

Identity Management Systems and the Principle of Multiple Identities

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The identity of a person comprises many partial identities which represent the person in specific contexts or roles. Hence, any given person can have different partial identities used and recognized in different situations and circumstances. In the offline world, an individual person can be a citizen of a specific country, an employee or an employer of a given company, a father and/or a son in one's family context, etc. In the online world, and in addition to the different partial identities of the "physical world", an individual may have different accounts on various social networking sites (or even within the same one), or she may hold different avatars in online games and virtual realities. She may also use pseudonyms for other kinds of interactions and present her civil identity for certain business. In this way, while in the past people would tend to be perceived as having only "one identity", today – and within our increasingly technological environment - it is becoming more and more acceptable to maintain "separate identities" for different aspects of one's on-line interactions.

The polarization of different identities is made possible because, contrarily to the physical world and the face-to-face interaction, where our identities tend to be fully disclosed by presenting ourselves in person (face-to-face interaction), in the digital world a person may reveal certain identity features and attributes while concealing others. An individual may even create new attributes and features of herself, crafting entirely new identities. We are thus moving towards a deep fragmentation of personal identity, shattered into multiple and different concepts of partial and virtual identities, such as avatars, pseudonyms, categories, profiles, etc. We are not only able to create and maintain multiple digital identities; we are also being increasingly attributed and matched with more and more identity representations.

In order to manage those various partial identities, the development of identity management systems assumes crucial importance. In this respect, the article notes that, despite the proliferation of identity management systems across Europe, there is still no appropriate and specific regulation on this matter. As a contribution to the debate about a possible regulatory framework for the protection and management of electronic identities, this paper develops a proposal for a principle of multiple identities within such legal scheme.

According to such principle, the paper argues that the latter should ensure that identity management systems provide its users with the necessary tools to keep her multiple identities under control, especially after identity-related data is disclosed. The principle of multiple identities, therefore, addresses the need of every individual to have, according to the context in which one would act, her partial identities recognized by law. Such recognition entails, moreover, that every partial identity (that is, the sum of particular elements describing and representing that person's partial identity) would only be subject

to identification according to those elements, preventing that the latter could in anyway be linked to any other elements and, thus, to other partial identities. The legal principle of multiple identities proposed by this paper would not only serve the privacy interests of the subject (by keeping important aspects of one's private life concealed, allowing the subject to act with only a restricted representation of her identity), but would also be in line with one of the data protection legal regime imperatives, that is, the minimization of personal data disclosure. In addition, the principle of multiple identities would allow for the possibility to create different representations of oneself, keeping them separate from one another.