

Doing privacy.

Media practices and digital citizenship

Description for the general public

This communication and media studies-based research project focuses at privacy as the sphere of realizing citizen agency in the digital era. By using perspectives of contemporary media sociology and activism studies, the project analyzes the concept of privacy as media practices being one of the key aspects of digital citizenship nowadays. In this light, it sees privacy as the political phenomenon that is done by broad repertoires of everyday media practices. Thus, it perceives privacy as highly context-related, collective, and never fully achieved.

Our current understanding of citizenship is questioned with digitalization processes of current cultures, politics, and economies. This project responds to these transformations by acknowledging that privacy has become the center of how citizenship is realized nowadays, affecting how people act in the public, socialize, or relate to power. It uses the media as practice approach that helps to 'follow' citizens performing broad repertoires of privacy-related everyday media practices.

For the research purposes, we define privacy as the control over the flow of personal information. Thus, to do privacy is to try to realize this control in relation to activities of others. By the project's research activities, then, we seek to learn how citizens do their privacies by their media practices? In particular, we ask: 1) what are citizens' understandings and expectations of privacy and how they are reinforced/questioned by particular media practices? 2) What are repertoires of social practices of doing privacy, in particular, by acting with media (using given, predetermined infrastructures), acting on media (technological interventions in media) and opting out of particular media? 3) What contextual and sociological factors can be applied to patterns of how privacy is done?

The project addresses these questions by qualitative methods-based research comprising 3 components, realized subsequently:

- 1) Interviews with activists working in the field of data protection/privacy;
- 2) Focus groups with the 'networked' citizens: members of organizational networks: NGOs, civil servants, media workers;
- 3) Focus groups with 'ordinary' citizens: university students & scholars; professionals of varying occupations; older users.

The results will show how privacy is done by collective and context-related citizen media practices. Reconstructing various privacy imaginaries and practices, and matching distinctions within both with particular contexts (sociological characteristics of users, technologies used, purposes of particular situations, discourses enacted within them) help to find emerging patterns of how privacy is understood, evaluated, and how it is – by people acting with media and on media – pursued: done and, at times, broken. By all these, the project contributes to revealing the conditions, contexts, and practices of digital citizenship nowadays.