirely qualitative and is based on a small sample of interviews limits the possibility of generalisations. However, opinions of participants were the 'truth' for those people. These opinions might be fragmentary, but when they are put together, they present a nominal truth about the phenomenon. While the focus has been on the subjective thoughts, feelings and interpretations of social actors, this does not lead to mere relativism, making generalisations impossible, but rather to a careful examination of more general emerging themes which underpin individual perceptions and are analysed based on the current theoretical knowledge within the field of privacy and Facebook.

## 1. Facebook as a Surveillance Tool

Facebook is first of all a capitalistic organisation, whose main drive is profit accumulation. Profit is mainly made through advertisements, which are targeted to users of Facebook. The privacy policy of Facebook, called "data use policy", is long, ambiguous and confusing. It is unlikely that many users will read it while signing up. However, if you do want to read it, one needs to go through different links, pages and the like, to get the overall impression of the fact that Facebook collects quite a substantial amount of data on its users and shares most of it with advertisers.

For instance, when you start reading the page where Facebook talks about how it shares information with advertisers, you are greeted with a reassuring paragraph: "We do not share any of your information with advertisers (unless, of course, you give us permission)". This is followed by the following paragraph: "When an advertiser creates an advert on Facebook, they are given the opportunity to choose their audience by location, demographics, likes, keywords and any other information we receive or can tell about you and other users" ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), accessed on April 18, 2012).

The catch is to click on the link provided under "any other information we receive", which then will send you to the page with a very long text, describing exactly what kind of information you give to Facebook. This includes your name, location, pictures, as well as your IP address, pictures you upload, texts you write, time when you took the picture, etc. In fact, by reading this page carefully, it is not that difficult to realise that Facebook collects every possible piece of data about its users. What exactly is sold to advertisers is not clear at all from all the texts the company has posted about its data use policy. It looks like, though, that almost any user data that can be obtained is sold to advertisers.

Fuchs (2011) argues that privacy in the age of capitalism is an antagonistic value, which on the one hand, is celebrated as a universal value which protects private property, and, on the other hand, is a value which is undermined by surveillance from corporations into private lives of individuals in order to accumulate profit. "Capitalism protects privacy for the rich and companies, but at the same time legitimises privacy violations of consumers and citizens. It thereby undermines its own positing of privacy as a universal value [...]. An antagonism between privacy ideals and surveillance is therefore constitutive of capitalism" (Fuchs 2011, 144).

Facebook is a typical example case, where privacy is an antagonistic value. On the one hand, users expect that their privacy should be protected, and Facebook reassures them that they can adjust their privacy settings at any time, but, on the other hand, Facebook as a corporation, collects data on its users and sells it to advertisers for profit accumulation. Thrift (2005) talks about knowledge economy, or "soft capitalism", which underlines the current capitalistic society, where capitalism has become knowledgeable in unprecedented ways and where, as David Beer argues, "knowledges that are transmitted through gossip and small talk which often prove surprisingly important are able to be captured and made into opportunities for profit" (Beer 2008, 523).

On Facebook, we engage constantly into gossip and small talk and this can be used by many companies to target their advertisements. And this leads to the following question. Are we indeed customers of Facebook or are we simply its product, as Andrew Brown asks rightly in his article "Facebook is not your friend". "Anyone who supposes that Facebook's users are its customer has got the business model precisely backwards. Users pay nothing, because we aren't customers, but product. The customers are the advertisers to whom Facebook sells the information users hand over, knowingly or not" (Brown 2010, 1).

Even games and quizzes can be regarded as another tool to collect more information about us. Almost everything on Facebook is a means to harvest data about its users and therefore, Facebook is much more complicated than a wonderful tool to stay in touch with people. It is also a powerful advertising machine, a sophisticated business model, and the exchange on Facebook is two-sided. We get a tool to communicate with our friends, while in exchange we provide information about ourselves, which can be used by the government, advertising agencies, market research companies and Facebook itself.

Alvin Toffler (1980) coined the term *prosumer*. Axel Bruns (2007) applied this term to new media and coined the term *produsers* - where users become producers of digital knowledge and technology. "Produsage, then, can be roughly defined as a mode of collaborative content creation which is led by users or at least crucially involves users as producers – where, in other words, the user acts as a hybrid user/producer, or producer, virtually throughout the production process" (Bruns 2007, 3-4).

