

Press release – November 18th 2020

The “Values and Policies of Personal Information” Chair organizes a series of conferences on trusted digital identities

The “Values and Policies of Personal Information” Chair of Institut Mines-Télécom (IMT) offers insight into the concept of digital identity. Digital identities, including both personal and sovereign identities, represent a major issue for society. The uses and regulation of these identities are changing rapidly in the midst of digital transformation. Given this context, the Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair has organized a series of multidisciplinary conferences with use cases to explore the legal, technical, economic and philosophical issues involved. The theme of the first session, held on November 13, was “Digital identities, biometric data and facial recognition”.

Digital identity, a plural concept

The concept of digital identity is a complex and multi-faceted one. It can be defined by reference to an electronic document issued by a State authority (electronic passport/ID card) or by any other means of electronic identification that allows individuals to prove they are who they claim to be, especially in the case of online transactions. By analogy, sovereign digital identity can be seen as the cyberspace version of an individual’s civil status. This external perspective considers the person as a set of stable characteristics used to unequivocally identify the individual on a long-term basis. However, digital identity can also be understood subjectively, from the individual perspective, according to how they choose to present themselves to others in social interactions.

Digital identity as an active projection of the individual

Digital identity can also be understood in a broader sense, from the individual’s perspective, based on how they choose to present themselves to others. This means allowing individuals to select the elements they wish to project to others, based on their specific context. The European Court of Human Rights has therefore recognized the “right to identity and personal development” and to “establish and develop relationships with other human beings and the outside world”. The issue here is the exercise of free will. One example is the use of social networks: individuals choose the name or alias they want to present themselves and the elements that will help to differentiate them from others and help prevent harassment.

A survey conducted by the Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair in April 2019, shows that users adopt strategies in order to present themselves as they see fit: 75% of respondents have several email addresses and 60% use several aliases, while 31% use at least one false identity.

Facial recognition, controversial probabilistic biometric technology

The Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair chose this theme for the start its conference series on trusted digital identities.

Some of us use facial recognition on a daily basis, to unlock our smartphones, for example, without even stopping to question this highly controversial biometric technology. According to its defenders, the technology enables identification with a high level of security and allows France to remain in the race of technological progress. Its opponents, on the other hand, question the reliability of the solutions developed, which are also used without people's knowledge. They also claim that it undermines basic fundamental rights, including freedom of movement. In any event, the debate on technological, ethical and societal risks is ongoing, with some stakeholders opting for a moratorium on its use and others calling for strict compliance with the legal framework.

The CNIL has reiterated that the GDPR applies to these uses, whether it be for the identification of suspicious behavior in schools, or to improve the customer experience by recognizing their emotions. All uses, even for experimental purposes, must comply with the principle of proportionality, which requires that probabilistic technology only be used if the identification of the individual can be justified as absolutely necessary. Whether it is used for physical access, for example at an airport gate, or for access to private or public applications (such as payment systems), respect for people must be central to these uses, for example by obtaining their consent.

The case of the ALICEM application

The issue of consent has been at the center of debate surrounding ALICEM, a mobile application developed by France's Ministry for the Interior. ALICEM can be used to prove an individual's identity with the same level of security as that of an official identity document. In order to create an account, users must prove they are who they claim to be. To do so, they must be filmed doing three things (smiling, turning their head, blinking their eyes). The video then allows the French National Agency for Secure Documents (ANTS) to check whether it is truly the person holding the phone (dynamic facial recognition) and retrieve a photograph that is compared to that of their passport or residence permit.



For the CNIL, however, this practice was not compatible with the GDPR. The main argument focused on the user's obligation to accept the processing of his or her biometric data, without having any other alternative. The French Council of State, unlike the CNIL, considered that the individual was not required to use ALICEM and therefore not required to use facial recognition, since another option, the public service FranceConnect, could be used for online identification.

Towards a European digital identity?

According to Claire Levallois-Barth, Coordinator of the Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair and research professor at Télécom Paris: *“The concept of digital identity, by its very nature, introduces a precondition of sufficient protection for the individual. I believe it is important to talk about digital identity in the plural form to avoid overlooking the possibility of using personal identities. The use of a stable sovereign digital identity is crucial, but only in situations when it is strictly necessary. Today, recent legal developments and the future deployment of an electronic identity card have introduced the need to offer practical solutions in France and internationally for a true European digital identity.*

These issues will be discussed at the next online conference:

The eIDAS regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market: history, briefings on the situation, and perspectives for assessment.

Date to be specified later.

CHAIRE VP-IP
**VALEURS ET POLITIQUES
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DONNÉES, IDENTITÉS ET CONFIANCE À L'ÈRE NUMÉRIQUE



About the Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair <https://cvpip.wp.imt.fr/accueil/>

The Chair aims to help companies, citizens and public authorities in their reflection on the collection, use and sharing of personal information, i.e., information about individuals (their personal lives, professional activities, digital identities, contributions on social networks, etc.) including information collected by smart devices that surround them (smartphones, smart meters).

About IMT www.imt.fr

Institut Mines-Télécom is a public higher education and research institution under the aegis of the French Ministry for the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs, which groups together 8 graduate schools, 2 subsidiaries and a network of strategic and affiliated partners. Its activities in the fields of engineering sciences and digital technology support the education of engineers and managers, partnership-based research, innovation and economic development. Always attentive to the economic world, IMT combines strong academic and scientific legitimacy, close corporate relations and strategic positioning in the key transformations of the 21st century: digital technology, industry, energy and ecology, and education. IMT is a founding member of the Alliance for the Industry of the Future and co-founder of the Franco-German Academy for the Industry of the Future with Technische Universität München (TUM). It is recognized by 2 Carnot Institute accreditations for the quality of its partner-based research. Each year, IMT trains over 12,000 students, enters into nearly 70 million research contracts, and hosts some 100 start-ups in its incubators.

About Fondation Mines-Télécom www.fondation-mines-telecom.org

Fondation Mines Telecom, a foundation recognized as being of public interest, supports the development of IMT and its eight graduate schools in their training, research and innovation missions. It groups together over 90 corporate partners and 3,000 private donors who are committed to supporting practical projects with high technological, industrial and societal impacts within the fields of digital technologies, energy and the industry of the future, as well as solidarity with students. Thanks to the support of companies including its founding partners (BNP Paribas, Nokia and Orange) and graduates and parents, the Fondation Mines-Télécom finances around ten programs in the fields of training (scholarships, open-innovation program for students, MOOC), research (theses, excellence awards, German-French Academy and teaching-research chairs), innovation (loans of honor for start-

ups and support for incubation) and forward studies (Cahiers de veille), as well as actions in favor of the development of IMT graduate schools (grants, social openness, state-of-the-art equipment, support for international mobility).

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