

Privacy in the Internet: Commodity vs. Common Good

Sebastian Sevignani and Christian Fuchs

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Social Networking Sites
in the Surveillance Society

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overall aims of the presentation:

- **Enfolding the privacy problem in the Internet, both, theoretically and practically from a critical political economy perspective.**
- **Sketch out an alternative path, both, theoretically and practically**
- **Ground my theoretical considerations in qualitative empirical data from a conducted interview study**



the interview study

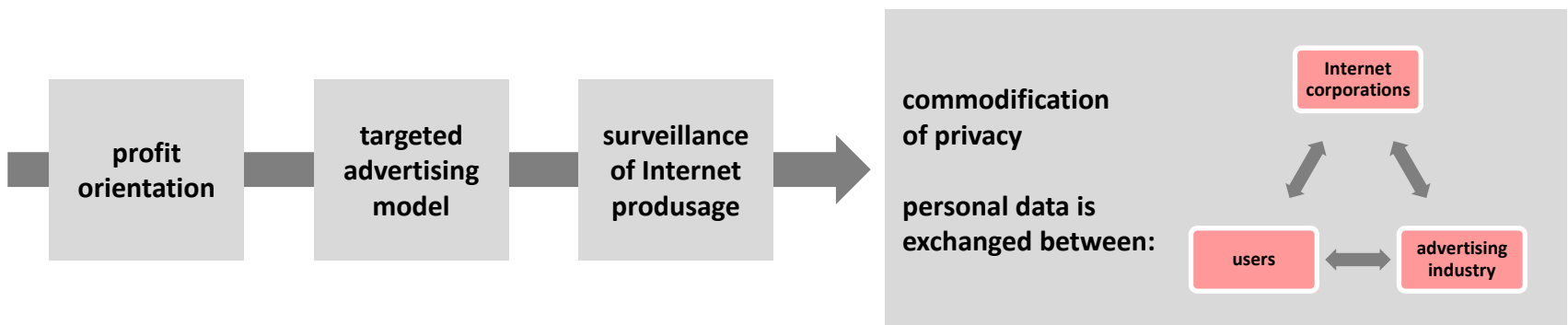
- **case study: social networking sites, commercial and alternatives**
- **purposive/conceptually driven sampling: cases that are (un-)critical as well as the standard user**
- **semi-structured interviewing (N=30)**
- **content analysis informed by thematic coding**



the problem of privacy - practically

Rank	Site	Category	Unique Visitors (users)	Reach	Page Views	Has Advertising
1	facebook.com	Social Networks	880,000,000	51.3%	1,000,000,000,000	Yes
2	youtube.com	Online Video	800,000,000	46.8%	100,000,000,000	Yes
3	yahoo.com	Web Portals	590,000,000	34.4%	77,000,000,000	Yes
4	live.com	Search Engines	490,000,000	28.7%	84,000,000,000	Yes
5	msn.com	Web Portals	440,000,000	25.8%	20,000,000,000	Yes

Top 5 most visited websites on the web, excluding google.com which is number one and has advertising (data: July 2011, source: doubleclick ad planner)





the problem of privacy - theoretically

dominant theories of privacy: individual control, formal, exclusion, and private property

“It is me who determines what privacy is; privacy is my right against others, I decide, whether or not, to give up privacy in exchange for benefits”

dominant philosophical thinking: possessive individualism

Possessive individualism denotes a kind of thinking *and* a social practice. Within capitalism it is useful and necessary that the individual perceives herself or himself as essentially “*the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society*” and enters “*into self-interested relations with other individuals*” (Macpherson 1962, 263).

dominant disposition of thinking as it is given by the practice of commodity exchange: mutual recognition as private property owners



user views on the problem of privacy

commodification of privacy

e.g.: “you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free, worldwide license to use any IP content that you post on or in connection with Facebook (IP License).”

(Facebook’s terms of use from June 8, 2012)

disagreement
(loss of privacy)

a) “there isn’t really an informed consent to targeted advertising”

*b) “because my privacy means a lot to me and I think it cannot be compensated with material goods. Privacy is about my decision and my freedom so that I do not lose my self-control.”
(Interviewee 24)*

(contractual)
agreement

“It is my individual decision; it is stated in the terms of use that I must accept; I do not have to sue particular Internet services”