As Trebor Scholz (2010) argues, we produce economic value for Facebook mainly in three ways: 1. providing information for advertisers, 2. providing unpaid services and volunteer work, and 3. providing numerous data for researchers and marketers. The first one is related to the fact that our mere presence on Facebook provides invaluable information to advertisers. Starting with our birth date and finishing with our likes and dislikes, all this can be processed by advertisers to target their advertisements to users. The third one is in line with the Thrift's argument, that in the current age of capitalism an increasing amount of knowledge and information is available and any information we post, in our case Facebook, can be sold to third parties and "transformed into profitable spreadsheets" (Scholz 2010, 245).

The second economic value, providing unpaid services and volunteer work, is especially interesting, as Facebook basically uses the labour of Facebook users for free. Scholz mentions that many Facebook users provide willingly their time and energy for Facebook use. The example is the translation application, where users translate Facebook into different languages totally for free. Roughly ten thousand people participated in the application which allowed Facebook to be read and used in many languages, besides English. However, also providing our data to advertisers and third parties, by simply being on Facebook and having 'fun', also constitutes working for Facebook and advertisers for free.

As Fuchs says: "If users become productive, then in terms of Marxian class theory this means that they also produce surplus value and are exploited by capital as for Marx productive labour is labour generating surplus. Therefore the exploitation of surplus value in cases like Google, YouTube, MySpace, or Facebook is not merely accomplished by those who are employed by these corporations for programming, updating, and maintaining the soft- and hardware, performing marketing activities, and so on, but by wage labour and produsers who engage in the production of user-generated content" (Fuchs 2009, 30).

Users of Facebook also provide data and content for the site, making it more appealing for use, through photos, comments, etc. One of the strategies employed by such corporations as Facebook is to lure the users through the promise of a free service and to encourage them to produce content. This content, in turn, is sold as a data commodity to third-party advertisers.

Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) introduced the term "immaterial labour", which means "labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato 1996, 133). Fuchs talks about "knowledge labour", which on the Internet is unremunerated labour. "The concept of free labour has gained particular importance with the rise of web 2.0 in which capital is accumulated by providing free access. Accumulation here is dependent on the number of users and the content they provide. They are not paid for the content, but the more content and the more users join the more profit can be made by advertisements. Hence the users are exploited - they produce digital content for free in non-wage labour relationship" (Fuchs 2011, 299).

Capitalism's imperative is to accumulate more capital. In order to achieve this, capitalists either have to prolong the working day (then it is called absolute value production) or to increase the productivity of labour (relative surplus value production) (Fuchs 2011). In the case of relative surplus value production, productivity is increased so that more commodities and more surplus value are produced in the same period as previously. Marx explains it in the following way: "For example, suppose a cobbler, with a given set of tools, makes one pair of boots in one working day of 12 hours. If he is to make two pairs in the same time, the productivity of his labour must be doubled; and this cannot be done except by an alternation of his tools or in his mode of working or both. Hence the conditions of production of his labour, *i.e.*, his mode of production, and the labour process itself, must be revolutionized. By an increase in the productivity of labour, we mean an alteration in the labour process of such a kind as to shorten the labour-time socially necessary for the

production of a commodity, and to endow a given quantity of labour with the power of producing a greater quantity of use-value... I call that surplus-value which is produced by lengthening of the working day, *absolute surplus-value*. In contrast to this, I call that surplus-value which arises from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day, *relative surplus-value*" (Marx 1990, 431-432: cited in: Fuchs 2011, 148).

Targeted Internet advertising can be called relative surplus value production (Fuchs 2011). For targeted ads to work on the Internet, both the labour of wage workers (working for Facebook or the advertising clients) and the unpaid user labour is needed. Users also produce content for free for Facebook itself, and thus, provide unpaid labour, which Fuchs also terms "play-labour" (Fuchs 2011). Users use such sites mainly for entertainment and usually in their free time. But without realizing it, in their free time they actually continue working for free for numerous Internet sites, by posting comments, updating profiles and by buying and selling things.

