

Theoretical Models in Privacy Research: A Literature Review

Bachelorarbeit

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Table of Contents

Abstract	I
Table of Contents	II
List of Figures	III
List of Tables	IV
List of Abbreviations	V
1 Introduction	1
2 How to do a Literature Review	3
3 The Research Process.....	5
4 Significance of Privacy	8
5 Theoretical Models in Privacy Research.....	11
5.1 Communication Privacy Management Theory	11
5.2 Internet Users' Information Privacy Concerns	21
5.3 Mobile Users' Information Privacy Concerns.....	30
5.4 Information Privacy Concerns: Linking Individual Perceptions with Institutional Privacy Assurances.....	34
6 Results & Discussion	40
7 Conclusion	45
8 Limitations & Further Research.....	46
References	47
Appendix.....	VI
Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung.....	VII

1 Introduction

Information privacy has been defined as one of the most significant ethical matters of the information era (Smith et al., 1996). Keeping sensitive information private in both interpersonal relationships and the internet environment is an omnipresent topic (Malhotra et al., 2004; Petronio, 2002). Privacy can be defined as and classified in different ways. In a global manner, it describes the protection of one's freedom in a democratic society. But the fear of losing a part of privacy is closely connected with the general fear of discrimination against the self and the vulnerability which automatically develops if people reveal parts of their privacy (Mühlichen, 2018). In today's digital age, privacy is a central and important value. In terms of any political, public, communicative or medial arrangement it has a high relevance. Privacy with all its risks and benefits has an impact on all members of society. The fact that privacy is a valuable and strongly protected benefit is historically, culturally and socially determined (Grimm and Krah, 2016).

The protection of privacy, especially regarding the dominant use of the internet, has also been a big topic for research in the last years (Malhotra et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2012). The high relevance of the topic is the frame of this bachelor thesis. The purpose is to answer and discuss the following research question:

RQ: Which theoretical models are primarily used in the privacy literature to describe individuals' concerns and the balancing act of disclosure and concealment?

To answer the research question, the basis of this thesis is a literature review of the theoretical models in privacy research. The second chapter firstly provides a general overview of how to write a literature review. The literature review presents a detailed summary of academic journal articles and books of the selected research area (Rowley and Slack, 2004).

The third chapter refers to the question of how a research process works in general and how it was done in this thesis. It is not only discussed how a qualitative process is done but also which articles and books were used for this review. The search for relevant text sources was made easier by defining keywords. In order to identify research from well-respected scholars, the literature search for this thesis concentrated on high-quality literature, as recommended by Vom Brocke et al. (2009) and Webster and Watson (2002).

A central term in this bachelor thesis is *privacy*. The fourth chapter is devoted to the importance of privacy. In this chapter the historical background of the development of privacy is examined first. Also, the term *privacy* is illuminated by various authors to

enable a conceptual classification which is used in the following chapters. In addition, the fourth chapter ties a connection between privacy and the current situation in our society. Because of the digitization and the use of the internet people become more concerned in relation to their own privacy and security of their private information (Stanton, 2003).

Based on the significance of privacy, the fifth chapter presents four selected theoretical models in privacy research. With reference to the topic of this bachelor thesis and the focused research question it can be said that this chapter builds the core of this thesis. In general, the models offer an opportunity to illustrate complex processes related to the field of privacy research and have an assisted part to achieve a better understanding of the subsiding processes in this area. Besides the main feature, the development and background of each model are described. To provide a better understanding of the processes within each theory, selected figures are included in Chapter 5.

The first model presented in Chapter 5.1 is the *Communication Privacy Management Theory* by Petronio (2002). In the focus of this model are interpersonal relationships of individuals and the decision-making process of revealing private information to others (Metzger, 2007; Petronio, 2002). Secondly the *Internet Users' Information Privacy Concerns* model by Malhotra et al. (2004) which focuses on concerns of internet users in relation to their conception of fairness and justice (Malhotra et al., 2004) is presented in Chapter 5.2. In chapter 5.3 the *Mobile Users' Information Privacy Concerns* model by Xu et al. (2012) handles the users' concerns in the mobile environment (Xu et al., 2012). The last model is presented in Chapter 5.4 and is called *Information Privacy Concerns: Linking Individual Perceptions with Institutional Privacy Assurances* by Xu et al. (2011). This model presents the linkage between individual requirements and institutional assurances (Xu et al., 2011).

After presenting the theoretical models, chapter 6 presents the results, compares the models with each other and discuss the findings. Finally, chapter 7 draws a conclusion of the thesis and chapter 8 mentions limitations and gives suggestions for further lines of research.

7 Conclusion

Summing up, the following results of this thesis can be mentioned: The complex theoretical construct of information privacy is one of the most significant ethical matters of the information era (Smith et al., 1996) and is a highly interesting research field (Malhotra et al., 2004; Xu et al., 2012).

To illustrate this fact, the historical background of the term 'privacy' was introduced, and the perception of different authors was presented (see Chapter 4). This is highly important for general research work because it avoids unidimensional research findings and ensures the validity of the research findings.

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the research question: *Which theoretical models are primarily used in the privacy literature to describe individuals' concerns and the balancing act of disclosure and concealment?*

Because for this thesis the format of a literature review was chosen, such a review was presented in chapter 2. In order to enable the reader to follow each step of the review, the research process was described in Chapter 3. After examining more than 100 text sources four, primarily used research models were presented in Chapter 5: Communication Privacy Management Theory by Petronio (2002), Internet Users' Information Privacy Concerns by Malhotra et al. (2004), Mobile Users' Information Privacy Concerns by Xu et al. (2012) and Information Privacy Concerns: Linking Individual Perceptions with Institutional Privacy Assurances by Xu et al. (2011). Apart from CPM theory which is a basic concept, all other models are built on already existing research models. This shows that research in the information privacy area is not completed and that it is still possible to explore new aspect and connections. The fact that CPM theory (Petronio, 2002), which was designed to explore people's behavior concerning disclosure and concealment of private information, is the origin of many models in the field of privacy is conspicuous. Consequently, this literature review achieved to answer the research question.