Studying a concept in disarray:
Cross-cultural, comparative analysis of privacy

– CPRN 2020 Online Conference –

The challenge

Digital privacy is arguably one of the most important topics of the current times in digital communication. With the growing ubiquity of information and information-based tools and services, privacy has become both a resource and a currency in social, cultural, political, and economic interactions. Yet, the conceptualization of privacy itself is still at the heart of the scholarly debate, especially when viewed from a global, comparative perspective. Conceptions of privacy hold deep, cultural underpinnings, yet these dimensions are often underexplored in research that focuses on how privacy is valued, measured, and enacted. Likewise, researchers are seeking guidance in order to engage with digital data while at the same time respecting privacy needs of persons involved in their studies. This conceptual plurality, coupled with socio-technical developments, makes comparative privacy research particularly challenging, despite its importance. We invite you to engage with this challenge.

Format

The CPRN 2020 Online Conference will focus on four themes. For each theme, we have prepared questions and challenges that we want to discuss with privacy scholars from around the world in a series of two-hour online live sessions as well as asynchronously on our site. The Online Conference will be structured as follows:

- Prior to each live session we will post to our website (www.comparativeprivacy.org) a short video introducing a series of key questions and challenges pertaining to the session's theme.
- In the first part of the live session, invited speakers will respond to these key questions and provide some insights into their own research.
- In the second part of the session, we will discuss potential solutions and envision directions towards a comparative privacy research framework
- The live sessions will be held using a videoconferencing platform. Concurrently, we will leave open a commentary section where all participants of the Online Conference will be able to share their thoughts on each one of the themes both before and after the live session.

The CPRN 2020 Online Conference is supported by the The Federmann Cyber Security Center, Cyber Law Program at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and by the Hebrew University itself.

About CPRN

The Comparative Privacy Research Network (CPRN) was born out of a series of independent studies around the world and conversations that occurred in venues such as the International Communication Association. Our goal is to create a sustainable network of interested scholars and a framework for comparative privacy research.

Organizers

+ Dr. Kelly Quinn – University of Illinois at Chicago
+ Dr. Dmitry Epstein – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
+ Dr. Carsten Wilhelm – University of Haute-Alsace
+ Dr. Philipp K. Masur – Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

Overview of the planned sessions

Date & Time	Session
14/05/2020 *16:00 - 18:00 (GMT+3)*	Conceptualizing privacy and capturing its changing nature across cultures CHAIR: Kelly Quinn
28/05/2020 *16:00 - 18:00 (GMT+3)*	The challenge of measuring privacy across cultural and political contexts CHAIR: Philipp Masur
11/06/2020 *16:00 - 18:00 (GMT+3)*	Cultural and social boundaries under conditions of "social distancing" CHAIR: Carsten Wilhelm
24/06/2020 *16:30 - 18:30 (GMT+3)*	Privacy after pandemic: Emerging directions in privacy research CHAIR: Dmitry Epstein

Session 1: Conceptualizing privacy and capturing its changing nature across cultures

Privacy is a complex and elusive concept. Not only conceptualization of privacy varies across theories and disciplines, ideas about privacy (both on the individual and societal level) hold deep, cultural underpinnings that require greater attention and an extensive debate if we are to unpack privacy as a global phenomenon. In this first session, we aim to discuss the conceptualization and dimensionality of privacy and ask whether such frameworks allow cross-cultural comparisons. To enrich this conversation we will engage with speakers from different cultural backgrounds and with deep local expertise in studying privacy. Some of the questions driving this session include:

1. Is a cross-cultural conceptualization of privacy possible? Is it needed?
2. Is there a universal need for privacy? Does the dimensionality of privacy differ across cultura-political contexts?
3. How are dimensions of privacy valued differently across cultures? What may explain that difference?
4. What other concepts (e.g., surveillance, informational self-determination, secrecy,...) are linked to or even more important than privacy in different cultures?

Session 2: The challenge of measuring privacy across cultural contexts

Conducting cross-cultural, comparative research poses numerous methodological challenges. Identifying differences between nations, cultures, and contexts requires consistent and parallized research designs, instruments, and procedures. In this session, we focus on three key areas:

1. How can we compare and measure national and cultural differences? What dimensions are important to consider when the goal is to understand between-culture differences in various privacy outcomes? Instead of comparing nations on the aggregate level, shall we aim to identify the societal structures, socio-demographic distributions, cultural values, historical developments, as well diverging technological developments that explain differences in privacy-related variables across cultures?

2. How can methods be adapted to different cultural contexts? Comparative research requires instruments and methods that work and measure similarly in the investigated cultures. Challenges hence pertain to the translation of scales, measures, stimuli, codebooks, interview guidelines, and procedures. A particular challenge is to keep the meaning of concepts and items similar and thus comparable.

3. How do approaches to research differ across cultures? Although our aim is to conduct cross-cultural research, we do acknowledge that researchers from different cultures may differ in how they approach research (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative, analytical vs. empirical…). In order to produce meaningful cross-cultural research, it is important to develop a common ground and approach to research. At the same time, an ethnocentric approach to this type of research is flawed from the start. Understanding and meaningfully integrating attempts to de-westernize, or to internationalize intercultural communication research inside the larger frame of the discipline itself, as well as critical inquiry into the nature of the cultural biais of socio-technical arrangements are an essential ingredient of any cross-cultural endeavour.

Session 3: Cultural and social boundaries under conditions of "social distancing"

As of March 2020, the Corona pandemic forced over 20% of the world population into a lockdown either due to quarantine or calls for "social distancing." As a result many social, professional, political, and economic activities that were previously conducted in third places, such as schools, offices, and public buildings, are now conducted from home, whereas municipal, regional or national governments enforce limitations of movement or curfews of various nature and force. Such rapid and massive change in the mode of social interaction requires an immediate renegotiation of boundaries between the public and the private, the professional and the domestic, and between the distant and the intimate. People may develop new practices of mediated communication and adjust their thinking about media, information, and communication technologies as they are forced into their rapid adoption. This session will focus on a series of emerging questions, such as:

1. What does the context of "social distancing" produce in terms of perceptions and practices of use of media, information, and communication technologies?

2. How do people deal with the contrast/tension between a situation of social isolation and the growing need to negotiate various boundaries (cultural, social, private, professional…)?
3. What may those redrawn boundaries look like? How persistent do we expect this arrangement to be over time?
4. How are digital media affordances leveraged to negotiate privacy in this context ?
5. How do actors (the "locked down", providers of communication solutions, regulators) position themselves in this context ? How do they adapt, profit from, or reinforce boundary work ?
6. What does communicating under "social distancing" do to perceptions of context of information flows and how does it alter the privacy calculus of individuals?

Session 4: Privacy after pandemic: Emerging directions in privacy research

This is an agenda exploring and an agenda setting session to consider questions that may face privacy researchers post-pandemic. The field of digital privacy is driven by technological and policy changes with a lot of empirical privacy research focused on either historical or current socio-technical developments. The COVID-19 pandemic offers a potential pivotal moment in our collective relationship with technology, particularly when it comes to privacy, which emphasizes the need to think about the emerging future-oriented privacy research agenda. Asking to engage with this challenge we want to ask:

1. What are some potential long term repercussions of the pandemic for practices, attitudes, and perceptions of digital privacy?
2. What research questions are rising from the rapid shift towards adoption and use of mediated communication?
3. How may policy and technological solutions, developed during the pandemic affect digital privacy practice and research in the post-Corona days.
4. Which emerging research questions about digital privacy may benefit from a comparative perspective?