Fuchs (2011) proposes an alternative notion of privacy, which he calls the "socialist notion of privacy" that aims at protecting consumers and citizens from corporate surveillance. He says that users are exploited by Facebook and become, therefore, the commodity. His argument is that when users have so-called fun on Facebook, they actually continue working for free for the corporation. He speaks of "Internet prosumer commodification". (Fuchs 2011, 155) Therefore, he proposes the de-commodification of the Internet and three strategies to achieve this goal: First, the requirement that all commercial Internet platforms should be forced to use advertisement only as an opt-in option; second he suggests that there should be more monitoring of Internet companies from corporate watch-platforms. Third, he argues for the establishment and support of non-commercial, non-profit Internet platforms, such as Diaspora.

By talking to different users about privacy and Facebook, I was curious to see what users thought about privacy and whether they were aware of both social and institutional aspects of privacy on Facebook. As we will see in the next section, users, based on the sample of my interviews, do care about both aspects of privacy, but while in the case of social privacy it is much easier to take necessary measures for greater protection, in the case of institutional privacy users are not sure whether there is "escape to that" and in most cases are either not aware about the existence of alternative platforms or are reluctant to switch in order not to miss out advantages. They are afraid that their Facebook friends will not follow them.

## 2. Facebook and Privacy: Views of the Users

Although the sample of my interviews was relatively small, all users to whom I talked about Facebook do care about privacy. In line with what Raynes-Goldie (2010) argues in her paper, Facebook's users are aware about privacy issues and engage in various practices to mitigate their privacy concerns. However, contrary to what Raynes-Goldie concludes based on her ethnographic research, the users in my interviews cared both about social and institutional aspects of privacy. According to Raynes-Goldie users mostly care about controlling access to personal information. However, the users in my sample were also concerned about what happens with their data. Though many of my participants were other PhD students, based also on my ethnographic data and observation of some public groups on Facebook, a tentative generalisation can be made that users, once aware about the fact that Facebook uses their data, do not like this fact and would probably look for alternatives if they were aware about their existence.

Regarding the social aspect of privacy on Facebook, users do care about privacy on Facebook, but they care about it in a different way from the one presented by researchers that favour the victimization discourse. It appears that users of Facebook are usually ready to reveal some aspects about their lives in exchange for the benefits they think Facebook has to offer (mostly, the possibility to communicate with friends), but this does not mean that they are willing to fully give up their privacy. What is important for users is mostly not to be embarrassed in a professional context, e.g. when looking for a job or at their current job. But few worry about posting some facts about their lives. If anything, this seems to be the allure of Facebook: one can create a profile, make status updates, upload some pictures, etc.

It seems that in the case of Facebook, users care about "contextual privacy" (Grimmelmann 2010, 4). This means that users do care about privacy, but it does not mean that they want to stay at home behind closed doors and never post something on the Internet or an online social network. Facebook is a social network, and as Grimmelmann argues, "social" and "privacy" do not work together. "So here's the thing: Connecting with people always means giving up some control over your personal details: 'Social' and 'secret' don't work together. Buy a pack of gum at the newsstand, and the guy behind the counter will learn what you look like – and that you like gum. Watch a movie

with friends and they'll learn something about your taste in movies. Make a joke on their Wall and they'll learn something about your sense of humour. You can't get a life without giving something in return" (Grimmelmann 2010, 7).

Users on Facebook are ready to reveal some aspects about their lives but it does not mean that they do not care about privacy. They care about it within the "Facebook context" and some examples as to how users try to negotiate potential problems with privacy, demonstrate that users do take this issue seriously. Some users limit their privacy settings, some periodically "clean" their profiles and others control who can have an access to their profiles. For instance, one of my interviewees has a very closed network on Facebook and only includes real life friends to her list of Facebook friends. She keeps her professional and social lives separate by limiting who can have access to her network. "...I don't want people from my professional life in there. I would never let my supervisors be my friends on Facebook. It just would not seem right because my social life is quite active actually, and I'm a little bit, you know...alternative. There are lots of photographs and lots of references on my Facebook site to my social experiences and I don't want them to mingle with my professional experience (Samanta). Lynne, another participant from my interviews, changes her privacy settings while posting something on Facebook. "But there is also the issue of who can see the status and who can't, and of course, it is customisable, but not everybody customises it. Mostly, the kind of things I put down as a status, I am unhappy to have public. When I was going away, I set it so that only people in my friends, and not even their friends, could see, so that I could actually say things while I was away about where I was and so on without giving to the entire world that I was away from my house for a week, which is of course, an issue" (Lynne). Other people are very careful with pictures they upload, what they post and what kind of personal information they reveal on the site.

