

# Mobile Privacy and Apps: Investigating User Behavior and Attitude

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## Abstract

My dissertation investigates privacy as it relates to user behavior and attitude on mobile devices. I will examine how users' understanding of mobile privacy differs from culture to culture. More specifically, I will use ethnographic methodologies to compare US and German library/information science students.

**Keywords:** mobile privacy; privacy; apps; mobile devices; user behavior; attitude; United States; Germany; library and information science students; ethnography

## 1 Introduction

Using applications ("apps") on mobile devices (i.e., smartphones, phablets and tablets) to access information has increasingly become the norm in our global society, replacing desktops and laptop computers as users' preferred access to the internet. Apps can automatically capture a broad range of user

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information that is already stored on the device, including the user's precise location, phone number, list of contacts, call logs, unique device identifiers, and more. Because today's mobile devices have developed such wide-ranging capabilities in a short period of time, preserving user privacy has become a "hot button" issue. But many users (myself included) are often unaware of or indifferent to what types of personal data certain apps can access and what is shared with the device manufacturer, app vendor, and even third parties. "This is typically seen as an expression of the 'privacy paradox' where intentions and behaviors around information disclosure often radically differ" (Shklovski et al., 2014: 2347).

## 2 Preliminary literature review

A preliminary literature review assessing 88 articles from 2010 onward found a wealth of articles addressing social networking and user privacy behavior – especially from the perspective of computer science and/or human-computer-interaction disciplines. But when it comes to privacy and mobile devices, the majority of research has been done by law scholars and computer scientists, as well as government/policy stakeholders and businesses, and user behavior as it relates to mobile privacy is, so far, underrepresented. The same can be said for the information and library science field: only two articles address privacy. The first, by Magnuson (2011) posited that online regulation and privacy management are an integral part of information literacy skills in academic libraries. The second, by Cyrus and Baggett (2012), explored the relationship between libraries and privacy, the emergence of mobile technologies, and how librarianship is challenged by user privacy issues. One of the more recent articles does not look at mobile privacy per se, but it is the only research that juxtaposes mobile-information-seeking behavior across different cultures (Lee & Song, 2015).

### 3 Research question

Are there differences in the mobile privacy user behaviors and attitudes of American and German library and information science students?

In order to establish the correct context for my research, I need to clarify the following:

- (a) Mobile privacy entails personal data and information being accessible or transferred on mobile devices to device manufacturers, app developers and/or other third parties. It does not include data privacy, online privacy on the desktop or laptop.
- (b) User behavior is defined as how a study participant utilizes mobile devices, apps, and websites in their everyday life.
- (c) Attitude investigates the feelings and established perceptions of study participants.

### 4 Methodology

My dissertation will use ethnography as its qualitative method. “Ethnographers typically describe a particular situation or process by asking multiple people about it, and by analyzing multiple types of data, such as interviews, direct observation, photographs, journals, or cultural artifacts” (Duke & Asher, 2012: 3). For Clifford Geertz (1973), Ethnographic description is interpretive of the flow of social discourse and interpreting it involves preserving the “said” of such discourse. For Seadle (2011), library-based ethnography is comprised of three components: a valid research question; data gathering to answer it; and conducting the analysis of gathered data to answer the research question persuasively.

## 5 Data collection

Data will be collected via interviews which entails also an experiment with participant observation. Fieldwork will be conducted in Germany and the United States. Participants for this study will be:

- **In Germany:** Ten students currently enrolled in *Masterstudiengang Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft* or *Fernstudium* (Master in Library and Information Science or Distance Study) at the *Institut für Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft (Berlin School of Library and Information Science)*, *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Humboldt University in Berlin)*.
- **In the United States:** Ten students currently enrolled in the *Master of Information Program* concentrating in Library and Information Science at *Rutgers University*.

Prior to the beginning of the study, all participating students will be asked to fill out a consent form. Furthermore, students will be informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data. Information that reveals the identity of the respondent will be omitted from research results.

Interviews will be video recorded. All collected data files will be transcribed and stored securely. A software program such as ATLAS.ti (<http://atlasti.com/>) will be used to facilitate data analysis.

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