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Privacy and interoperability on social networks in the EU – the legal dimension

As the use of social networks increased in the second half of the last decade, so has the need for different services to communicate with each other. Apart from the general privacy issues that the use of social networks raises, the interoperability of these networks invites questions concerning users' privacy *specific* to the interoperability situation. Threats to privacy and possible response to them are analyzed in light of two main interoperability types: account interoperability, which is the ability to authenticate with credentials from another website, and content interoperability, which is the ability to share content. The paper is the analysis of the legal background, policies and practices in the areas where information is exchanged between different social networking sites.

The paper is divided in three parts. The first part analyses the concept and practice of interoperability on social networks, which are a dominant form of user-generated sites today. It answers the question of what interoperability is and looks at how different social networks communicate with each other. The second part of the paper analyses terms and conditions and privacy policies of social networking sites which relate to exchange of information with other sites. The third part analyses the legal background both in the EU and in the member states.

The paper draws three preliminary conclusions. First, the interoperability is widespread among European websites, but most of it involves simple cross-use of ID/authentication. Second, EU and national frameworks do not pose obstacles for interoperability but extend general privacy protection requirements to situations involving exchange of information. Third, social networking sites very rarely have policies or engage in practices which are *directly* contrary to EU laws, but often operate in the gray area.