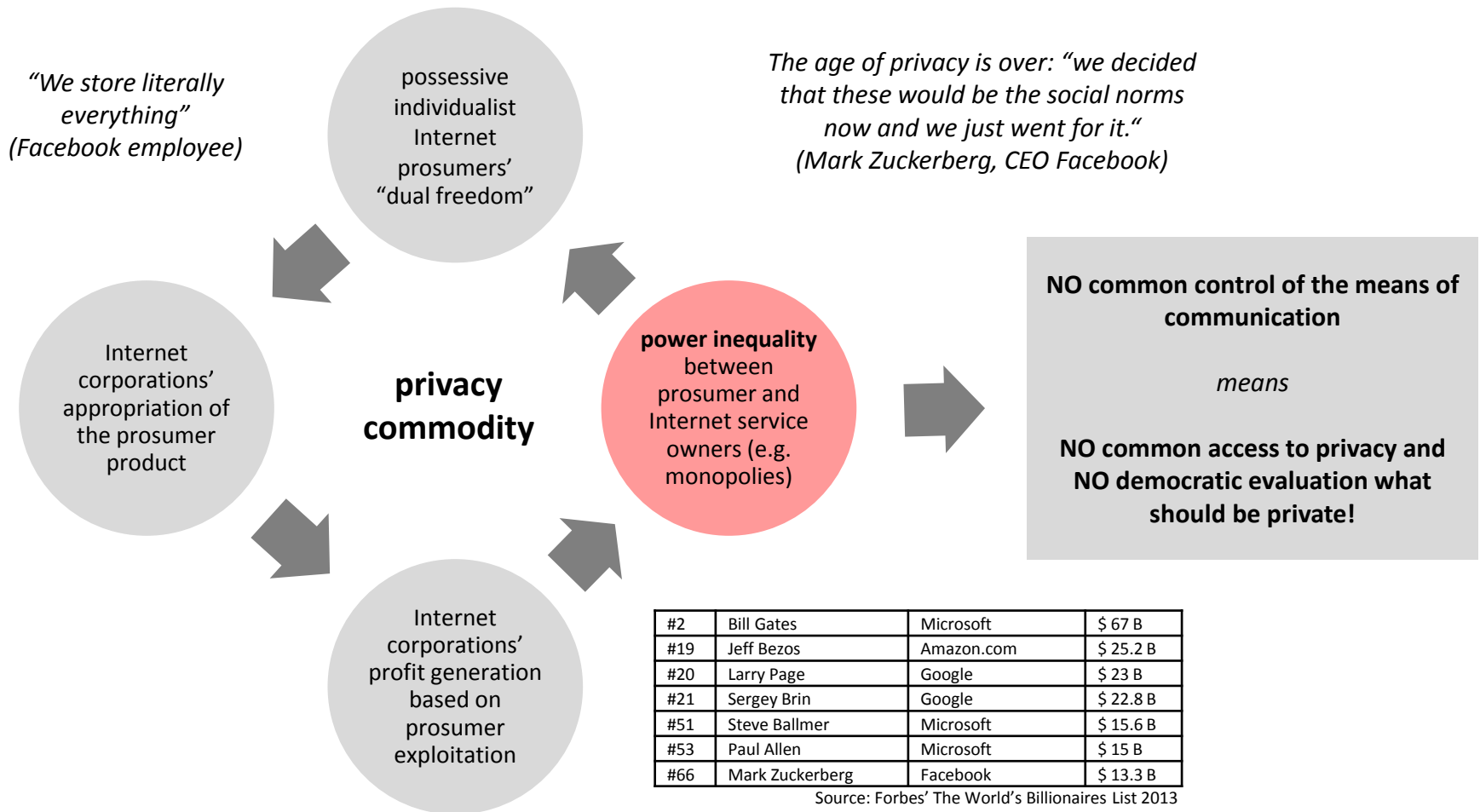
■ The **distribution if targeted advertising is or is not a privacy invasion** was nearly **balanced** among our interviewees.

■ A **informed consent is currently questionable**: interviewees are **likely to change their attitudes after an information input** about which categories of data commercial SNSs are allowed to use and see it now as a privacy invasion.

■ **Possessive individualistic privacy notions are dominant in our sample**



the problem of privacy: commodity vs. common good





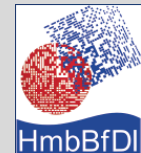
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alternative path to privacy as common good - practically

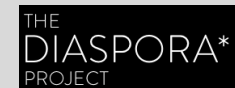
Political struggles for privacy as an inalienable persona/civil right (“privacy is not for sale” and to limit the surveillance power of Internet corporations)

the overwhelming majority of our interviewees support the introduction of opt-in for advertising and would even welcome a law which makes opt-in for advertising mandatory.



(monetary) support for non-commercial, alternative Internet services (e.g. publicly or donation financed)

alternative SNS are rarely used but all our interviewees support presented alternative SNS, nearly the half would also support them monetarily.



“Our distributed design means *no big corporation will ever control Diaspora. Diaspora will never sell your social life to advertisers, and you won’t have to conform to someone’s arbitrary rules or look over your shoulder* before you speak” (Diaspora 2011c).



alternative path to the commodification of privacy - theoretically

proceed from (newer) privacy theories that reject individualism and takes into account trans-subjective and societal aspects

adopt the perspective that individual/private and societal/public goals are not necessarily contradictory

reject subjective formalism and try to identify who and for what purpose privacy is acclaimed based on an analysis of societal power relations

e.g. Barry Schwartz (1968) and Irvin Altman (1976) provide a dialectic understanding of privacy. Schwartz argues: "Rules governing privacy, then, if accepted by all parties, constitute a common bond providing for periodic suspensions of interaction." (Schwartz 1968, 742)

"In my perspective privacy means that my attitudes and thoughts are respected by others." (Interviewee 25)

"I think, **the more a rule is valid for all society members the more privacy can be granted to the individual.** If everybody would disclose his or her date of birth, name, size, and eye colour then this would be perfect because all know this. [...] But if only 50% have to disclose this and the other 50% this and also three points on top, then I probably would plead for more data that is public accessible. This situation is about a relation of disparity. The more uniform it is the less one should have to disclose." (Interviewee 4)

"There is this old slogan that **the private is political**; and it is correct. The private is not completely uncoupled from the general society. Hence a lot of things that happens in a private space are not OK from a societal or human perspective. Frequently this is whitewashed when it is said that my privacy is of no one's business. An instance is violence in the family, against the children or the partner. This has nothing to do with privacy." (Interviewee 30)

"I hold the opinion that **privacy should not exist for the state, companies, or organisation in the public sphere.** This also applies if it has negative consequences for groups, public authorities, organisations, and corporations." (Interviewee 16)



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

further information: <http://sevignani.uti.at>,
sebastian.sevignani@uti.at, <http://sns3.uti.at>