These examples show that people do care about social privacy. However, as my interviews as well as observations of some public groups on Facebook revealed, many users of Facebook also care about institutional privacy and about what happens with their data. This is in line with the research conducted in the Austrian research project "Social networking sites in the surveillance society" (see <http://www.sns3.uti.at>), where a survey was conducted in order to see what users think about online social networks. On the question as what are the greatest concerns of social networking sites, the main concern listed was "data abuse, data forwarding or lack of data protection that lead to surveillance" (Allmer, Presentation at the 4<sup>th</sup> ICT and Society-Conference, Uppsala, 2012).

In my interviews, it was interesting to see that while users are aware about this issue, they have an ambiguous approach towards it. Yes, they do not like the fact that Facebook collects data on them, yes, they do find it uncomfortable, but would they do something to address the problem, like switching to an alternative medium? Probably, but many users do not know about them or find that Facebook has such a monopoly that it would be very difficult to switch.

Consider, for instance, what some of my interviewees said. "Obviously, you worry about the long-term consequences of this. Nobody knows how your data is being stored. I'm sometimes concerned about Facebook's data storage and data handling policies. I find their advertising targeting quite unnerving sometimes, how they're obviously targeting adverts towards you based on your profile information, I find that quite uncomfortable...But I don't know, because everyone else is on Facebook I feel it would be a detriment to leave. I've never really wanted to leave recently, so it doesn't bother me but I guess I'm worried about data storage in the long term. Who's handling it?" (Tom). When I asked Tom to reflect more on the issue of switching to an alternative medium, he gave the following reply: "I would love to switch to something like Diaspora and would in fact regard this as ideal. The main barrier to this is that few of my friends care about privacy/open access enough to move over as well..." (Tom).

Another participant, Jessica, heard about a possible alternative medium, such as Diaspora, only from me and while very interested, mentioned the fact that switching to another medium would be time-consuming: "I have not heard of Diaspora before, but the idea of a non-profit social networking site really appeals to me. I might now look into it...The only downside is that it takes time to build up contacts on new sites, and I already have so many contacts on Facebook...I already find it time-consuming checking two email accounts...and Facebook, so to be honest, the thought of joining a new social networking site seems exhausting!" (Jessica).

Observation of some public discussion groups (for instance, Facebook and Foucault, or Discussions of Facebook - now closed) reveals that many users discuss institutional privacy and are concerned about the data collection policy exercised by Facebook. Consider what some users said about surveillance in one of Facebook's groups while discussing Facebook and surveillance society: User 1: "Outside of Facebook...when the big corporations come into play, then we're talking about surveillance society. It's far more intrusive these days than just a couple of CCTV camera's

on the corner of your street. Some of you may have noticed the new 'Dot' (mobile phone networks for students) adverts popping up on Facebook at the moment, obscuring your picture galleries with no way to close it. Clicking on it will not only make Facebook money, but tell dot exactly what they want to know..." This comment is followed by a reply from another user: User 2: "...there are specific aspects in Facebook to be concerned about...Web 2.0 offers all kinds of possibilities, but as you provide more content to the web, that information can be garnered by companies...This information is built up as a profile, generating electronic signals that marketing companies are very much interested in, and conceivably politicians, big corporations and even designers have huge vested interest in. Big brother (and sister) is very much part of the family these days" (Facebook and Foucault - group now closed)

There are some other instances where users engage actively with the surveillance aspect of Facebook and its privacy policy, and which demonstrate that users show certain resistance through 'play' on Facebook itself.

Vejby and Wittkower in "Facebook and Philosophy" (2010) talk about how users approach actively the culture around us through what they call 'détournement', which "refers to the subversion of pre-existing artistic productions by altering them, giving them a new meaning and placing them with a new context" (Vejby and Wittkower 2010, 104).

They give an example of how users reacted to the privacy changes announced by Facebook by approaching changed ironically and through a play of words. They quoted also my status update in the chapter:

"*Ekaterina Netchitailova* if you don't know, as of today, Facebook will automatically index all your info on Google, which allows everyone to view it. To change this option, go to Settings - -> Privacy Settings --> Search - -> then UN-CLICK the box that says 'Allow indexing'. Facebook kept this one quiet. Copy and paste onto your status for all your friends ASAP." (ibid: 105)

After this status update another one follows from a different user:

"*David Graf* If you don't know, as of today, Facebook will automatically start plunging the Earth into the Sun. To change this option, go to Settings - -> Planetary Settings - -> Trajectory then UN-CLICK the box that says 'Apocalypse'. Facebook kept this one quiet. Copy and paste onto your status for all to see." (ibid: 105)

And shortly afterwards another update appears:

"*Dale Miller* If you don't, as of today, Facebook staff will be allowed to eat your children and pets. To turn this option off, go to Settings - -> Privacy Settings - -> then Meals. Click the top two boxes to prevent the employees of Facebook from eating your beloved children and pets. Copy this to your status to warn your friends." (ibid: 105)

One of my friends posted a following status update:

"WARNING: New privacy issue with Facebook! As of tomorrow, Facebook will creep into your bathroom when you're in the shower, smack your arse, and then steal your clothes and towel. To change this option, go to Privacy Settings > Personal Settings > Bathroom Settings > Smacking and Stealing Settings, and uncheck the Shenanigans box. Facebook kept this one quiet. Copy and paste on your status to alert the unaware"

This playful interchange allows Facebook's users to actively react to Facebook's policy and approach media content as active agents. "This kind of play may be silly, but it is significant. Of course, we should be concerned about privacy and Google-indexing of our Facebook posts, but the sense of participation and playful ridicule helps us to approach the media and culture around as active agents rather than passive recipients. It may not be the fullest form of political agency, but it's an indication of the kind of active irony which online culture is absolutely full of, and represents a kind of resistance and subversion" (Vejby and Wittkower 2010, 105-106).

The examples above show that users care, reflect, and even respond to institutional privacy. Whether the playful resistance mentioned above can lead to significant changes is another question, as despite numerous angry responses from the users, Facebook did maintain its new privacy policy. However, the institutional aspect of privacy should cause most concern. As Fuchs (2008) argues, as long as users are used for capital accumulation, their data is going to be collected and sold as a commodity, and "The real threat is that ISNS users become objects of state surveillance because providers pass on their data to the police of the secret service and objects of economic surveillance that drives capital accumulation" (Fuchs 2008, 22).

As already mentioned, Fuchs proposes three solutions to overcome the problem of data collection. Currently the European Commission is working on a reform of the European data protection regulation with one of the main objectives to strengthen online privacy rights. However, the main issue seems to be awareness: users do not always know how they can react to Facebook's policies and whether they can react at all. Groups such as Europe-v-Facebook, organised by Austrian

students to help to spread awareness about the protection of personal data seems to be an important step in the right direction. The more users can learn to know about the problem, read about it and know what to do against it, the greater is the chance that they will respond to it.

### 3. Conclusion

With the rise of the Internet, and especially, online social networks, a lot of research has been focussing on privacy. However, most of the research has been focussing on individual users, ignoring the macro-context, such as capitalism, and thus, ignoring, a much more important question in regards to privacy – what happens with our data?

In this paper, while we tried to focus also on the user, we tried to address both personal information revelation (social aspect of privacy) and institutional aspects of privacy. By talking to different users, I tried to understand what their main concerns were regarding Facebook and privacy. Users care about both aspects of privacy, and while in the case of personal information revelation, they tend to take necessary measures in order to protect their privacy, in the case of institutional privacy, they seem to be either unaware about alternative Internet platforms, or reluctant to switch, out of fear that their friends won't follow them. However, this aspect of privacy is a real issue of concern in the age of knowing capitalism, and more should be done to raise awareness about this aspect of privacy, in order to involve the users to respond. As I tried to show, users actually respond to what is happening, once they know about the issue, very often through a playful exchange on Facebook itself, however, would Facebook ever allow some serious resistance on its own network which could put in danger its status-quo? The answer is that probably no, and that is why the reform of the European Commission, participation of independent non-profit groups, etc, are so badly needed.

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## About the Author

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Is a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University. Doing a PhD on Facebook has so far been, almost four years of pure fun, mixed with some frustrations though due to the strict requirements of academic writing. Apart from academia and all kinds of serious debates, Ekaterina also writes in her spare time and hopes to become an author in order to freely exercise her somehow more 'journalistic' style. Ekaterina lived in four different countries, speaks four languages (and likes boasting about it), loves dancing and reading and is a mother of a two-year old boy who doesn't like the fact that she is involved with doing a PhD instead of chilling out with him all the time.